

# **INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POVERTY, PROSPERITY AND PROGRESS**

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## **APPROPRIATE EDUCATION TO MEET HUMAN SECURITY NEEDS OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

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### **Introduction**

The conference is entitled 'POVERTY, PROSPERITY AND PROGRESS' and its aim is to examine the relationships between poverty and development and to share experiences and lessons learned locally and globally. In addressing these broad issues I have decided to base my presentation from the perspective of an indigenous woman and a mother, linking it to my own experiences, observations and analysis as an activist during Vanuatu's liberation struggle against colonialism, a trained journalist, a community worker, a Pacific campaigner, a former member of western governance/democratic institution and a promoter of indigenous values through indigenous system of education. In analysing the state of human suffering, both in the Pacific and globally, I have decided to address the need to focus on what I call "human technology" because I believe it is the key to natural peace, human security, economic justice, prosperity and progress.

### **Background**

The Pacific is a home of diverse living cultures and peoples who are still very much spiritually linked to their indigenous Gods, belief systems and land. This is evidenced by an estimated 2000 indigenous languages and cultures, which in essence represent 2000 creation stories from which values are based to supervise cultural obligations, conduct and relationships. These cultural practices are guided by natural laws of society and protocols as foundation for peaceful co-existence. Any disturbance to peace is compensated for and peace is restored immediately according to the laws of society. In the indigenous world, spirituality is the most important component of the human inner development because it directs all mental and physical activities.

Human technology in indigenous communities is a collective obligation which requires proper nurturing and guidance both from parents and communities. The origin of human technology began with the first human life and is based on the cultural environment of the land and is linked to creation stories, belief systems, spirituality, natural laws of society and the mode of production the communities rely on for social, economic and political security.

In the Pacific these have changed over the centuries due to ideological invasion, colonialism, domination of western civilisation, human displacements and cultural supremacy over other cultures.

Today the full extent of the indigenous world and spirituality that has never been colonised, Christianised or modernised can still be found in the highlands of West Papua, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. The rest of the Pacific community is continuing the search for personal prosperity and national progress based on Christian "spirituality", western values and modernisation taught in western education institutions.

In addressing the issue of poverty, prosperity and progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I am always reminded of our own Pacific history and what these terms mean to the Pacific community. While we can blame ourselves for development crises occurred during 27 years of political independence we must not forget the different waves of invasion and power play that has shaped the Pacific community over centuries to become what it is today.

Firstly, it was the wave of European contact, followed by the wave of land acquisition and colonialism, wave of Asian merchants and trade, wave of Christianity, wave of western system of education in the name of civilisation, wave of slave trade, employment and monetary value, wave of militarisation and nuclearisation, wave of Pacific

nationalism and land rights, wave of constitutional democracies and western governance, wave of nation building based on western models of development, wave of national independence and sovereignty, wave of neo-colonialism and aid dependency, wave of economic globalisation, wave of resentment against value systems that erode indigenous values and now we are being challenged by the wave of re-indigenisation.

## **DEFINING PROSPERITY, PROGRESS AND POVERTY**

To understand the concept of prosperity, progress and poverty these terms have to be interpreted in their entire Pacific context.

In rural village communities, all elements of prosperity and progress are present if these are to be measured on the bases of spirituality, human values, social and economic security, achieving these on their own terms and at their own pace.

One of the major weaknesses facing the Pacific community is to continue accepting how we are being defined by others. For example the definition of poverty in the Pacific islands is based on income, which means one has to be employed to be paid in modern currency. However, the majority of islanders especially in Melanesia are not employed, they are subsistence farmers. While poverty level may be true for communities whose live depends on employment and modern money, all Pacific islanders own land or have access to land. Pacific islanders therefore have the choice of having to work the land or working for someone else. We also have the choice of wanting to live in modernity and struggle all our lives to pay the required cost in monetary terms or to live simply like the majority of the rural village population, who are usually in control of their own lives except in cases of natural disasters or human created disasters. Their basic needs being safe drinking water, health and education facilities, and market infrastructure.

All healthy thinking people would agree that the state of peace, human security, prosperity and progress at all levels of human society depend very much on how families and societies collectively nurture, guide, enrich, empower and transfer knowledge and skills to their children. When properly nurtured within a peaceful secured family environment, taught essential human values by quality leaders in community institutions or schools, they develop vital human consciousness naturally. Children grow up with respect, become very responsible and active members of their peaceful community and develop leadership quality to continue managing their families and community affairs.

In my home country, Vanuatu, all indigenous peoples belong to clans and tribes who collectively own the land and all the resources within that area. This guarantees their identity and citizenship to their indigenous nation. Prosperity in this context must relate to the social and economic status of an individual, a family, a clan, a tribe, a nation and the state. The family is the most important unit on which prosperity of others depend. As long as the family unit is socially secured and economically productive there is prosperity at all levels. Extended family, clan and tribe provide social security. Economic security depends on how land and its fruits are managed, distributed, and used for economic security. The word for poverty describes the status of a family who is lazy to work on the land. This social and economic security is valued in indigenous resources and currencies not in modern currency.

## **IDENTIFYING THE ROOT CAUSES OF POVERTY**

Prosperity and progress for any family, community or country depends on how human resources are nurtured. This is based on cultural and spiritual philosophy, human values, clear vision and development goals. These become the guiding principles on which parents, communities and nations draw their guidance for proper nurturing of their children, development of progressive education policies, curricula and teacher training. This important aspect of human technology or human development seems to be inadequate in what is narrowly termed as "education". Nations are trying to uphold a system that is out of date and has corrupted innocent generations after generations.

This current education system is based on a model that was started by people like Martin Luther during the 14 and 15 century Europe. The idea was aimed at establishing Lutheran schools as an agency for gaining control over people's lives by breaking children away from their families at early ages and forcing them into classroom situations where they could be taught Lutheran religious aspects instead of Catholic teachings. This education system was later perpetuated by kings who wanted to build "national unity", which translated to mean "a strong and loyal military" that could be used in aggressive acts against other nations. By separating the children away from the parents, the

ultimate goal of a classroom education was to destroy any individual natural interests or instinct, personal destiny, hopes and dreams so that the children can be moulded into obedient loyal soldiers willing to serve the agenda of the state. Over the centuries most of the authorities throughout the world adopted this system and continue to uphold it to this day despite the damage it does to children, communities and nations.

The Pacific is no different. The education system inherited from colonial governments continue and was built on the false idea that if one can create enough artificial hardship for children to endure, this hardship would build character in children. However, commonsense teaches us that artificial hardship does not build character but it breaks children down physically, mentally and emotionally. This education system does not consider the wellbeing of children.

In the Pacific for the primary hours of the day the children are taken away from their parents and are placed with complete strangers. Children under 10 years old who follow this recruitment procedure cannot recover from the loss of the relationship with their parents. Teachers do not replace parents and they are put incharge of too many children with too many needs to supervise that they cannot possibly answer the needs of 20, 30 or 40 children. Children are forced to adjust to school because they have no other choice.

Researches that have been carried out on the education system in bigger countries like the United States has shown that the average adult cannot relate in a personal way to more than 5 children at one time. Despite this the average class size in the Unites States is 20.

In the Pacific island countries the average class size is 35, and I believe many developing and developed countries face similar situations. Even the most well meaning teachers must relate to the children in their care as a "class" and not as individuals. Schools and classroom situations are set up for the convenience of the teacher not around the individual needs of children.

Children are forced to sit quietly in a hard wooden chair for five to six hours a day. During most of the time they are not allowed to relate in any healthy, normal way. They are not allowed to speak, laugh, express anger, hurt or fear. They are not allowed to eat when hungry, drink when thirsty or use the bathroom freely unless they are confident enough to express themselves in a foreign language allowed as medium of instruction to ask for the teachers permission to leave the room. Children are forced to read, sing, stand, sit, walk and talk only on the command of the teacher.

Furthermore children are taught to think that everyone in the world is exactly the same except for the ability to memorise isolated pieces of information which are rarely connected to their personal lives. When they cannot or will not perform this task, they are punished with public humiliation. Public humiliation is a powerful and harmful psychological weapon when it is used with a fully grown adult on small vulnerable children.

In summary, expectations of life in the classroom are in no way connected to the natural need, wants, goals, feelings of any child or indigenous communities. The expectations of a classroom education belongs to the teacher. Children conform to these expectations because they are forced to do so under conditions of extreme psychological duress. After awhile children develop within them the hope that their parents will discover the trauma they go through and come to their rescue. But when that wish does not come true the consciousness enters the stage of accepting what is there to dominate their personality.

After 12 years of operating in a school system based on assumption, it is difficult to determine who and what other people really are. Once this happens children start to accept conditions that are unnatural and wrong and concludes that their own natural instincts and inner feelings have no value. They are never asked whether they feel like singing, playing etc. They are forced into passive acceptance of whatever the teacher offer them. In summary, all children in a school situation are treated like prisoners because that is what the system is all about.

Relationship between students and teachers are devoid of any healthy emotional contact. Teachers being strangers to children, are not allowed to hold or touch children, giving the kinds of physical support that all young children need. In the school setting it is estimated that the average child has between one and five personal contacts with a teacher a day and that those contacts are more often negative than positive. At home with their parents or relatives, children average between 200 and 400 personal contacts each day, most of which are positive.

Unless a child is a very rare individual whose parents have a lot of time to give extreme amount of support, they can sustain the damage inflicted by schools on their inner natural destiny.

Today as we begin a new century we acknowledge that the state of social insecurity, economic disparities, political instability is the result of continuous power struggle, religious and ideological differences, selfishness, control of resources, militarism, political mistakes, misguided policies, economic disparities, climate change etc.

### **THE SEARCH FOR APPROPRIATE EDUCATION TO PRODUCE QUALITY HUMAN BEINGS AND TO MEET HUMAN SECURITY**

For the past 20 years I have been searching and analysing the western education system, the products of the system, the implementors of the system and the values that the dominant education system promotes. More importantly the destruction of vital aspects of human consciousness in the name of education. I believe that we can teach human beings how to read, write and count without injuring them in the process.

The outcome of every society depends on the treatment of children and the global picture of society is very negative. It is obvious that there are disparities in values taught by schools, education and tertiary institutions to children, especially genuine human values. This led me to seriously look at alternative systems including the indigenous education system and its values.

We are all products of this dominant education system and from the public point of view, we are all proud to be what we are, who we are and how far we have progressed academically. But is today's education giving the needed human values or is it merely a market force education controlled by those who continue to get rid of spirituality and human values? Why is it that parents and society frown upon all those who did not succeed academically as failures they are being blamed for joblessness, homelessness, mentally handicap and becoming organised gangs.

We also take it for granted that we have given the students what they need and it is now up to them or to the states to create a favorable environment for them. But today's products face a lot of challenges and there is no justice in the education system.

Vanuatu is fortunate that it still has original indigenous communities that have never been colonized and christianized. It's a world of indigenous concepts. An estimated 90% of its population still live in villages practising only their cultures that are allowed by Christianity. It also has urban societies and modern facilities where indigenous concepts are eroding very fast and all children are sent to formal education. Education in Vanuatu is not compulsory but parents invest heavily in formal education and complain vigorously when their children become failures.

Having traveled throughout Vanuatu, the Pacific Island countries and the world I believe that the western education system is out of date, it creates hardships to life especially to the future generation and needs to be reformed urgently to meet human security needs and nations expectations.

During my search for answers to life crises, I have lived in indigenous communities, learned their values, their science and technology, medicine, but most of all peaceful co-existence with nature. It's the answer to many questions in modern societies and a choice for individual. I have also had the opportunity to travel to many industrialised countries including close neighbours Australia and New Zealand. There are some like China that manages herself effectively as the most populated country on earth. But for most countries the picture painted for human security and poverty alleviation is very negative.

### **INDIGENOUS CONCEPT OF COLLECTIVE OWNERSHIP**

In 1997 my indigenous nation, TURAGA NATION established the Melanesian Institute of Philosophy and Technology. This institute is a co-ordinating centre for indigenous education and its relationship to all indigenous systems of living.

The overall aim of the Institute is to preserve, teach and promote Melanesian indigenous values. This is a community initiative set up after 20 years of analytical researching and piloting which proved that indigenous education system yet the most appropriate for Vanuatu because it safeguards respect, human values, leadership qualities and economic empowerment for self reliance.

The Institute is responsible for the formal coordination of the six levels of the Vanuatu indigenous education system. Melanesian indigenous education system is a lifetime process that begins at conception and only stops when one dies. An individual is educated in their natural environment by characters that surround them including their parents, older peers, clan members, community chiefs, skillful and talented members of the society and wise men and women of the older generation. Indigenous education is all about every thing that people come into contact with everyday and it teaches practical skills for their roles in society and for their responsibilities at different stages of human development. Each person learns what is needed in life to be socially secured and economically self-supporting.

The Institute is the coordination center for six levels of the indigenous education system. The first stage involves children of up to six years old. Their education is the sole responsibility of their parents at home because this is the most crucial stage of child development where their sense of security is of utmost importance and their relationship with parents prosper. The second stage involves children of 6 - 12 years who begin to produce household, farming and economic commodities. Their education is the responsibility of clan members, chief of the nakamal (chiefs' administration center) and his community. They are taught their public responsibilities, self-esteem, respect for others and their property in order to uphold peace at all times. They also learn about procedures, rules, protocols and community laws. The third stage involves children of 12 years and over and it takes place at the nasara (village arena for political and business activities). At this stage one begins to implement practical skills in economic, credit, borrowing, trade and marketing. This is also the level where they start to acquire grades, ranks and decorations. They receive their education from qualified chiefs with acquired status.

This age group is eligible for enrollment at the Institute. The Institute formally teaches third, fourth, fifth and sixth levels of the indigenous education. The fourth level concentrates on leadership and how to build social, economic and political relationships with others. The fifth level of education teaches specialised areas chosen by students. The sixth and final level is on balancing social, economic and political power as the bases of unity and quality leadership of the highest standard. It also offers lessons on philosophy, specialised wisdom and technology.

The Institute has developed written course outline and curriculum for all the six stages of the education levels.

Indigenous Raga language is the official language of the Institute. Other languages including English and French will only be taught as subjects at the fourth level.

Melanesian indigenous script writing is the only writing used at the Institute.

Students from throughout Vanuatu are accepted at the Institute. However, children must be 12 years or over. Adults are also accepted and they have to start by learning the script writing before they can be fitted into one of the education levels. The whole idea of getting students from other language communities is to teach them to develop their own school curriculum in their own vernaculars using indigenous script writing and to start their own community schools.

Thirty-five subjects covering all areas of human, social, political and economic developments are offered at the Institute.

## **WHAT CAN WE DO COLLECTIVELY**

In order to rescue our children, our families, our communities from insecurity and poverty to the state of peace, human security, prosperity and progress we need to put our resources and attention in reforming the education system to one that concentrates on human technology.

As parents, community leaders, teachers, academics, policy makers, decision makers, national leaders, we need to commit ourselves collectively to understand the underlying issues within the existing education system that is damaging to human security and rediscover the vital aspects which will guide individuals, families and communities in achieving peace and human security.

Women as mothers are the first teachers, but this is also true in the teaching profession where women are the majority. As women we need to re-examine our natural roles as educators in shaping a child's security, who when

properly nurtured will become a useful and responsible member of the community, a quality national leader and global citizen for peace

Men as fathers and heads of families, need to re-emphasise their disciplinary roles as fathers whose positive role models can naturally shape the sons, a vital contribution which is diminishing very fast?

Parents jointly need to look for ways on how to protect family security that is needed for the initial human security. As such we have to challenge the systems that destroys vital elements in human development of our children. We also need to try and evaluate school from the eyes of a school personality and not from our natural point of view as parents.

Successful grandparents and parents should be asked to share their wisdom with communities and education institutions on elements of cohesive marital relationship for our future generation who are already badly affected by the exodus of divorce and breaking up of families.

As teachers, lecturers, tutors and professors we must develop appropriate education resources and be prepared to question the relevance of the present education system. To often we believe on the false assumption that we are acting in the best interest of the children/students.

Policy makers, decision-makers and religious leaders, should make indepth studies on the failures of the existing education system and develop alternatives based on their findings. We need to provide the leadership needed for mobilisation and our power base to stop the suffering which we have contributed in inflicting on our innocent people.

In order to feel secure in our families, villages, islands, nations or in the global community, we need to review our parental responsibilities and our national education system and how they contribute in shaping the kind of personalities, families and communities that we ourselves are part of today. We should then make sure that parental responsibilities become obligations and education reforms become a priority for all nations during the first decade of this new millennium.

This reform must go back as far as identifying the original and basic values of life. That means learning from societies that still live and practise those values and take the best from all systems to form the foundation for an appropriate education for the production of quality human and sustained human security.