

Pacific Dialogue debate: Where to for tertiary education in Fiji?

Suva, Fiji - August 4, 2015

The process to develop a Tertiary Education Strategy for Fiji has begun, led by the Fiji Higher Education Commission and involving tertiary institutions, government, industry and civil society. The tertiary education sector is vital to the social and economic growth of the country, and as we look forward it is also valuable to reflect on what has been done right and what has been done wrong in the sector.

Speakers:

- Mr. Kolinio Meo, former Director of the Fiji Institute of Technology
- Dr Ganesh Chand, former Vice Chancellor of Fiji National University

Moderator:

- Mr. Jone Dakuvula, Chairman, Pacific Dialogue Limited

Summary

The debate explored the way forward for the tertiary sector in Fiji, through the lens of the question of whether the formation of the Fiji National University (FNU) was a good idea.

Although a cold and wet evening, the debate was well attended by an audience of over 50 interested and engaged citizens - including politicians, public servants, educationalists, academics, teachers and students.

Mr. Meo and Dr. Chand both presented well thought-out, perceptive and discerning points of view to the audience, which is no surprise given the invaluable contributions both speakers have provided to the development of education in Fiji, and the respect they have earned during their careers.

Whilst opposed over the main question, Mr. Meo and Dr. Chand had many areas of common ground.

At the heart of their disagreement was the creative tension between academia and technology, between University and Institute, between an intellectual society and a skilled society.

Woven through the debate was an insightful history lesson on the development of FNU and of the tertiary education sector in Fiji, provided by both the distinguished speakers and also by esteemed and experienced members of the audience.

This lesson covered the opportunities seized and constraints faced, gave reminders and insight into the context of past times and decisions, the economic and political contexts, and above all the importance of the tertiary education sector for the nation's future prosperity.

Rather than declare a winner, for this was not a debate for point scoring, the moderator Mr. Dakuvula reminded all present of the value and need for ongoing dialogue and constructive debate when faced with opposing or conflicting ideas and perspectives.