



# The University of Fiji

## **Education for Economic Growth: Remodelling Fiji's National Development Plan post Covid-19**

### **A Roundtable**

#### ***Press Statement***

The University of Fiji held its second Roundtable on the topic ***“Education for Economic Growth: Remodelling Fiji's National Development Plan post-Covid 19”*** at the Saweni Campus and also by zoom connection on Friday February 26<sup>th</sup>.

Attending the 1-day Roundtable were organisations and individuals who have a stake in education and Fiji's economic development. They included representatives from several religious organisations, town and city councils, educators, the sugar industry, police, livestock and agricultural producers, unions, women's organisations, the Judiciary, UNDP as well as opinion shapers and influencers.

The Acting Vice Chancellor of the University of Fiji, Professor Shaista Shameem, said the participants at the conclusion of the Roundtable drafted 10 Resolutions, as follows:

#### ***The National Development Plan of Fiji to be revised with the following Principles:***

1. Promote people and earth-centred efficient production and development instead of production solely for market-driven monetary value;
2. Emphasise the importance of human rights and values in education and investment proposals as opposed to market demand.
3. Ensure the importance of a holistic and comprehensive education at all stages of sustainable national economic development.
4. Promote an innovative education curriculum that adapts technologies for local situations and practices.
5. Pursue new markets for local produce and products.
6. Facilitate innovative and diversified agricultural practices and products.
7. Invest in education, health and welfare for social protection.
8. Government to regulate all investment in Fiji in favour of constitutional provisions on protection of the environment and the local population.
9. Form a nexus amongst Government, higher educational institutions and economic stakeholders for generation, assimilation, and dissemination of knowledge and skills for effective, holistic and sustainable national development.
10. Redefine Fiji's place in the world as a leader in forward-looking development strategies.

Professor Shameem said the resolutions point to an alternative economic development paradigm which was premised on sustainable new industries, education to facilitate investments by local producers and for local consumption as well as to diversify export in niche areas, especially in medicinal herbal products for example medicinal cannabinoids, and in spices and coffee, as well as other niche areas in demand in the world post Covid-19 reality.

She said the Roundtable participants said it was apparent from the Reserve Bank economic forecast and the concerns of key NGOs that the people of Fiji faced dire economic consequences not only due to Covid-19 but also because of the global downturn prior to the pandemic.

She said the participants said that Fiji's growing debt could be mitigated by concentration on alternative agricultural products that were in demand internationally such as medicinal herbs, coffee and spices. For example, coffee was a high-end product that could be grown sustainably in Fiji and was considered now to be second to oil in the international demand market, she said. The Roundtable participants were concerned about monoculture products that depleted the soil and the environment. They wanted to consider education for a different type of economic focus for the nation.

Professor Shameem said the Roundtable participants decided that education, appropriately and adequately funded, would lead to economic growth for all the people of Fiji and earn surplus for the Government as well. She said the participants insisted that there should be more funds allocated to the social protection areas of education, health and welfare. In particular, well-funded and appropriate education from the cradle to the grave would lead to economic growth with new sustainable industries and products being emphasised for Fiji, she said.

The Roundtable concluded that the 20 and 5-year National Development Plan of Fiji as well as the Education Strategic Plan needed to be revised with proper consultation to enable the nation to get past its economic problems caused not only by Covid-19 but also due to other factors not related to the pandemic.

March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2021.