

Topic: The role of youth and the climate change movement: Experiences and Lessons Learnt

Presenter: Ms. Brianna Fruean, SPREP Youth Ambassador

Parallel 6: Increased awareness and understanding of climate change issues among schools, communities and other stakeholders

“Talofa lava!

My name is Brianna Fruean the SPREP Youth Ambassador.

This is a newly created role by SPREP to recognise that we can't talk about our future without involving our future and for that I would like to say thank you to David Sheppard and the team at SPREP.

It was while waiting for my Mum to finish work that I sat in on the 2008 Pacific Climate Change Roundtable when I was 11 and I heard the words climate change and it grew an interest in me. So it is with great pleasure that I stand before you today to speak.

The 2008 PCCR inspired me to make a difference.

I wanted to help empower Pacific youth to make active choices in their lives to become better people who take care of our planet and I wanted to help ensure that our Pacific youth voice is heard and taken seriously when it comes to tackling climate change.

I started out making small changes myself and then spreading this within my family, friends, school and youth and church groups with a range of different activities – planting native trees, planting sustainable gardens, encouraging people to conserve water and power at home as part of their daily routine - helping people to take ownership for their decisions and to take positive action.

Now when I visit schools to speak I always encourage interested people to start small as eventually all the small steps will add up to greatness. Just do what you can and sustain that before taking the next step to bigger activities and projects which will happen naturally.

When I was 11 I started a youth environment group with 6 people, just me and my friends. Now there are 600 registered young people who are still taking action today, five years on.

And we can all do so many things, we have conducted school visits, took part in youth workshops and retreats, coordinated public marches, written blogs and news items as well as the action driven activities that show us walking the talk.

And this is what I have learnt – that we work best when we work in partnership with others and some of the work I have done has been done with others – my parents, my friends, my school, SPREP, 350.org, PACMAS the Pacific Assistance Media Scheme, the Commonwealth Secretariat and Pacific youth across the region.

Young people make up 40% of the world population and there for are our most powerful mobilisers for change, and youth have been proving this in many ways. Even though I might be the only youth in climate change representative here today, I am not the only one out there.

I have also learnt there are so many other young people across our islands that are active in working to save our environment in many different ways and I must pay tribute to them, to name a few, Matea Nauto of Kiribati, Kelvin Anthony of Fiji and Betty Tuilotolava of Tokelau and we are grateful for your support and help which brings me to another lesson I have learnt.

There is a need to continue to work with youth when it comes to making decisions as we inherit your decisions made. Work with us, seek our input and involve us, not just as a token but for real participation.

In saying this I must commend SPREP for taking this on. My first official duty as the SPREP Youth Ambassador was to be part of the SPREP delegation to the Oceania 21 in New Caledonia. Thank you to New Caledonia and SPREP for funding my participation which saw me become a real part of the team.

I was given a lot of support and information as part of preparation, I was also asked for my advice and input whenever we had team meetings and I also was given the role of speaker on behalf of SPREP at the table with other partners and countries when we discussed the paragraphs on youth in the Lifou Declaration. Our Pacific youth were given a voice through me. This was an amazing experience and I would recommend that others consider giving their youth champions the same courtesy.

It was in Copenhagen at COP 15, 6 years ago, that a 17 year old Solomon Islands, Ms. Christina Ora made a speech on behalf of the global youth constituency saying - "I was born in 1992, you have been negotiating all my life you cannot tell us that you need more time, commit now to decisions that will guarantee our future."

When I was in New Caledonia for the Oceania 21, we had a special welcoming ceremony that mentioned that we are not owners of this land but simply managers. And yes this is true you are managing this land for me and my generation and we will manage the land for the next. But gone are the days that youth can just wait around for their turn to wear the manager's badge.

When I was in Primary school my science teacher told my class "now kids we must treat our planet with love and care because at the rate we are going we might have to relocate villages in the next 20 years".

At the time I did the calculation in head that at 31 I would start to see people moving inland, yet people have already started moving but I'm only 16. We can no longer afford the luxury of waiting for our future generation to take over in the next 20 – 50 years - our young people must be involved now.

The best way forward is through is an intergenerational approach. David Sheppard often mentions that SPREP is all about partnerships, at the Oceania 21 my deputy prime minister of Samoa mentioned the SIDS conference last year and its focus of partnerships and what better partnership than the leaders of today partnering with the leaders of tomorrow?

Youth need to be given a space and a voice in negotiations because a lot of the time it's so easy for negotiators go hours writing, removing, discussing and looking at text that they think all you focus on is the words in the document – do you use "will" or "shall", "has" or "have"? But it is about more than just words. Within this document lies our islands future, your children's future, my future.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today."