



The University of Fiji

(An Entity of Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji)

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Provide SDG Audits of Industry says Vice Chancellor of the University of Fiji, Professor Shaista Shameem.

“Industries that wish to employ graduates from the Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in Fiji should be asked to provide the Fiji Higher Education Commission (FHEC) with an audit report of their compliance with the Sustainable Developments Goals (SDGs) before they can be considered to be suitable for employment of graduates.

This was stated by the Vice Chancellor of the University of Fiji, Professor Shaista Shameem in her presentation at the ‘Transformation of Higher Education’ 3-day Forum hosted by the FHEC in Nadi.

Professor Shameem said that in January this year FHEC had requested all higher education institutions to implement the SDGs. The University of Fiji had put in place its Strategic Plan 2022-2026 to facilitate the request. However, while industry was an important partner with HEIs for providing employment opportunities, the main industries in Fiji needed to provide real evidence that they themselves were complying with SDGs, she told the Forum.

Professor Shameem said the main industries in Fiji were tourism, sugar (and agriculture more broadly), manufacturing, mining, fisheries and forestry. The University of Fiji requested FHEC to undertake an SDG audit of all these industries to allow HEIs to implement the SDGs properly. The United Nations SDGs are intended to be reached by 2030 which is just 8 years away, said Professor Shameem. It was imperative for the FHEC to provide HEIs with the audit report so that universities and others could advise their students accordingly. Industries that complied with the SDGs or had a plan for compliance with benchmarks would be promoted for employment by the University.

Similarly, said Professor Shameem, the University was considering the SDG rating of professional organisations such as law, finance and accounting firms. Recent studies had shown that many private sector professional firms advised on investment in tax havens, removing important tax revenue from public spending on health, education, social welfare, and infrastructure development including for roads and easier access to public facilities. SDG compliance reports on such firms were also required for the University of Fiji to fulfil FHEC’s request for SDG implementation, she said.

Professor Shameem said that statutory institutions such as FHEC and the Tertiary Scholarships and Loans Service (TSLs) could not require HEIs on the one hand to have their programmes supported by industry and on the other hand not provide evidence of the industries which were SDG compliant. However, once the SDG compliance audit was done, the HEIs would be pleased to form linkages and partnerships with the SDG compliant firms.

Professor Shameem also said that an important source of revenue for Fiji was remittances. This required development of human capital with emphasis on a knowledge-based labour force which would be transferrable overseas. The University of Fiji was focused on such development of human capital for the global labour market since remittances formed a significant portion of Fiji's revenue.