



Aspire Artemis Foundation

We empower future leaders

Igniting the inner fire in youth and transforming it into sparks of creativity.

ASPIRE ARTEMIS FOUNDATION SUMMIT 2018 REPORT

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Executive Summary

Aspire Artemis Foundation (AAF) is an organization committed to promoting cultural exchange, language learning and holistic educational training opportunities to youth in vulnerable and marginalized communities across the globe. The aim of these efforts is to educate, empower and support youth in order to better prepare them for their future careers.

Through leadership and cultural exchange summits and other holistic training methods, Aspire Artemis will play a critical role in highlighting the similarities faced by marginalized youth and empowering them towards sustainable solutions for productive ventures. Summits will include panel discussions, leadership exercises, speech training sessions and entrepreneurship activities among others. Additionally, mentorship and internship opportunities will be emphasized as Aspire Artemis recognizes the importance of bridging the gap between educational training and the professional world.

The Caribbean Context

Across the developing world there is a pervasive sentiment that far more needs to be done to engage youth and ensure their adequate integration as productive members of society. The Caribbean region is no exception, as many islands continuously fail to recognize the strong ties between investing in youth and achieving development aims. This is evidenced by, in part, poor recognition of youth concerns in official National and Regional Policies, persistent youth unemployment and underemployment and failure to ensure social security for this growing portion of the populous. The Caribbean Development Bank estimates that youth unemployment in the Caribbean region exceeds

25%, dwarfing the 8% rate for adults.¹ It is important to halt considering these matters as peripheral or inconsequential since they directly impinge on development and economic advancement for the respective countries. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) asserts that youth unemployment directly contributes to crimes and violence, which are, in turn, “bottlenecks to growth in the Caribbean.”² In 2017, the IMF estimated that disenfranchised youth were responsible for 80% of prosecuted crimes in Caribbean countries. Statistics such as these emphasize the need to critically engage youth populations across the Caribbean region and ensure that intervention strategies have their desired effect.

The Summit 2018

Recognizing these critical challenges, Aspire Artemis aims to help address the marginalization of youth. One of our primordial activities to this end during the last quarter was the Aspire Artemis Summit 2018. The objective of the Aspire Artemis Summit is to demonstrate how youth can learn from each other while sharing their experiences. At the end of their time with Aspire Artemis we hope that we will have successfully shown youth leaders how to build relationships, forge lasting partnerships, and strengthen their advocacy and communication abilities, all while developing empathy and social skills.

The Aspire Artemis Summit 2018 took place from March 6-8, 2018 on the island of St Lucia. The Ministry of Infrastructure, Ports, Energy and Labour served as the base for capacity building activities and discussions while participants also had the opportunity to

¹ The Imperative of Youth Employment for Sustainable Development in The Caribbean. Caribbean Development Bank. May 2015.

<http://www.caribank.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Youth-Study-Imperative-of-Employment-CDB-2015.pdf>

² Crime and Youth Unemployment in the Caribbean. International Monetary Fund. November 2017. <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2017/11/13/na111417-crime-and-youth-unemployment-in-the-caribbean>

glean insight into St Lucian culture by touring prominent local sites, including taking part in a youth exhibition in the country's Constitution Park. The summit also highlighted the successful collaboration between, business, the private sector, civil society and other regional organizations. The Summit's participants hailed from the United States of America, South America, the Caribbean and Africa. Among the events included in the Summit's activities were a panel discussion through which different young people could share their ongoing entrepreneurship and activism-oriented activities. Additionally, participants engaged in a leadership simulation exercise, facilitator training, as well as talks. This included a motivational exercise by Bahamian lifestyle coach and author, Simmone L. Bowe and best-selling author and speaker Fawn Germer. Although the Summit emphasized the focus on youth, particularly women's empowerment, the active participation of several males as well as Professors of the American International Medical University, Rise Saint Lucia, and other local NGOs, stood as testament to the Summit's ability to bridge divides of gender, age and nationality.

On account of strong interest in the Summit's activities, an additional event was hosted on the campus of the American International Medical University (AIMU) in St Lucia. At this event an even more diverse group spanning numerous countries, continents, age ranges and religious backgrounds participated in leadership training exercises. Apart from students and faculty of AIMU's faculties of Nursing and Medicine, participants from the Community, Family and Youth Resilience program (CYFR) and Rise Saint Lucia also engaged and benefited from the training activity. Importantly, this served as a "train the trainers" exercise so that the lessons learnt will now have a spillover effect in various communities. Diverse facilitators have been empowered to share lessons about youth leadership and involvement. In addition to the leadership activities which took place, the Aspire Artemis Foundation was especially grateful for a leadership simulation exercise designed by Jo Singel and World +®.

Evidencing the emphasis on empowering women and girls, the Summit deliberately coincided with the St. Lucian government's month-long observance of International Women's Day (IWD). A truly integrated approach, IWD activities on the Caribbean

island were sponsored and coordinated by sixteen (16) different partners and organizations including the St Lucia Ministry of Education, Innovation, Gender Relations and Sustainable Development, Ministry of Youth Development and Sports, the Caribbean Association of Feminist Research (CAFRA), Community, Saint Lucia Industrial and Small Business Association (SLISBA) St Lucia National Organization of Women (NOW), St Lucia Crisis Centre and many others. The rationale behind such a consolidated observance of IWD was to foster the sharing of ideas, events and spaces and also ensures that there would be no duplication of efforts. In effect, this all maximized the impact of the month's activities. Aspire Artemis' and St Lucia's celebration of International Women's Day reflected the desire to engage women across rural and urban settings and across all economic strata of society. The impact of the celebration of women and their power across the nation was palpable and created a veritable momentum for further action.

Summit Outcomes

Aspire Artemis has the ability to engage in effective youth intervention activities through its Summits and other training programmes. Additionally, given that the many individuals in the organization's leadership team have strong ties to the Caribbean region, there is an increased likelihood for these interventions to have an impact, as there already exists a comprehensive understanding of the Caribbean region, its realities and its challenges.

Through all of its activities, the Aspire Artemis Foundation aims to contribute to long-term development, sustainably change lives, foster strong communities, engage in neighboring cultures and make an overall positive impact. Aspire Artemis strives to re-channel the efforts of youth toward more productive ventures. The specific goals of the Summit in St Lucia 2018 were to serve as:

- an impetus for network building with committed young leaders working on issues that have a social impact.

- an opportunity to form lasting partnerships and share lessons learned with youth leaders from diverse regions as well as to benefit from the training of accomplished mentors.
- a forum to allow for the development of innovative skills that will spur initiative building in local communities, as well as the opportunity to advance cross regional networking and relationship building.

As the pilot Summit in the Caribbean, it was worth noting the issues that arose organically from Summit participants. Given that these youth were largely a carefully selected group, i.e. they chose and were selected to participate in the event driven by a pre-existing interest in youth development imperatives; the issues they discussed reflect considerable concern and preoccupation in their lives. These matters include the need for greater innovation and entrepreneurship in their respective countries, a real rejection for what they perceive as youth being conflated with inexperience, lack of respect for their contributions, an apparent lack of economic/professional opportunities and the need to include men in any and all discussions of gender parity.

Moving forward, Aspire Artemis aims to broaden its sectoral priority areas in the next five years to the following, given that they are incredibly pertinent to current realities in the Caribbean environment:

- **Establishment of a premiere Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math (STEAM) center in the Caribbean region**

We believe that Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math (STEAM) is an important driver of innovation and change and can create opportunities for self sustenance for youth across the globe. In partnership with E-Lab Africa and other notable partners, we will provide the tools to students through interactive workshops so that they are able to have the technical skills necessary to design engineering solutions that solve global challenges.

- **Preventing Violence Against Women**

Between January 1 2018 and March 25 2018, 14 women were murdered by their domestic partners in Trinidad and Tobago. Violence against women is a pervasive problem in larger Caribbean islands such as Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, but the problem has been recently heightened in the latter. In its discussion of strategies to promote gender and youth empowerment, the Summits have the opportunity to inspire young people to return home with strategies and tools through which they can boost their activism efforts. Given the critical situation in Trinidad and Tobago, one Summit participant has already initiated a video-diary project through which women share their views, trepidations and hopes regarding the spate of attacks against women in that country. This coincides with the creation of a virtual safe space for women created by the Saint Lucian group, Herstoire.

- Curbing violence

The IMF asserts that there is a sharp link between youth unemployment and crime in the Caribbean. There remains a need to meaningfully engage young people and reorient them towards constructive and productive avenues. Aspire Artemis's activities can certainly play a role in these efforts.

- Minimizing youth disaffection

There is a pervasive sentiment across many Caribbean societies that youth have been excluded from the political discourse. The mere fact that in some Caribbean nations youth development seems to be habitually equated to sport and nothing else echoes this problem.

- Curbing youth Unemployment

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and other major international organizations all estimate youth unemployment to be 25% or above in the Caribbean, a figure, which according to the IMF is three (3) times the unemployment rate for adults. The hope is that through attendance at the Summits, as well as through

leveraging the Foundation's mentorship, training and internship opportunities, participants will become engaged in entrepreneurship activities – thereby employing themselves and others - or be better prepared to enter the world of work through specifically catered training programs.

- Mental Health

The World Health Organization estimates that 1 in 4 members of society suffer from mental health illness. Unfortunately, the issue of mental health is not adequately ventilated across Caribbean societies. In fact, mere recognition of the importance of dealing with mental health as an issue is in its infancy in many Caribbean nations. Several summit participants are engaged in projects centered on increasing awareness of mental illness and echoed how the Summit made them empowered to return to their home countries better prepared to engage relevant stakeholders to speak about this issue.

- Suicide rate reduction programs

There is little question that the ongoing unemployment crises coupled with a general feeling of disenfranchisement and being excluded from all political and economic discourses can spark feelings of frustration and despair among many talented youths. This in turn can lead to unhealthy lifestyle choices, increased mental illness, stress and even suicide. Suicide rates in the Caribbean region are on the rise due to increased feelings of hopelessness amongst youth. Interventions that engage and empower youth and foster and drive innovation are necessary and timely.

Synopsis

As discussed above, there are a number of pervasive problems affecting Caribbean youth populations: increased disaffection and feelings of disenfranchisement, the spate of gender-based violence in states such as Trinidad and Tobago, the unemployment and

underemployment crises across Caribbean territories and overall rising crime and violence in larger states such as Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica.³⁴⁵

While it is clear that Aspire Artemis cannot independently resolve the issues highlighted, the foundation does succeed in Empowering young people to Act and to bolster their voices to speak to a host of these matters, among others. In this way, the chances for organic and credible change across Caribbean countries are amplified.

In light of these problems, there is a heightened need for *effective* intervention programs directed not only at marginalized youth, but also youth with a demonstrated interest in effecting a positive change in their communities. It is important to consider both these youth populations when engaging Caribbean youth. Aspire Artemis, through its cultural summits, mentorship programmes and internship opportunities, will have the ability to capture or work with these critical segments of youth and empower them to make a difference in their communities.

There is a strong case to be made that given the fragmentation in many of these communities; grassroots efforts will prove far more effective than top-down strategies that fail to connect with local realities.⁶ This too represents a key opportunity for the Foundation, together with its partners, to have a sustainable and meaningful impact across many Caribbean societies.

Throughout the Summit, participants engaged in a meaningful and insightful discourse on a range of problems experienced in their respective communities and/or countries. The following reflects some of the reflections of various youth regarding the event in St Lucia:

³ According to the InterAmerican Development Bank study on Crime and Violence in Trinidad and Tobago, only Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago register more than 100 murders annually.

⁴ InterAmerican Development Bank. Crime and Violence in Trinidad and Tobago - IDB Series on Crime and Violence in the Caribbean. June 2016

⁵ Trinidad and Tobago's murder toll for 2017 was 494, while Jamaica's murder rate was 1616.

⁶ Grassroots Associations are Important: Some Theory and a Review of the Impact Literature. David Horton Smith. September 1997

On the value of the Artemis Summit in inspiring personal empowerment...

“I got to meet and interact with powerful and strong minded young leaders, it was my first experience having a round table discussion with women from the Caribbean, South America, and Africa”

“The Summit had me look at myself and feel empowered. It made me confirm things I already knew. I participated in workshops that allowed me to realize my internal and external limits.”

“I met new people from different parts of world, we exchanged ideas, thoughts and values...this has left a permanent mark on my life.”

“I am really proud to say that the experience I got from this summit has left a permanent mark in my life.”

“The summit was indeed educational and empowering, it created an atmosphere where different young leaders around the world got the opportunity to meet, interact, share their stories and achievements to establish and cement a long partnership relationship and broaden our networking.”

“I felt like we all shared our diverse viewpoints and grew a relationship so close that most would think we knew each other for longer than a few days. It showed that it did not matter what part of the world we were from, we were all similar.”

“During this Summit, my perspective on culture has shifted...I now view culture as an art. In its broadest context, culture embraces everything from your choice of what to wear each day to the traditions, beliefs and values of your family and community.”

On engaging young adults, particularly women and girls...

“The (leadership) simulation exercise has enabled students to appreciate the diversity of culture and experiences which they will encounter during their studies, in the

work place and also in other settings and the environment where they will be in the future.”

“The summit allowed me tell my life story and be comfortable sharing it in a room full of strangers. It demonstrated to me that my story can empower another woman in the room who may have related experiences despite coming from a different part of the world.”

“Although brief, the summit inspired such incredible dialogue and exchange, that I truly believe this experience will influence my thinking and actions moving forward.”

“I found her (Dr. Banks) call for women to not diminish their own power in a bid to appease others really pertinent to my own journey and it is definitely a message that will reverberate in my consciousness for a long time to come.”

On embracing a culture of mentors and its impact in enhancing growth and learning...

“The president of Aspire Artemis demonstrated to me that a leader is someone who is flexible and adaptable to change.”

“We had a seminar talk by Simmone Bowe on “LIMITELESS LIFE”. A very powerful section where everyone was enlightened on how to break through their limitations.”

“Simmone L. Bowe, offered powerful messages about confronting your perceived limits and overcoming them.”

“important life coping skills were taught by respective participants. These included: the importance of listening to people’s opinion, putting oneself into others shoes, letting your actions speak for you, in diversity there must be diplomacy and being patient with people.”

“This Summit affirmed that I do not need to dim my light to make anyone’s light brighter. If anything, I need to shine my light and be a beacon to inspire and empower others.”

On the role of boys in ensuring female empowerment...

“I was particularly enlightened by Simmone Bowe’s emphasis on the importance of not excluding men from the discourse of gender empowerment. Simmone and a male delegate from Grenada both demonstrated the alternate side of the gender debate and how in our attempt to build women up we ought not to tear men down...”

“It was also the first conference on the theme of women’s empowerment where I saw men join in to share their knowledge and support. The conversation was lively, and each woman/ man shared their individual viewpoints. The space was also comfortable.”

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, some of the broader consensus emerging from the St Lucia summit seemed to be recognition of the value gained from interacting with diverse young people. All participants indicated as well that the Summit left them feeling inspired and rejuvenated. A few delegates have already declared that they will be employing lessons and strategies learnt at the Summit to expand their activism efforts at home. All Summit participants displayed strong enthusiasm at the prospect of working with the Aspire Artemis Foundation again, attending future leadership and cultural exchange events and helping to augment their peers’ awareness of the work of the Foundation.

As repeatedly emphasized throughout this brief report, the Caribbean region while plagued by a number of issues vis-à-vis youth, also represents a prime locus for positive revitalization, rejuvenation and reformation. The successful staging of the 2018 Aspire Artemis Foundation Summit in St Lucia evidences that AAF can play a critical role in engaging the region’s young people and helping to empower them and their voices. When one examines the aims of the Aspire Artemis Foundation, the specific objectives of the



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Summit and participants' extensive feedback, it is quite clear that the targets were well exceeded.