

Reflecting on our republican status

NEWSDAY

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TTUTA

AS WE celebrate our nation's republican status, it is timely for us to collectively reflect on our achievements in the sphere of education.

Many may say we have made significant strides such as the achievement of universal early childhood, primary and secondary education as well as free tertiary education. Our school graduates have been able to hold their own in a very competitive global environment, making significant contributions both locally and internationally.

As a young nation, we have every right to be proud of what we can and have been able to do, especially given our size.

Credit must be given to our past leaders who laid the foundation for national development by placing top priority on human capital development through education. As a result, significant sums of money have been spent of education.

However, simply spending money will not result in the provision of quality education, nor will it ensure there is equity. TTUTA would have in the past argued that we must now reflect on the returns on our investments in education and ask ourselves: are we getting value for money?

Such reflection must however be couched against a clear plan about the nature and purpose of education. Our education thrust must not just be about the creation of a workforce but more so about the creation of a society that is based on universally accepted principles of human rights and human dignity.

Unfortunately, our approach to education is still stuck in that old mould of creating workers who are driven by consumerism. Our educational ambitions must be grounded in our desire to empower people to realise their maximum human potential, thereby enlarging their choices and capacity to add value to the society in which they live.

As we further reflect, we must ponder on our capacity as a nation to engage in sustainable development and the role of education in the context of climate change and the preservation of the environment such that we do not incur debts to our future generations.

The global protest action by young people on Friday should have caused our leaders to sit up and take note of the concerns of the next generation and the justifiable fears they harbour regarding the future of our very planet. Unfortunately, no attempt was made here in TT for our students to be a part of this global awareness environmental campaign.

Our history as a nation on the issue of environmental protection has not been a particularly good one, beginning with our economy so heavily dependent on the extraction and use of fossil fuels. Our capacity to transition to the use of renewable sources of energy must be driven by our school curriculum reflecting government policy.

As a nation our carbon footprint continues to be a very strong; our passion and desire to recycle lag far behind many other small economies with sporadic initiatives spearheaded mostly by non-governmental organisations.

As a mature nation, proud of its ability to chart its own course, we must recognise that going forward the climate change agenda must assume a more prominent and significant position in our education agenda. This is even more important given our vulnerabilities to the negative effects of climate change as a small island nation.

As a small society, brainwashed by consumerism, and awash with the proceeds of fossil fuel extraction, we have ingrained lifestyle habits that are environmentally unfriendly and destructive. Schools must play a significant role in reversing these habits, especially knowing what is at stake.

The students of the world made their position abundantly clear when they took to the streets in their hundreds of thousands. Every citizen is required to do their part. The scientific evidence is overwhelming. Ignoring the call to drastic action is at our own peril.

The students of the world see danger ahead and are prepared to take the lead in the fight to reverse the effects of climate change. It is time for us as a nation to seriously get on board with concrete action, beginning with policy guidelines from the leadership of the country.

Schools must be striving to become carbon neutral places following on the efforts of the Carbon Zero Initiative of TT. All teachers must get on board the climate agenda with haste if we are to do our part as a nation.

Attaining republican status meant assuming responsibilities and taking charge of our destiny. This is a time to show our maturity.