

MELANESIA EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION INC
Pitpit Street Lot 60 Section 276 North Waigani
P O Box 1636
PORT MORESBY
National Capital District
Papua New Guinea

COMMACT INTERNATIONAL
NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION (NGO) SOLIDARITY PARTNERSHIP
CONFERENCE, BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA

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“PAPER ON THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION”

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen;

On behalf of our Melanesia Education Development Foundation of Papua New Guinea, it humbles me to express our sincere gratitude to Mr. David Thompson of Commaact International and its wonderful and dedicated staff of Melbourne Australia. Secondly to my Solidarity Partnership sponsor, MADEC headed by Ms Pat Thorburn of Mildura, Victoria, for enabling me to be here today. I further extend my thank you to all our Solidarity Sponsor Partners from the North and South, and our NGO sponsorship recipients from across the globe who are present here today to share together and become advocates and agents of social and economic change in the world.

I have great pleasure in presenting you today about the significance of Education as the foundation to enable social and economic transformation in order to achieve better living standards and harmony across the globe. The subject that you and I are more familiar with, indebted to, and what the power of education can accomplish to eradicate poverty in the third world countries like Papua New Guinea, and address some of our global issues of today.

If I were asked to answer what would be the role of Education in our complex society today; I would have given this Answer: Civilization begun with Education and shall conclude with Education.

Credit goes to the value of Education. If it wasn't for Education, I wouldn't be standing here today to stress the importance of Education especially for the developing countries like Papua New Guinea as much as its importance to the industrialized world. I am most grateful indeed of what education has done for me just like it has done for billions of people around the world.

Education has played a major role perhaps in my life for something like a thousand years in a life time; from Stone Age to Computer Age and beyond Space Age in just under 40 years because of the prominent role it has played significantly in my life.

The role of Education is therefore rightfully profound in an individual's life of which a society is founded. Therefore, the importance of Education has been rightfully recognized by our global community for the very prominent role it plays in our societies' advancement.

Education is so fundamental that it is recognized under the International Convention on Human Rights, under which the Convention on the rights of the Child. We are aware of this Right. It states under Article 28 that: "States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular: Make primary education compulsory and available free to all; Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need; Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means; Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children; Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates"

"States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention"

"States Parties shall promote and encourage international co-operation in matters relating to education, in particular with a view to contributing to the elimination of ignorance and illiteracy throughout the world and facilitating access to scientific and technical knowledge and modern teaching methods. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries"

Article 29 further states that; "States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to; The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential; The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations; The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own; The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin; The development of respect for the natural environment"

Further, my analogy on the importance of Education is that; Education is not lesser of our five human senses neither blind. Rather, Education is super proficient of all knowledge. Education can see what eyes can not see. Education can hear what hears can not hear. Education can taste what mouth can not taste. Education can smell what nose can not smell and Education can touch beyond what body can not touch. Education is a long walk of life on limitless of all knowledge.

A thirty year old man who is not educated is literacy blind than a young man of fifteen years who is educated, literate, and can comprehend. A child who is educated can pronounce and comprehend than a young man who is not educated is like to a Dumb and a Deaf. A community who is educated benefits from better standards of living like to taste than those who have not been educated and can not enjoy the same benefits as to lack of taste. An educated group of girls can make better informed choices of life like to our sense of smell, than those who were not educated like to blocked sense of smell and can not make informed choices from good and bad, and right from wrongs in their decisions.

An educated population can be able to produce goods and services by being participants than those who aren't educated who can only touch and receive goods and services being produced by others like in the sense of touch. Education is like you gained sight from being blind at birth. Education is all about knowledge and science.

For the developed world, Education has been passed down from generations to generations over thousands and hundreds of years. For some of the third world countries like Papua New Guinea (PNG), it is the other; education has just been introduced and sparsely reached onto the second generation of our populace today. The social and economic benefits accrued to both sides differ in quantity and quality. Comparatively the benefits of importance of education derived in the third world are much lesser than the developed world has achieved both in terms of quality, quantity, innovation, advancements, and sustainability.

I take liberty to zoom you into Papua New Guinea briefly on what education has mattered to my community in Papua New Guinea and our aspirations. Here, we reflect on the Education development trends in my own Korika-Kengelga-Aiyaka tribal community, the District of Tambul Nebilyer, the Western Highlands Province, and Papua New Guinea to draw some comparative analysis and account for lost opportunities in our quest for social and economic development.

I am the second born child to a family of seven members. Unfortunately, my family lost five of our members without an education and left with only three of us. Two boys and one girl. In the family, I am the only one who had an opportunity to complete secondary education and onto three years of college owing to my parents and those who have extended me a hand of generosity. Regrettably, my parents have never lived that long to see the fruits of my education that they dearly considered important for my future. My parents and the generations preceding were never educated and lived in a world of obscurity.

I am in the first generation of those who have been educated in my Korika-Kengelga-Aiyaka tribal community onto the 21st Century. A similar trend has shown across the entire Highlands Region of approximately two and half million (2.5 million) people today.

There are approximately five thousand (5,000) members of my Korika-Kengelga-Aiyaka tribal community. Out of the five thousand (5,000) members, only one thousand five hundred (1,500) have been to school in the last thirty years since our Independence in 1975.

Only one hundred (100) members have enrolled onto secondary education, skills based training, and tertiary education. Fifty (50) members out of the one hundred (100) of these tribal members are currently employed.

The success rate of Education for my Korika-Kengelga-Aiyaka tribal community is decimal to only two percent (2%) out of a total population of five thousand (5,000) in the context of completing secondary education, gained some skills based training, and are currently employable.

The rest of the one thousand four hundred (1,400) members who have enrolled at school have become “drop-outs” and unemployable in the formal economic sector, and left being entrapped in lifetime poverty for lack of accomplishing a successful education.

A similar education development trend had proceeded to my remote Tambul Nebilyer District and onto the Western Highlands Provincial scene with a population of seventy two thousand (72,000) and three hundred and fifty thousand (350,000) respectively for lack of embodying Education as the Key to achieve human capital development.

Nationally, the same education development trend has reflected with two percent (2%) success rate on human development index based on my own calculations.

Ninety percent (90%) of children enrolled at schools in PNG each year become “drop-outs” prior to completing the final two years of secondary education, onto skills based training, and tertiary education at a

more tender age for lack of sustaining Education as a strategic building block of successful nation building. An individual, society, and a nation without Education are simply poor.

This has necessitated Papua New Guinea taking its rightful ranking as a least developing country in the Human Development Index of United Nations Development Program Report of 2006 (pg 284) as 139th out of a total of 177 countries of the United Nations wanting of any development achievements. The very importance of Education being used as a powerful tool to bring social and economic change has been gravely lacking in my own country of Papua New Guinea which is indeed a cheerless scenario.

Our literacy rate in PNG is only fifty two percent (52%) out of six (6) million people. Life Expectancy rate at birth is fifty five percent (55%). Average life expectancy rate is fifty one (51) years. Real per capital income is less than a \$1.00 per day based on my tribal communities estimates although its nationally recorded at US\$2,500.00 per annum due to the aggregate GDP (revenue) figure from the mineral resource sector (UNDP Report 2006 pg 285).

Consequential to this negative education development trend, Papua New Guinea is engulfed in huge social and economic predicaments. These social scenarios range from huge unemployment rate to associated social upheavals of all sorts which have become endemic, prevalent and deep rooted. Poverty has gained its grip. This is largely an end product of giving lip service to Education. Thus, PNG ranks as a least developing country in the world today.

If for instance my one thousand five hundred (1,500) tribal members who have entered school have achieved an hundred percent (100%) success rate in education and are all currently employed, life expectancy in my tribal community would have thrived and increased. Child mortality rate would have equally been reduced. Literacy rate would have increased. Real income per capita would have increased a thousand fold. Permanent homes would have been constructed. General quality of life would have tremendously increased. And general spin-offs would have been insurmountable due to the benefits derived from a successful Education development program.

Conversely, with one hundred percent success rate in education of my one thousand five hundred (1,500) tribal community members, there would have been generally lower rate of poverty like in the case of Papua New Guinea. That would have been an ideally successful scenario of social and economic transformation being driven consistent with investment in quality and accessible Education for my tribal community members.

Nonetheless, the future outlook on social and economic progress with the current state of Education development trends in PNG is any one's guest given the current trends.

A good success rate in Education in any developing countries would project corresponding social and economic gains and poverty reduction.

“We shall not grow wiser before we learn that much that we have done was very foolish” said F. A Hayek is statement that reflects on Papua New Guinea's priority in Education development for its citizens.

Good examples of countries recognizing the very importance of Education in the world have fared well in their overall social and economic development indexes. These countries have given top priority to human development (Education) have become very successful and competitive in the world today. Some recent past emerging countries who have graduated onto the industrialized status are like Singapore, South Korea, and Malaysia to name a few. They have concentrated investments into human capital development through emphasis on Education. Today, they have a very successful story to tell the world where we all in the third world can admire, learn, and emulate.

In concurrence, Education is very important to build a solid foundation for the well being of a country and its people. With Education, you build a knowledge driven society and a vibrant economy. It basically means our existence is dependent upon Education as the foundation. For some, without Education there is lack of social and economic progress, benefits, and left to live with poverty for generations to come.

Regrettably, the developing countries have not fully explored and built education as a solid base for social and economic progress. Much of it has to do with their limited resources to build their raw Human Capital, some due to bad governance and corruption as major impediments, some for lack of wisdom and strategic forward planning of the critical essence of education as a tool to bring lasting social and economic development. Collaterally, poverty has continued to drown its people.

That is the very rationale, our United Nations affirmed the very importance of Education which can never be over emphasized by pronouncing a Policy of “Leave No Child behind”. Promoting every child to gain an Education in order to help bring social and economic change forever on the face of this earth. But in reality that is a tall order. Today, we have yet to achieve this universal call on the importance of Education for every global citizen.

This brings me to this moment of sharing and why we are here today pitched to what a great icon of America, President John F Kennedy had challenged upon not what America can do for you but what you can do for America. As social entrepreneurs, we are here today because we want to bring that vital social and economic change to our various communities we serve. I am only reflecting and emphasizing on the part of Education.

President John F Kennedy’s call is relevant today. We have decided to bring that change to whatever causes of society that we are called to collectively serve. No matter how trivial or how challenging these causes are not forgetting whatever we do will end up beginning with education.

If we wait for the Government to intervene as rightfully it should, relieve will never come on time as we have experienced. Only fools do wait in vain knowing it will never eventuate. The only way out of poverty is to help ourselves if our governments can not help us to become successful in our education accomplishments. This is more so relevant to the third world needs, like embodying Education as the Key to social and economic development.

Melanesia Education Development Foundation was born in October 2000 to bring change to one child at a time through Education to communities we decided to serve. And to promote education for the less fortunate children and students and people of Papua New Guinea and greater Melanesia in order to help them realize their full potential in life.

We have just started and small though eights years gone by is like a month old because the urgency and the need and work yet to accomplish are so great and compelling. We shall answer the call to serve those in need in accordance with limited provisions can we raise for the cause of Education.

Education can truly eliminate poverty amongst our third world countries. Without education, poverty amongst developing countries will not be eliminated. That’s the reason why Education is very important for the developing countries like Papua New Guinea to reach a high level of human development in their quest for social and economic development and its equity participation.

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” as said by Nelson Mandela- in 1918 is still affirmative to our society today.

With appropriate and better education, we can address some of our major global issues today on Peace, Unity, Environmental Care, Good Governance and Transparency, Community Service, Healthy Lifestyles, etc, to further the general wellbeing and harmony into our global citizenship.

Humanity has recognized the power of education can bring to an individual's life and the global community. All we have to do is to recognize, enhance, harmonize, promote, invest, cultivate, share and respect Education as a tool to bring real social and economic change for better standards of living and advancement in the developed and the third world.

In conclusion, you might want to ask what your Dream in Education is if Education is that important to you. Well, if I understood well, one of China's Great Premier's once upon a time on development of his people had pronounced something like this; "Let millions of flowers bloom". So is my Dream, I would like to "make thousands and hundred thousands of flowers bloom" in Papua New Guinea.

Thank you!

Presented by: Mr. John Senior Kambowa
President
Melanesia Education Development Foundation Inc
Pitpit Street Lot 60 Section 276 North Waigani
P O Box 1636
PORT MORESBY
National Capital District
Papua New Guinea
Phone: + 675 687 3448
+ 675 325 2667
Fax + 675 325 2667
Email: Melanesiaeddevfoun@yahoo.com
Website: <http://www.freewebs.com/melanesiaeducationfoundation>