

## Creativity and Innovation in Education: Fiji's Future <sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

I thank you for the invitation and the warm welcome. I am delighted to be here as I believe that the Fijian Teachers Association (FTA) has played a critical role in the development of education in this country. Apart from supporting the development of teachers, FTA has taken a key role in furthering the education of underprivileged I-Taukei children and other minorities present in some of the remotest schools in the country. We should also acknowledge many FTA members who served in the past and many who are serving at present in remote and deprived schools with terrible living and housing conditions. They deserve praise and recognition.

I am also pleased to be here as I reflect upon my own junior secondary school experience in Dreketi, Macuata where I was taught by members of the Fijian Teachers Association. I recall very fondly, to this day, some of my favourite teachers like Mrs. Unaisi Lekenaua, Mr. Ben Waqaliti, Mr. Sitereki Delana and the Late Valekuta Mateni.

The theme of your conference *Creativity and Innovation in Education: Fiji's Future* for 2012 is critically important and one that reflects new thinking that needs to go into making future education policies in Fiji. Let me briefly go back into history before I delve into the issue of creativity and innovation in education and what that means for the future of Fiji.

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### Brief History

Fiji's independence in 1970 saw the ushering in of a new era; one filled with hope and glory; with hope and glory accompanying developments, which to some extent define the state of our education today. If we did a stock take of the first decade of our independence, we would feel very satisfied with the speed of development in this country, including the development of infrastructure for health and education. Economically we were on a growth trajectory which would have delivered significant prosperity for all the people of this country. In fact in the first decade of independence we were better than some of the now well developed and prosperous upper-middle income economies.

One such comparison is often made with Mauritius. Around 1986, Fiji was better or the same as Mauritius on a number of development indicators. Mauritius grew on average of more than 5% for more than 25 years. As a result it has today some of the best indicators for development. For example, about 87 percent of Mauritian households own homes, there is free education to all from pre-school to the University, and free health services including heart surgery for every citizen. There are a number of explanations offered for this kind of success: good and consistent economic policies, political stability and no coups because there is no military in Mauritius, and robust Mauritian democracy that has allowed the flourishing of talents, entrepreneurship and creativity based on an identity of excellence. Mauritius is a multi-religious, multicultural and multi-lingual society so it has much in common with Fiji.

Our country, as a result of the coups, continues to languish economically. We lost the confidence, trust and goodwill of our citizens and many have left to settle elsewhere. The trend has not reversed and more qualified Fiji citizens of all races will continue to leave the country. In fact, we can say that in the last 25 years, Fiji has been gutted of entrepreneurship, talents, creativity and innovation and along with this, huge amounts of savings and capital. Unless this trend of declining confidence in the country is reversed we are likely to continue to suffer economically.

If, however, we do reverse this trend, Fiji can bounce back very quickly. This would be helped if our education system continues to nurture and promote creativity and innovation. It is creativity and innovation in our economy that will help us to grow, create employment for our youths and help reduce poverty. Economic prosperity is vital for stability and social cohesion in Fiji.

## Definition of Creativity and Innovation

What is creativity and Innovation? There seems to be a puzzling variety of definitions of creativity and innovation; I am not going to delve into all of them. However, as an economist, I will try and stick to definitions in the field of economics and relate them to what it means in education.

Creativity to economists is a process or activity leading to certain kinds of results; often this is measured in the form of inventions that come out of it. Innovation is defined as the exploitation of new ideas arising from creativity and how it is used in the market place.

Creativity and Innovation in education, therefore, can be seen as a generation of ideas, models etc., to improve the quality of output that come out of schools, colleges and Universities which can support economic and social development in the country.

The National Center on Education and the Economy report of 2006 raises some fundamental questions about creativity and innovation<sup>2</sup>. They are as follows:

1. What do we know about the sources of creativity and innovation in individuals?
2. What do we know about curricula and pedagogical techniques that have proven effective in promoting innovation and creativity through formal and informal education?
3. What do we know about techniques that have been proven to stimulate creativity and innovation in workplace?
4. What is it about the nature of our culture, our society and our economy that makes our country more creative and innovative than others?

These questions are relevant; we ought to ask the same questions if we are to move towards developing better creativity and innovation in education here in Fiji. Before I try and answer some of these questions let me say a few words about the role of education in development.

## Role of Education in Economic Development

The broader issue of the role of education in economic development is now at the centre stage of education policies in most countries which see education as the driver for economic development. While people gen-

erally everywhere believe that education is beneficial for themselves and their children, there is a much bigger awareness about the correlation between education and income. On average the more educated people are, the higher the earnings for themselves and their families. In addition, there is a clear correlation between national income levels and educational attainment. More specifically, the contribution of education to economic growth is generally found to be positive and significant. Economists such as Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill and Alfred Marshall, long ago recognized the fact that education was good for growth. It was Alfred Marshall who said the following:

There is no extravagance more prejudicial to growth of national wealth than that wasteful negligence which allows genius that happens to be born of lowly parentage to expend itself in lowly work. No change would conduce so much to a rapid increase of material wealth as an improvement in our schools, and especially those of the middle grades, provided it be combined with an extensive system of scholarships, which will enable the clever son of a working man to rise gradually from school to school till he has the best theoretical and practical education which the age can give (Marshall, 1920: 176).

Education also contributes to poverty reduction, improvement in income distribution and improvements in demographic and political development. In economics we talk about positive and negative externalities of achievements and outcomes but for education we can say there are only positive externalities. For example, the increased productivity of workers and co-workers and a general rise in the skills of the labour force will generate further innovation, adaptability to new situations and entrepreneurship. Education at all level is important for economic growth.

## Rapid Global and Regional Economics Changes

Fiji, like most developing economies, has undergone structural changes and will continue to face rapid economic and social changes in the future. From being a largely agricultural country in the 1970s and 1980s, Fiji's economic structure changed rapidly in the last two decades where it has become a more service and trade-oriented country. The contribution of agriculture to GDP, for example, is down to about 10 percent from as high as 20 percent two decades ago while the manufacturing and services sector's contribution has increased substantially.

As a result of these changes labour market needs have been chang-

<sup>2</sup> See also the report by Karlyn Adams (2005).

ing as well. This has to be reflected in the future education policies of Fiji. The ability of our economy to integrate into the regional and global economy will require us to become more competitive and creative. We live in a competitive and sometimes unforgiving world. If we do not raise our levels of efficiency and competitiveness as an economy, we will be left behind, just as Mauritius left us behind. In fact, the first creative economy report by United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) proposes how countries can create new industries and become globally competitive through trade and hence increase their national economy<sup>3</sup>.

UNCTAD (2010) defines creative economy as an evolving concept based on creative assets potentially generating economic growth and development. These include the following:

- It can foster income generation, job creation and export earnings while promoting social inclusion, cultural diversity and human development.
- It embraces economic, cultural and social aspects interacting with technology, intellectual property and tourism objectives.
- It is a set of knowledge-based economic activities with a development dimension and cross-cutting linkages at macro and micro levels to the overall economy.
- It is a feasible development option calling for innovative, multidisciplinary policy responses and inter-ministerial action.
- At the heart of the creative economy are the creative industries.

It is, therefore, worth referring to that report briefly. Creative industries are defined as the cycles of creation, production and distribution of goods and services that use creativity and intellectual capital as primary inputs. They comprise a set of knowledge-based activities that produce tangible goods with creative content, economic value and market objectives.

Some of these include activities like traditional art and crafts, publishing, music, visual and performing arts, technology intensive and service oriented industries such as film, television, radio broadcasting, sports and recreation and new media and design. According to the report, creative industries today account for about 3.4 percent of total world trade, with exports reaching about \$424 billion in 2005, and \$595 billion in 2008.

<sup>3</sup> See 'Summary Creative Economy Report 2008', United Nations, Geneva.

Global economic changes are creating new imperatives for us locally. This requires our education system to respond to them through constant changes and adaptation of what we teach our students. This trend offers some exciting possibilities and our educationalists should be prepared for them.

Let me now go back to the questions I posed earlier. What are the sources of creativity and what is the environment in which we can achieve those?

### **Environment in which creativity and innovation can be achieved**

When we talk about creativity and innovation, we need to be aware of the context and environment in which this can happen. Literature on creativity recognizes the paradox about the process of creativity. One aspect of that is that it requires both introversion and extroversion. It has been established through research over so many years that a creative person must have autonomy, yet must also connect to the wider society both locally and internationally for ideas. She/he must develop a delicate balance between obedience and disobedience. Psychoanalyst Otto Rank believes that there is always a tension between the two desires of individuation and identification<sup>4</sup>. Individuation gives one the ability to develop ones independence and become creative while identification with others to share experiences and togetherness can sometimes inhibit creativity. Therefore, the environment in which our students study can determine whether they become conformist, or creative and productive types. In economics we talk about process innovation and product innovation. My view is that often we concentrate too much on process innovation rather than output or product innovation.

Did we provide this environment for our children? The answer is, perhaps not.

Again, I go back to our history before we can look forward. Since 1987 we have created a culture of fear based on ethnicity and how ethnic identity can or cannot define one's talent or capability for a position. We compromised meritocracy at all levels in the civil service to satisfy other agenda and criteria of politicians who wanted power at any cost. In some ways the teachers' unions have also perpetuated the ethnic divide and ethnic dimensions to recruitment and promotions within the school system. Our societies and communities which ran schools also perpetuated the ethnic dimensions in the school system. Here, I wish to congratulate Min-

<sup>4</sup> See Swan (2009) for more discussion on the paradox of creativity.

ister Filipe Bole and the Bainimarama government for at least moving to symbolically remove the ethnic dimensions to the naming of the schools and introducing zoning of the schools. Lot more, however, remains to be done to remove ethnicity from the education equation in Fiji. There is no place for mediocrity in the education system perpetuated through ethnic considerations. If we want quality, creativity and innovation in education we need to move towards a culture and identity of excellence in our teachers and students.

Creativity and innovation also requires a free and democratic environment. School administrators, teachers and students need the academic freedom to articulate different views, engage in free discourses and debate on important issues affecting the country and those beyond the national borders. It is critical for our future that we get back to a free and democratic environment in 2014.

### **Directions for Policy**

Fiji no doubt has a well-developed education system. We have almost 100 percent enrolment at primary school level. We could do better at secondary and tertiary levels. For example, there are high levels of drop-outs at the secondary levels. The analysis by Professor Wadan Narsey shows very high drop-out rates for children from very poor families. At the secondary school level (Forms 6 and Forms 7) the percentages at school drop to a much lower 55 percent for the lowest three deciles, contrasting with around 72 percent for the top three deciles. For those aged 19 to 21 (usually associated with tertiary education), the percentage at school is an extremely low 27 percent for the children of the families in the bottom 3 deciles, compared to around 44% for those in the top 3 deciles. For the future we will also need to look at the quality and relevance of our education system.

First, we need to work towards developing a national education policy framework (NEPF) and to develop a long-term plan, preferably for the next 20 or 30 years. This would ensure a collective vision (keeping in mind the fast changing economic environment) which can be pursued by different governments.

Secondly, we should consider the curriculum at the primary and secondary school levels to promote creativity and innovation. Budgetary allocation and rewards for schools which promote creativity and innovation in the schools would provide the appropriate incentives. Between 2000 and 2009, the average expenditure on education has been 18% of total expenditure and 5.7 percent of total GDP. This is closer to the OCED

benchmark for appropriate levels of expenditure. If we use this measure then we can say that Fiji has been committed to making appropriate levels of investment in to the education system.

However, if we want to specifically promote creativity and innovation in our education system we have to consider investment both at our primary and secondary school levels. If we take 2009 as an example, by increasing the budget as a percent of total expenditure of 4 percent, (\$62 million) we could on average allocate about \$70,000 for each of the 893 primary and secondary schools especially for creativity and innovation related activities. This would allow teachers to introduce to students very early the idea of creativity and innovation and how this could be useful for them and for the country economically.

We need creativity in the classrooms<sup>5</sup>. Students in the classroom are more creative when they have the opportunity to question and challenge, make connections, explore ideas and be critical of each other. We also need creative teaching; this means that teachers are able to use methods to make teaching more enjoyable and imaginative. It means teaching creatively and teaching for creativity. For both classroom creativity and teaching creativity we will need creative teachers. Teachers can encourage creativity by providing time to students, creating the right environment and ensuring that the right materials and resources are provided to the students.

The provision of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) services to students and teachers can help and play a pivotal role in transforming Fiji into a knowledge-based creative economy. In fact the Ministry of Education should develop some monitoring mechanisms to understand whether students and teachers are being more or less creative and innovative overtime. There is a need for a study in this area.

As teachers we must be willing to discuss innovations in education with an open mind, and a willingness to accept changes which may not please all our members. Teachers unions must become proactive and encourage reform of the Fiji curriculum and not just leave this to the Ministry of Education and foreign consultants.

Thirdly, the government needs to re-visit its decision to reduce the retirement age to 55. It should take it back to 60 as we need experienced teachers and administrators to promote better and innovative educational standards. The analysis in 2010 by Professor Wadan Narsey showed that 27 percent of primary school Head Teachers and Assistant Head Teachers will reach 55 by the year 2016.

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<sup>5</sup> For more details on this issue see Morris.

Similarly, in 2010 it showed that 25 percent of Secondary School Principals or Assistant Principals will reach 55 by the year 2016. These figures show that we could face serious leadership issues in the future. I believe the problem is already surfacing; I believe very inexperienced people are already being thrust into leadership positions. It is expected that the average experience of teachers both at the secondary school and at the primary schools level will be further reduced in the next five years. The reduction in retirement age, combined with the continued migration of senior teachers, does not augur well for the future teaching capacity in the school systems.

The argument that early retirement makes way for younger teachers and will reduce unemployment is flawed. In fact it works counter to the efforts to recruit talented and smart people into the teaching profession. Those thinking about becoming teachers will explore other options in the private sector where they could be assured of a longer term employment beyond 55. We cannot ignore the fact that creativity and innovation cannot be realised without experience. Teachers need several years of experience behind them to know the past in order to teach for the future; inexperienced teachers cannot do this well. In addition, as a country we need to review the terms and conditions of our teachers so that we can further incentivize and motivate our teachers to give their best and also to attract the best in the profession.

Fiji is at the cusp of major changes. This will require the creative and innovative inputs of all the people in this country. The constitutional process announced by the government should be welcomed and everyone in this country must have the opportunity to participate. The opportunity to participate must come with a free, open and transparent environment. In this respect, the government needs to immediately remove the public order act, the media decree and the decree giving media privilege to the cabinet members. If we want a creative and innovative Constitution for Fiji, we need to free up the people so that they can participate without fear.

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