

School Management Association of Fiji
5th Annual Conference and Annual General Meeting
Rishikul College Hall, Valelevu, Nasinu, Fiji
17th October, 2015

Presidential Address

Theme: “Management of Sustainable and Quality Education”

The Chief Guest, Honorable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy

Ministry of Education Officials

Invited Guests

Fellow Managements

Teachers, Students

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Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me commend SMAF Secretariat and the Executive for their courage in organising this conference despite enormous financial challenges confronting SMAF this year.

I feel honoured and privilege to welcome the Minister for Education, Honourable Mahendra Reddy and other significant partners in education but not limited to Fiji Principals Association, Fiji Head Teachers Association, Fiji Teachers Union, Fijian Teachers Association, Save the Children Fund, parents, students and well-wishers.

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the official opening of the 5th Annual Conference and Annual General Meeting of the School Management Association of Fiji by none other than the Honourable Minister for Education, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy.

Honourable Minister, your presence here this morning testifies your commitment to giving a hearing to the school managers on whose behalf I stand to speak. Your presence here this morning also indicates your recognition of SMAF and your willingness to embrace and honour the partnership with SMAF. Ladies and gentlemen, SMAF was legally registered during the reigns of Bainimarama Government and with the blessings of the then Minister, Hon. Filipe Bole and Permanent Secretary, Dr. Brij Lal, who is now part of the Fiji First Government. It was in recognition of partnership of managements as owners of schools and Ministry of Education as providers of other resources that culminated in signing of a memorandum of agreement between SMAF and the Bainimarama government represented by Hon. Filipe Bole and Dr. Brij Lal.

As the founding President of SMAF, I take my hat off for my school management colleagues across the country. Many of them not here today as they could not afford to finance their trip and stay cost. I pay tribute to those pioneer managers who have made a commendable contribution, to progress education for all the Fijian Children, for more than a hundred years. The pioneer managers lived a modest life, never received a salary and never had much for themselves, but they chose to sacrifice whatever little they could afford, and invest in children's education voluntary.

There were no government grants then. Yet, our communities and faith-based organisations, demonstrated sheer will, outstanding courage; deep conviction and passion to build schools where people of Fiji including us seated here today, received education that changed our life and the future of our country.

The education system in Fiji has been pioneered by faith-based organisations, and missionaries in the pre-indentured era, dating back to 1830's and joined by other migrants faiths in the post-indentured era since 1879, gaining momentum thereafter. The school management committees and communities, have made selfless sacrifices to embrace education, some, given the trying conditions paid the ultimate price with their life. One cannot grasp the history of struggle, without mentioning names like Hanna Dudley, the first European Christian Missionary and Methodist Missionary, Authur Lelean. There is no doubt that most of our first schools were grounded in churches, kovils, mandirs, temple, masjid or just thatched bures. In the yester years, not only management built schools, they employed teachers, paid salaries and took

total control of education. The then colonial government had its own position on the education of natives and indentured labourers.

There has been a major transformation over a century as faith-based organisations and independent managements excelled in the construction of schools that have been demand driven. Most urban schools had exponential growth, and today boast quality environment for teachers to work in. Much of these were achieved through fundraising. Successive governments, in particular, Ministry of Education, have enjoyed meaningful, symbiotic partnership creating a very strong bond between managements, parents, students and government for a century now. SMAF was therefore born to challenge managements and in our Honourable Minister's words

“...to think critically to think outside the box.”

Managements have their own strong views on matters pertaining to education and I shall be speaking on some of those.

With the passage of time, managements slowly relinquished aspects of education, to the government in the firm belief, that the special character of schools would be maintained. Our belief and values underpin the notion that education must be concerned with the “whole of a person's life which included spiritual and academic formation, based on the gospel of each and every faith based communities, operating schools.” This is clearly reflected in Methodist Church message to SMAF Conference.

Our schools created material and spiritual conditions for our full development. It provided a solid foundation, on which to build our lives. It guaranteed safety, we felt secure, we could anchor ourselves in the values that were taught to us, to complement our academic progress, and these noble aspirations, were reflected in the message by the Catholic Church to SMAF Conference.

Was it a mistake to relinquish aspects of education? Do faith-based organisations need a greater say in aspects of curriculum? Are we getting what we wanted to get from our schools? Are we equal partners? How much say do we have in school operations? Is our contribution accepted and translated into policy? Are our schools, are our buildings serving the purpose for which we vested? Are we being consulted? What is management status in this partnership, since the new Minister has taken over, and is this effective and equal. These are but only a few of the hundreds of questions confronting managements today.

Ladies and gentlemen, the current spate of violence, mental illness, immorality, suicide, cheating amongst schools, cannot and must not be ignored. Colleagues the alarm bells are ringing - take heed, act now. In my opinion, we are offering band aid

solutions to many of these problems. When children committed suicide, we had a suicide prevention day. When children drowned, the Ministry quickly announced that

“swimming will be compulsory in all schools from beginning of Term Two 2015 confirmed by the Permanent Secretary.” (Fiji Times, 15th March, 2015)

“The Minister has now confirmed swimming classes will be a compulsory part of national curriculum from next year.” (Fiji TV 30/09/15)

When Charlie-Charlie came in, it created havoc in schools exposing the vulnerability within our education ethos. When the Minister gets involved, it is a serious matter. Ladies and gentlemen,

“when faith is lost, when honour dies, the man is dead” – so it is said.

Children need to be imbued with faith and generosity and not just logic and cold reasoning to fight fear and distrust that may lead to suicide. The solution to the problem lies deeper, that’s the point I am making.

Dear Managers, there are even more serious problems in our schools, arising out of views and opinions regarding the conduct of spiritual lessons such as the directive given to Suva Grammar School. The more alarming part of this whole saga is the silence amongst school managements, lack of cooperation, consultation and consensus amongst us to find a common ground and to take a confident stand. We have not been as proactive and as futuristic as we should have been. May be we thought it was somebody’s problem and anybody would solve it, only to realise it is everybody’s problem and nobody solved it.

SMAF advocates and campaigns as one of its objectives that the early years of child’s education be in their mother tongue and that children shall be grounded in their cultures in line with UNESCO Declarations.

This is the right of every child and hence SMAF motto “Students First.” But do we have the back up from stakeholders. Does MoE fully understand why sometimes management want teachers of their choice?

So when you gave a press release, Hon.Minister, on 30th of June, 2015

“School Leaders, Principals and Managers Stuck with Ethnicity”

we thought you did not fully understand managements vision to inculcate values, virtues, ethos and aspirations. In one of your speeches, you raised our hope by announcing that you will build a society with

“prodigious wisdom, built on solid foundation of values and virtues.”

We are not racist Hon.Minister. Our schools are a testimony that we are the most multiracial organisation. We want teachers who not only can advance the academic pursuits of the community but also make contribution to the special culture of schools. When you appeal to the reason of the people you will never fail.

Honourable Minister, you are not only Minister for Education, but also Minister for Heritage, Culture and Arts.

Our children from early childhood to at least up to primary schools are waiting for your blessing so that they are educated in an environment that empowers them to protect their heritage, that grounds them in their cultures by providing teachers who not only have formal qualification but also show leadership in promoting the special culture of the schools to save Fiji's rich multiracial heritage including the indigenous arts, culture and heritage that is unique in this world.

Dear School Managers, year in year out and on a daily basis several criticisms are being labelled at you. Some of these by teachers and school heads who don't see eye to eye with school managements and come with different agenda. Many parents too have found it easier to complain to the Ministry and Minister about school managements. MoE too freely criticises management on media. Like my rights to offer critical opinion, other stakeholders too have a right to criticise us. Managers need to examine all views carefully and I know that managements are broadminded, wise people who will deal with the matters raised professionally, diplomatically and tactfully.

The fee free grants given by the Fijian Government is a blessing. It has solved many problems confronting parents and children. For the schools, the grants, we get is not necessarily exorbitant as some people put it. That is what used to be collected in levies before this initiative. We are thankful to the government for such magnanimous initiative. However, there are issues that need to be resolved so that school managers are in a position to provide service to the schools. Under the six budget category, there is a 30% allocation for administration and management and operation. Yet MoE and school heads have the audacity to say that managers cannot use any fund to attend SMAF Conference. Please read circular dated 12/12/2014 which clearly outlines 2015 fee free grant allocation for schools and I quote:

'administration/management and office operations 30%, building and compound maintenance 20%, IT, computer and vocational materials 15%,

library and textbooks 10%, PEMAC and science equipment 10%, Stationery 15%.”

School management from rural, remote and small schools continue to call SMAF throughout the year on issue like virement of funds, financial policy, matters pertaining to rights of managers, appointment of school heads without consultation, servicing existing loan with government grant and capital development for which there is no provision under the current six categories of budget. It appears to most managers in the country that with the administration of new fee free grant, managements have lost their autonomy, and their operation expenditures have not been taken care of despite 30% allocation for administration, management and operation.

There are also constant accusations against managers for abusing grants. In the Fiji Times of 30th June, 2015, the Honourable Minister publically announced that an audit carried out by the MoE has revealed that 20% of school managements in the country have abused grants. It is a very serious slur on the integrity. Managers have a challenge to ensure that our reputation doesn't get tarnished. SMAF is available to assist those managers who ask for assistance in conducting meeting, financial reporting, school planning, budgeting and financing, etc. We can provide you with attachments to well-functioning managements whereby you can study their operations. However, managers must know that the grant given by the government under six categories is operational grant and there is no separate allocation for capital development. This money is to repair and retain schools to the highest possible standard to provide sustainable quality education. Please note we have no other source of income for capital development as we are not charging any rent for the use of buildings nor are we doing fundraising.

Dear Managers, our honour, respect, dignity and reputation is in our hands. We need to upgrade ourselves, we need to educate ourselves and we need to improve the way in which we manage our schools so that we continue to offer sustainable quality education. It's our moral obligation to ensure all school age children are in school. I call upon all parents and children to please take advantage of the assistance provided by the government to ensure that all Fijian children are educated enough to stand on their own feet. If our people stand on their own feet, our country can only then, stand on its own feet and we can one day with much pride call our nation truly independent.

Managers must step up their performance and commitment to schools and we can make every school in Fiji a model school. If we have made the choice to be managers of schools, we must have time; have passion and a clear vision to guide our schools to success. We need to support and inspire our school heads and teachers to improve their performance and improve student learning, without humiliating any teachers, student or parent. I salute the teachers for their selfless sacrifice.

Dear Managers, abuse is a tricky word but I would like to believe that when abuse is referred to here. It doesn't mean managements have used school money to build their own homes or have parties. I would like to believe that money allocated on one thing, has been used to build or repair or purchase another thing based on the exigencies at the school. Or even money from one sister school to another as short term loan to complete an important project because the other school may not have generated enough money, that is well understood amongst us as we are on the ground. My advice is let us follow procedure and guidelines, apply for virement though I know the approval may come too late.

Honourable Minister, SMAF doesn't write blogs, SMAF has not shared its critical viewpoint of MOE in media and despite going over the air several times, we have reserved our critical opinions to discuss matters face to face in the spirit of progressivedialogue and in your words

“to think critically and outside the box,”

I am inspired to critically examine the work of your Ministry since you have been in office for more than a year now. I hope to provoke all of you into dialogue and anticipate positive outcome at the end of this conference to achieve the objectives of the conference theme.

The inspiration for this critical examination comes from two sources. The first from a distinguished educationist the former Vice Chancellor of the USP, Dr. James Maraj who in opening the Fiji teachers Union Conference one year said that

“the paths to progress are not sign posted with platitudinous remarks.”

The second inspiration comes from Swami Tadananda's article printed in the present newsletter of SMAF. I invite all of you to read the article in full. The article makes

the point that sustainable quality education is the responsibility of all stakeholders engaged in education. A principle of success, as stated in the article, is '*continuity of sound policy.*' For a reform to be successful, the implementation must

“go through the rigorous process of proper review of existing systems by competent professionals, clear identification of areas of reforms, selection of appropriate reform measures, their methodologies and policies, strategic implementation plan, funds, education and training of the stakeholders, actual implementation, evaluation, assessments and feedback.”

The questions that emerge is how have we conducted our reforms? Were these evidence based? Were researches carried out by competent professionals? Were they credible? Were they circulated to stakeholders or published?

I am tempted to quote in full the respected saint Swami Vivekananda's statement which Swami Tadananda has used:

“Freedom is the first condition of growth. What you do not make free, will never grow. The idea that you can make others grow, that you can direct and guide them, always retaining for yourself the freedom of the teacher, is nonsense, a dangerous lie which has retarded the growth of millions of human beings in this world. Let men have the light of liberty. That is the only condition of growth.”

Our conference theme for 2015, “Management of Sustainable and Quality Education,” can only be successful and meaningful when founded on sound democratic principles of participation dialogue and discussions. I have therefore decided to focus only on this aspect of sustainable quality education and I will leave the rest to the Honorable Minister. Policies will flounder or be successful depending on the degree of ownership of the policies by the people.

Proposition

The thesis I am going to propound ladies and gentlemen is that, the Ministry for Education, since the appointment of the new Minister, has willy-nilly made unilateral

decisions which fall short of carrying the stakeholders with it. The process of decision making and implementation strategy clearly demonstrates a lack of adherence to any theory or philosophy in the formulation and implementation of the so-called reforms.

I will propound this thesis in the firm belief that I am now operating in a society which respects and is founded on democratic values. I do so in the spirit of the Vice Chancellor's statement that the future of Fiji is not founded on platitudinous remarks. We can only go forward if we continue to critically evaluate what we are doing. That would be the wider meaning of freedom so necessary as Swami Vivekananda said

“is the condition of growth.”

Honorable Minister Sir, if you think you can decide for everyone else and usurp the right of all other stakeholders can only be seen in Vivekanand's word as

“nonsense, a dangerous lie which has retarded the growth of millions of human beings in this world.”

You have yourself very ably argued at numerous forums that your vision for education in Fiji is to produce people who

“should now.....think outside the box.”

In your maiden speech, you said that

“we need to breed and channel out critical thinkers, we need thinkers – a thinking society.”

You promised that this is what you will do. It is in this context of freedom that I am offering a critical point of view, with a great hope that it will be taken in that spirit and we will all come out the better for it.

The Reforms

Honorable Minister, speedy implementation of reform measures, without sufficient ground work, preparation, training, provision of infrastructure support has put the

education institutions in a state of fear, confusion, indecision, bewilderment and in a state of deep frustration leading sometimes to inaction. The almost daily reforms can only be summarized in management policy terms as based on a theory of ‘muddling through.’ Let me give you a few examples Honorable Minister:

“On November 8th 2014, you publicly announced that “despite having exams for Year 6, students will be allowed to progress to Year 10. Students will then choose which stream they wish to further their education, higher education stream or technical education stream.”

Clearly you are saying that those who do not pass will go to technical vocational schools that you are establishing.

“On 30th November 2014, you reaffirm your position that after Year 10, we would want students with less aptitude to go to technical college and find stream or pathway and still end up at university.”

Then on 8th September 2015, you change your stance and announced:

“there will be no student repeating class up to Year 11 even if they fail exams. You further add whether students pass or fail, they will proceed to years 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12.”

Honorable Minister this happens on daily basis. I am accusing you of “daily dose of reforms willy nilly and muddling through policies.”

Fiji Sun of 4th June, 2015 in writing on reforms writes and I quote

“Minister Allays Teachers fears. Teachers had been told that they have nothing to fear from reforms and that no teacher will be sent home for non-performance as a reason.”

Honorable Minister, when stakeholders, such as teachers, parents and children are not included in the reforms and are not able to take ownership of reforms, we will live in a state of fear, confusion and frustrations.

The state has considerable power, you too Honorable Minister have considerable power, both over the people and resources. You can use this power to plough its decisions through with no regard to any alternative view, getting rid of those who have alternatives to offer and surrounding itself with a bunch of ‘yes’ men who will offer no constructive alternatives and meekly carry out all instructions.

Hon. Minister, we ask whether this is the best way of doing what you want to achieve? In the process of micromanaging you may be violating the fundamental principles of democracy which is founded on participation, dialogue and discussion. The major stakeholders in education are still waiting to be involved in the process of decision making and implementation. Indeed, in a very fundamental way, you have not kept up with your major promise. Allow me first to begin with the Fiji First source document, the manifesto.

Fiji First Manifesto

The manifesto quite rightly emphasized that the Fiji First Government will “**build upon**” the Charter Plans adopted by the previous military government. In clear terms the manifesto promised to

*“**build upon** the success of the many policies that the Bainimarama government has already put in place.”*

The difference with the present government was expected to be in the execution. The hope was that it will be implemented with full regards to democratic participation, now that the Bainimarama government was elected by the free choice of the people.

I invite you Honorable Minister to examine your various policy statements. This will allow you to assess the extent to which your “own intention” has been entirely different from ‘**building upon**’as the government had initially intended in the manifesto. You have instead talked about bringing fundamental and radical changes to the education system. The changes you advocate range from revision of education act, teacher administration load, teacher professionalism, introduction of super principals,

curriculum, examination, assessment, changes in the school management and the entire modus operandi.

No school manager in Fiji is opposed to change, we are not opposed to change. But we expect change which we can claim as our own, in which we have a shared responsibility, not one which is imposed. Democracy demands that as the Minister, you carry the management, stakeholders and the people with you. One effective way of doing this would be through the Education Commission you promised.

The Education Commission and Your Vision for the Future

In your maiden speech, one of the good things you promised to the people of Fiji was that the fundamental changes you are talking about will come as a result of Education Commission which you were to appoint this year. You repeated this at your FNU address on 7th November, 2014 where you said

“that the Ministry will address the curriculum issue using a number of strategies which will culminate in the full work of an Education Commission next year.”

I agree that the year is not over but there has been no talk about planning or preparation for the Commission. There is no discussion on the terms of reference or consultation on the makeup of the Commission.

At the FNU Conference you seem to have disclosed more of your vision than you did in the parliament.

At that conference you outlined our educational goals as having an

“educated society with prodigious wisdom.”

You talked about

“a society which has the ability to critically and logically think.”

A society

“built on solid foundation of values and virtues and believe in fair mindedness and inclusiveness” – brilliant words.

You repeated the same sentiments at the 2015 World Education Forum in Korea.

At the Korean Conference, you talked about a range of different factors that shape how Environmental Sustainable Development is viewed. For education, you said that it can be seen in four ways: society, environment, economy and culture.

I am rather intrigued by what you said on society.

“..... an understanding of social institutions and their role in change and development, as well as, the democratic and participatory systems which create opportunities for the expression of inclusion, rights and social justice concerns, respect, care, opinions, governance processes, the forging of consensus and the resolution of conflicts and differences.”

We are left to wonder: to follow the laudable rhetoric delivered at the FNU and the World Education Forum or deal with the harsh realities of a daily dose of policy reforms formulated in direct contradiction to your ideals, unilaterally declared in a work environment infested by criticisms of cronyism, favoritism and victimization and publicly naming and shaming teachers’ performances.

Just an example of your favoritism and victimization Honorable Minister, is your approval of a staggering sum of up to \$500.00 for government paid salaried teachers to go on a junket to all the way Kadavu for their conference where you were their chief guest and you only after lot of begging by SMAF, approved \$120.00 to managers to attend the conference here in Nasinu. I am confused, depressed, disappointed and unable to come to terms with such double standards and discrimination. Despite agreeing to allow use of only \$120.00, you did not withdraw the circular to school heads which read that no grant shall be used for management conference. To add salt to injury, your staff Adwin V. John wrote on Monday the 12th of October at 02:20pm and I quote,

“Good afternoon, please note we cannot issue funds for the school manager’s conference.”

But you agreed to fund two conferences of the Principals Association with second conference claiming \$100.00 in registration alone this year. Is it too much to ask for goodwill from you to reciprocate? I thank you for financing school heads conference but I condemn the double standard you practice. Despite of what you have done, we are working with you and availing our primary and secondary schools and our voluntary labour in managing schools free for you and to the people of Fiji.

Coming back to the issue, you went further to outline how in your view we could reach these goals. Honorable Minister, your vision is laudable but it is not the only view. The Education Commission would allow other visions to surface. When this is done, it would be in keeping with what you have said at the FNU and the World Conference in Korea. Hon. Minister Sir, we and the stakeholders invite you to put into practice your promises you announced that is

“developing democratic and participatory systems.”

Too much is at stake for Fiji to allow just one view to prevail. History will blame us for not learning from the tyranny ravaged by those who have made unilateral decisions in the past, thinking that their view was the most superior.

Your observations on the curriculum are far reaching. And I dare say may not be easily understood by your own curriculum staff or the teachers who are to implement them. One important element you emphasized was

“context conditions in deciding what is right in particular circumstances.”

In other words, you are saying that the teachers should have the freedom to explore and develop contextual curriculum and that the curriculum should allow this to happen. These are praiseworthy aims but in my opinion pitched against the requirement to measure teacher effectiveness with examination results only becomes a major constraining factor.

Now, Honorable Minister, what do the teachers do? Teach to a contextual curriculum or rigorously and painfully follow syllabus in preparation for the exams, that too under unprecedented threat of x-percentage pass or face the guillotine.

Managements, Honorable Minister, are not opposed to what you are saying but when one thinks outside the box, finds an inherent contradiction which perhaps can be resolved by a competent Commission. I suggest that you should not hijack or usurp the work of the Commission. Submit all your plans and visions to a Commission and let the people of beloved Fiji, including all the stakeholders in education, have their say as well. And then let us move forward together and I repeat and plead Hon. Minister let us move forward together.

The idea of '*entrepreneurship education*' could also be subjected to further thought by the same Commission. In talking about entrepreneurship education, you may wish to be mindful of the alternative belief that education should

“embrace a more humane, more democratic approach to education.”

Teacher/Information Software

This is a laudable idea and should enable teachers to access their own information. It is also envisaged that teachers would be able to apply for promotion online and I thank you for this initiative. I call upon you Honourable Minister to take greater care of teachers terms and conditions of service.

OHS in Schools

Another laudable initiative for training all teachers to ensure they all meet minimum OHS compliances and standards. This has always been a contentious issue with labour department charging exorbitant fees.

One Laptop per Child Policy

Our earnest hope is that this is done without discrimination. Giving it to some schools and not others doesn't augur well. In case of financial hardships a modest fundraising be allowed to ensure access and equity. There are many good kind hearted parents who would willingly donate to a project because they value the contribution the schools are making to the community.

Examination

Honourable Minister, there are serious problems in the way exams are handled and SMAF will need a meeting with you to sort out this matter. Stakeholders were consulted under Bainimarama government when exams were set aside and replaced with class based assessment. We were not consulted under your leadership when the decision was suddenly reversed as Fiji First manifesto emphasised that it would **“build upon.”** We need to know if the policy will last or is it a trial run.

Quality of Work by Exams/ Curriculum

In a press release dated 05th February, 2015 you announced that in a bid to stop leakages all external exam papers will now be prepared by experts who have master's degree rather than teachers – Sir the leakage of paper tells me that your experts have failed you.

The Ministry has sent 3-4years question papers with answers - there are errors. This is not acceptable. You have handpicked people at Ministry now and there should be zero tolerance. Furthermore, Hon. Minister, teaching exams will not fulfil your promise of providing critical thinkers. Children have left everything aside and are just revising 4 years past papers, as per your advice.

Teacher Registration Board

Please note that there is no school management association nominee on this board. Association had submitted a name and there has been no response from Ministry of Education.

ICT and E-Learning in Schools

Swami Tandananda and Shree Vivekanand High School have given open invitation to school managers and principals to have a look at the model that you can adopt for your school. Hon.Minister, the IT Service to schools from Ministry needs to be seriously upgraded with extra competent staff to support the IT revolution that the Prime Minster has talked about.

Library Service

The nucleus of learning in school is the library. Hon. Minster, you need to provide us with more qualified librarians so that they can provide support to the existing school librarians and we need to meet with you on this matter as well to explore further options.

Sports

This is very important area of holistic development but we need a national insurance cover for all children in the event of injuries or accidents. Some schools are paying insurance, some do not have the capacity. I would like to propose that you have a national policy and cover all students, so that schools can encourage participations.

Swimming

The media release by the Permanents Secretary that swimming shall be compulsory from Term 2 of this year is causing us nightmare as parents are questioning managements why we are not teaching swimming when Ministry has publicly declared its compulsory. You must withdraw that directive and help us out.

Radio and Press

Hon. Minster, we are stakeholders in education and we hold Ministry of Education in high esteem. Please send capable people on radio broadcast and talkback as some

people have neither the command of language nor the charisma to be on the radio. Their deliberations over the air has become a joke.

Advancement of Sustainable Education Goals and Solidarity amongst Stakeholders

The Post 2015 Education Agenda calls for partnership amongst all stakeholders. They included teachers and teacher unions, parents, faith-based organisations and school managements. It is about time the differences are resolved, unity is achieved so that the 2030 Education Goals are achieved.

Teacher Quality, Teacher Performance and Teacher Training

Honourable Minister, we need to discuss these matters at a forum that your Ministry can facilitate. Honourable Minister, your reforms have seriously undermined the ILO/UNESCO Recommendation on the Status of Teachers.

Conclusion

Honourable Minister, I could talk about every single statement or policy and give it the same scrutiny and state options.

The intention is not necessarily to oppose them, although some quite clearly needs to be opposed, but to seek ownership, to be involved, to find ways to become part of and to be supportive. This is not my wish but the wish of every manager and every stakeholder.

There are three major stakeholders in the education sector. All three are organised. The first sector is the Ministry of Education of which you are the head. The second

stakeholders are the teachers represented by the teacher organisations. The third is the school management which is represented by the communities we represent.

The country knows that the teacher organisations are extremely dissatisfied with your policies as they affect their welfare and encroach on their professionalism. You have been in office more than a year now. You have given us a fairly difficult time by your actions such as forming breakaway associations. This is neither good for you nor for me and not for Fiji.

I invite Honourable Minister to work as a team. I invite you to show leadership, to stop being vindictive and embrace the inclusive, participatory, democratic, respect, care and other values and virtues that you have delivered in several speeches.

We in SMAF are looking for an avenue to be consulted on a regular basis. We seek participation on the basis of equality and collegiality. Hon. Minister, if you think you can stand on the strength of the one leg of the Ministry alone, it may be a disaster.

As a partner in education development, we are calling upon you to announce the Education Commission you promised and let an independent team draw up plans for the future which we can openly discuss, debate, adopt and call the plans our own.

Our problem with the Ministry is not so much with your plans but with your method of implementation. We find no method and that is why we feel that the Ministry is merely ‘muddling through’ a set of policies without clear direction and foresight. We believe you can find this direction by implementing your base policy of announcing an Education Commission immediately. You will get the support of all the three sectors of education. Honourable Minister, today’s Fiji Sun, the daily newspaper which we find is very pro-government, has an editorial which reads

“Reddy Needs Support.” (Fiji Sun 17th October 2015)

Yes, Honourable Minister, you do need support. We invite you to get us all together for the future of our children and for Fiji.