

The Commonwealth Conversation: Youth Group Discussion

Alumnus: Dr. Cornelia Ndifon

Place: Otjiwarongo Town

Otjozondjupa Region

Namibia

Participants: Grade 11 (Eleven) Secondary School Students from three Secondary Schools in the Town (Donatus Secondary School, Otjiwarongo Secondary School and Paresis Secondary School). The Students are aged 16 to 17 years. One Teacher from Donatus Secondary School was present and participated in the discussions.

Location: Teachers' Common Room, Donatus Secondary School, Otjiwarongo Namibia.

Production: Interactive discussion on video (DVD)

Aim: To engage young people in a creative conversation about the Commonwealth

Preamble: Students introduced themselves by name and school grade. In the early part of the discussion they talked about their ambitions and aspirations. Most of them wanted to become doctors, one a pilot, one an accountant, two lawyers and about three had not made up their minds yet. Some of those who had not made up their minds were planning to sponsor themselves while earning an income because their parents were unemployed. The discussion went very well, but audio quality on computer is very poor. Good audio with a CD player, and best audio with DVD player.

Discussion Themes and Responses (paraphrased)

1. Knowledge of Commonwealth –existence and composition

- § 2 out of 9 students knew that “the commonwealth consists of 53 independent countries, and that membership is determined by linkage with Britain as Colonial Masters or by association, as in the case of Namibia and South Africa”.
- § 1 student had heard of Commonwealth Games but did not know who participated in these games and where the next games were to be hosted.

2. Evidence of Commonwealth’s presence in their community

- § There was no response

3. Commonwealth’s handling of the situation in Zimbabwe

3a. Students and Teacher knew why Zimbabwe was in its current situation

- § Students were aware that Zimbabwe was facing political and economic crises.
- § They were aware that sanctions had been imposed on Zimbabwe and their reasons for sanctions being imposed on Zimbabwe were bad leadership, long stay of President Mugabe, and the approach President Mugabe took to address land reform issues.
- § The Teacher particularly commented on the fact that, it was wrong for the President to have taken companies, industries and businesses from skilled people to unskilled citizens; he had also violated the constitution of Zimbabwe

3b. the way to a permanent solution

- § They suggest that the Commonwealth considers the plight of ordinary Zimbabweans who are most affected by the sanctions and, are asking the Commonwealth to lift the sanctions (specifically want Commonwealth to support agriculture, continue dialogue with some concessions to Mugabe and to help the youth of Zimbabwe). They also want President Mugabe to relinquish power because the country is greater than any one individual.

4. Climate Change

4a. What it means to them

- § These students went to town with the topic of climate change. They knew that cfc's (chlorofluorocarbons) produced from factories and industries, damage the ozone layer and increased the amount of ultraviolet rays penetrating the earth. This has led to global warming and climate change; manifests as drought, flooding, and diseases.

4b. How they want the Commonwealth to address Climate Change?

- § Educate and increase awareness in schools, supermarkets and at rural community settings where trees are cut for firewood
- § Campaign for cfc-free manufacturing
- § Provide solar panels for generation of electricity
- § Support institutions currently researching in alternative energy sources by providing funds
- § Reduce ownership of individual cars for transportation –more people to use public buses
- § Country governments to enact and enforce laws on environmental pollution
- § To have a World Court to address climate change issues

5. What else should the Commonwealth do/their vision of future Commonwealth?

5a. what else should the Commonwealth be doing?

- § Provide grass root level information on how persons can apply for scholarships
- § Host grass root Mini-Commonwealth Games
- § Invest in medical care in developing countries
- § Send doctors to help countries which do not have enough doctors
- § To check how country governments are managing international aid/funding/grants.

5b. on future Commonwealth?

- § Achieve more.....
- § Climate change mitigated
- § Enlarge membership
- § Zimbabwe situation resolved and Zimbabwe more secure
- § Invest in Educational Systems because Teachers shape future leaders
- § Help developing countries by reducing cost of finished goods
- § Help Kenya and Namibia reduce death rates

October 27, 2009

Commonwealth Conversation: Regional Education Officers, Otjozondjupa Regional Education Authority, Otjiwarongo, Namibia.

Number of participants – 12 (Men – 5, Women – 7)

Facilitator: Dr. Cornelia Ndifon – Alumnus.

Summary

1. The Commonwealth poorly marketed. Alumni should form associations in country and develop or run projects so Commonwealth can be known to the wider/grass root public.
2. Namibia seems to have been left out of the scheme of things.
3. Commonwealth to be more involved in education by providing school buildings and hostels; to invest in nomadic education for cattle rearers and migrating populations; to provide textbooks for learners; provide more bursaries to a wider group of young learners; invest in institutional development in developing countries; to invest in slow learners; make scholarship application forms more accessible to regional offices.
4. Commonwealth to consider investing in alternative energy sources, and in the case of Namibia, to investing in harnessing solar energy because it is hot most of the year in Namibia; the global involvement of the Commonwealth in Climate change will also benefit Namibia's agriculture as floods will be contained; to provide Sun Stoves for cooking.
5. Future Commonwealth to ensure a more collective involvement of member states; a stronger organisation.

The details are on the DVD which I think is awesome. Please pardon any political incorrectness!

Thank you.