Empowerment

Model Village at Bambous Accommodates First Beneficiaries

Phase I of the model village project at La Valette, Bambous, comprising of 71 housing units, has been completed and the contract leases and house keys were handed over to a first batch of beneficiaries on 16 April 2009. Phase II of the project which consists of some 127 additional housing units is expected to be completed by the end of 2009.

The model village, a Rs 204 million social housing project, was initiated under the Integrated Social Development Programme of the National Empowerment Foundation (NEF) which has now become a prominent institution engaged in helping the vulnerable groups to benefit from the democratisation of the economy. It is the first project designed according to an integrated concept. Thus, land has also been earmarked for SME units, craft markets, a cooperative shop, a children’s play area and basket/volleyball pitches. The project which extends over 20 acres of land is in line with Government’s endeavour to provide assistance to low-income families and support vulnerable families who have difficulties to meet their housing needs.

The housing units, of a floor area of about 50m², stand on plots of land of approximately five perches each and have been structured in such a way so as to offer the possibility to the residents, if they wish at a later stage, to extend their houses both laterally and vertically.
The approach developed under the Integrated Social Development Programme also provides for support to the families in terms of social, economic and environmental aspects through education, training, employability and entrepreneurship with the assistance of the NGOs. This will help the families to break the vicious circle of poverty and integrate mainstream society.

With a view to help more families, the Government is working with NGOs and the private sector to replicate this housing scheme in Cité Lumièrè at Grand Baie and other pockets of poverty throughout the island.

Broadening Circle of opportunities

It is recalled that the NEF, initiated in the 2006 budget, aims at broadening the circle of job opportunities to each Mauritian while reducing unemployment and fighting poverty in the context of democratisation of the economy.

At the end of March 2009, an amount of Rs 1.2 billion had been disbursed for all the programmes and around 12 000 persons both in Mauritius and Rodrigues have benefitted from training facilities, placement and financial assistance under the different schemes initiated by the NEF.

As the main priority of the NEF for the year 2009 revolves around training and placement, NEF aims at broadening the circle of job opportunities to some 3000 additional job seekers through training and placement facilities as well as helping those whose jobs are affected by the global economic crisis in securing their jobs.

One of the forthcoming prominent projects of the NEF is the setting up of an ‘Espace des Metiers’ by June 2009 whereby a desk will be permanently arranged to attend to all queries of the public as regards existing jobs on the market.

Economy

Additional Stimulus Package to Mitigate Adverse Effects of Global Crisis

In light of the on-going financial crisis and global economic downturn, the Government presented an Additional Stimulus Package (ASP) to the tune of Rs 10.4 billion on 20 December 2008. The main purposes of the stimulus package are to mitigate the adverse consequences of the global economic recession on Mauritius and to position the country to experience sustained growth when the global economy recovers.

For a proper implementation of certain projects necessitating legislative amendments, the Additional Stimulus Package (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill was voted in the National Assembly on 15 April 2009. The law will hence enable Government to implement measures to encourage construction, residential as well as industrial, to improve efficiency, global competitiveness, to protect and support SMEs in industries and in tourism, to boost private investment in particular FDI and facilitate investment so that Government can meet the overarching objective of saving employment and creating jobs.

For a better coordination of the implementation of the measures enunciated in the package which encompass several sectors likely to be affected by the crisis, 11 sub-committees have been put in place. The sub-committees will be in turn monitored closely by a main steering committee chaired by the Secretary to Cabinet and Head of Civil Service.

The ASP is geared towards saving jobs and enterprises to shore up economic performance both in Mauritius and Rodrigues. It will be implemented over a period of two years ending on 31 December 2010. The package is expected to unlock a growth of about 1 to 1 ½ percent annually over the 24 months period from January 2009 to December 2010.
Protecting Workers

One of the primary objectives of the package are to protect workers by supporting vulnerable businesses to continue operations during the transition. Money will also be spent on public infrastructure, on training and reskilling of retrenched workers through the National Empowerment Foundation, on local infrastructure for various projects across the country and on several tax measures to support industries.

The package also aims at ensuring that the private sector gives highest priority to employment protection as firms restructure to meet the crisis. Besides, the Rs 10.4 billion additional stimulus package, equivalent to about 3.8 percent of the Gross Domestic Product, also caters for the protection of investment, markets and production and covers a series of measures initiated to support the vulnerable sectors namely, tourism, textiles/clothing, sugar, construction, financial services, freeport, seafood and ICT.

Supporting the manufacturing sector

As a means to support vulnerable manufacturing and export sector oriented enterprises, the Government has put in place the Mechanism for Transitional Support for the Private Sector (MTSP) which is operational since mid December 2008, under the ASP to help firms facing financial difficulty in the context of the world’s economic crisis. The MTSP, implemented with the assistance of Enterprise Mauritius and the Joint Economic Council, will provide additional financial support to enterprises which are considered to have had a viable past record and will have a viable future once the difficulties of the moment are over.

Since its coming into operation, the ASP has committed Rs 3 billion to help certain sectors which are facing difficulties and around Rs 400 million have been injected in the economy. The package includes some main measures to revamp the tourism and textile sectors which are the most exposed due to the global economic downturn the manufacturing/textile sector. Besides, Government is accelerating the implementation of the Manufacturing Adjustment and SME Development Fund. Rs 400 million have already been committed out of Rs 500 million to support around 50 projects, mainly SMEs.

Intensifying tourism promotion campaigns

As regards the tourism sector, Government’s main concern is not lower income but rather protecting employment. Government will support enterprises in this sector provided employment is protected. The promotion budget for the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority has been increased by Rs 100 million and Government is organising special promotion campaigns at the 35 points served now by Air Mauritius. From 1st January 2009 to 31st December 2010, hotels have been called upon to pay the Environment Protection fee only if they show profit at the end of their financial year.

The package also provides for upgrading infrastructure
US – Mauritius Trade
Third TIFA Council Meeting seeks to maximise opportunities

The third meeting of the Council of the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) between the United States and Mauritius held on 21 April in Balaclava focused on the way forward for interaction between the US and local private sectors so that opportunities are maximised.

Competitive areas representing potential for business were identified. The meeting also served to discuss ways of consolidating agricultural trade and establishing further agri-business linkages between the two countries.

As regards the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), both sides agreed that discussions on the future of AGOA provisions would be pursued in order to ensure that the benefits are maintained beyond 2015 and that the duration of the Third Country Fabric provision is harmonised with the duration of AGOA.

Delegations at the meeting were led for the US side by the Assistant Trade Representative for the region of Africa, Ms Florie Liser, and for the Mauritian side by the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Mr Anand Neewoor.

The third Council meeting reviewed progress on five priority items of the work plan that was adopted during the first TIFA Council meeting held in 2007 in Mauritius.

The priority items were:
- encouraging private sector representatives to identify opportunities, forge linkages and work towards the removal of specific trade and investment impediments between the two countries
- identifying specific competitive sectors in which to promote trade, investment and cooperation
- coordinating on AGOA implementation, including encouraging value-added production and trade diversification
- exploring the potential for greater cooperation and more comprehensive trade and investment agreements
- strengthening agricultural trade and agri-business linkages, including value-added agricultural products and processed foods.

TIFA, which provides a formal mechanism to address bilateral trade issues and enhance trade and investment relations between Mauritius and the US, was signed on 18 September 2006, in Washington. The main objective of the Agreement is to strengthen and expand trade ties between the two countries. It also represents a structured dialogue process allowing Governments of both countries to take stock of current trade development challenges, find new perspectives for trade development programmes, broaden the scope of partnership and forge investment linkages.
AGOA Week

Local Entrepreneurs urged to diversify exports to the US

At a workshop held in Pailles on 6 April to sensitise the business community on export opportunities in the context of AGOA, both the minister of Industry, Science and Research, Mr. Dharambeer Gokhool, and the US Chargé d’Affaires, Ms Virginia Blaser, urged local entrepreneurs to diversify exports to the US.

The workshop was one of the events of the AGOA week organized by the Ministry of Industry, Science and Research from 6 to 10 April 2009.

Preferential export opportunities under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and the US Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) apply to a list of over 6,000 items. However, it is textile and clothing that constitute the largest part of Mauritian exports to the US, hence the call for diversification. “The way is clear for Mauritian entrepreneurs to expand business with the US in non-textile products”, Ms Blaser pointed out.

Actually local exports to the US are expected to cover in the very near future products like jam, agricultural rum, spices, tuna, special salt and honey. This follows the recent participation of Mauritian companies in fancy food shows in New York. The US side sees huge potential for Mauritius in agricultural opportunities in trade and development. Local enterprises are therefore pressed upon to further explore existing opportunities.

AGOA is a United States Trade Act that significantly enhances US market access for 40 Sub-Saharan African countries. The Act originally covered the 8-year period from October 2000 to September 2008, but amendments brought in July 2004 extend AGOA to 2015. In October 2008 the US Congress approved the eligibility of Mauritius for the Third Country Fabric provision until 2012.

AGOA builds on existing US trade programs by expanding the benefits previously available only under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) programme. Duty-free access to the US market under the combined AGOA/GSP programme apply to more than 6,000 product tariff lines, including the roughly 1,800 product tariff lines that were added to the GSP by the AGOA legislation. These include items such as apparel and footwear, wine, certain motor vehicle components, a variety of agricultural products, chemicals, steel and others.

As regards exports earnings, in 2008 around 40 large enterprises exported goods worth Rs3.46 billion to US. In 2007, export proceeds had been higher, amounting to Rs 4.21 billion. Exports to the US actually accounted for about 10% of total exports last year.

A H1N1 influenza

In response to the outbreak of the A(H1N1) influenza, Mauritius has intensified surveillance, especially at the airport and the harbour where incoming passengers are screened and emergency teams are in attendance.

A health declaration form has to be filled by all incoming passengers and the commanding officer of aircrafts will inform customs of any suspected cases before landing.

The Ministry of Health and Quality of Life has a stock of 1.6 million doses of Tamiflu as well as 300,000 masks for eventual emergencies.
Travel

Visa free access to the Schengen areas from July

Citizens of Mauritius will be authorized as from 1 July 2009, to enter and stay without a visa in the mainland territories in the Schengen area of the European Union. The stay should be for a maximum period of three months during a period of six months following the date of first entry.

An agreement in this respect will be signed on 28 May by the minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade and the representative of the European Commission.

The United Kingdom and Ireland will not be covered by the short-stay visa waiver agreement.

The Schengen area is made up of the following countries:

- Austria
- Belgium
- Bulgaria
- Cyprus
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Estonia
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Greece
- Hungary
- Italy
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Luxembourg
- Malta
- The Netherlands
- Poland
- Portugal
- Romania
- Slovakia
- Slovenia
- Spain
- Sweden

Internet and e-services

.mu administration handed over to Mauritius

The administration of the country code Top Level Domain of Mauritius (.mu ccTLD) has been handed to Mauritius after the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding, on April 22, between the Minister of Information and Communication Technology, Mr. Asraf Dulull, and the Manager of Internet Direct Ltd, M. Yan Kwok, who had been the trustee of the .mu TLD since 1995.

Country code top level domains (ccTLDs) are usually two letter domains assigned or used by a country, territory, or other geographic location to service the local community. The acquisition of the ccTLD .mu is expected to enhance government e-strategy and give a boost to the ICT sector.

Following the handing-over of the .mu to government, the latter will set up a new .mu administration framework based on a local multi-stakeholder representation, which will comprise Government, private sector, academia and NGOs, in line with ccTLD international best practices and as set out in the Pailles Declaration.

The Declaration made by the Forum for African Policy Makers and Regulators on Internet Governance held in Mauritius in March 2009, stated that each country should manage and host its ccTLD based on the multi-stakeholder approach that would best serve the interest of local and global Internet users. The Forum also highlighted the benefits of local administration of ccTLD including giving the country an identity in cyberspace, boosting the development of the country’s e-services through its ccTLD unique brand as well as safeguarding the interests of users with local legislation governing the registration, renewal and suspension of domain names and the resolution of disputes.

Consequently, Mauritius has opted for the shared registry model for the administration of .mu. This means that policy, technical and commercial exploitation will be handled separately for transparency and better accountability. The policy environment will be dealt with by the local independent multi-stakeholder structure while a pool of registrars will be responsible for the commercial side. Regarding technical aspect, the current registry operator will remain at the helm of operations because of its professional expertise and experience in the field of ccTLD management and to preserve the stability of .mu.
Upgrading the Health Standards

Towards the Implementation of MS ISO 9001:2008 in the Health Sector

The Ministry of Health and Quality of Life is embarking on a very ambitious project of implementing the MS ISO 9001:2008 system in all its services. This project is seen as a means for continuous improvement and is expected to contribute to the development and improvement of a Quality Management System for the health sector.

The road map consists of the setting up of a Coordination Committee at the level of each hospital by May 2009 to monitor progress on a monthly basis on the implementation of the project in all health services. A Quality Manager from each hospital will be responsible for the setting up of working teams from each department. By July 2009, training sessions in ISO and internal auditing will be given to Quality Managers and working teams. A Quality Manual will be finalized by November 2009 and an assessment exercise will take place by a Certification Audit in February 2010.

The Ministry of Health and Quality of Life is committed to provide a quality service with continual improvement to the customer. Its mission is to enhance the health status of the population, improve quality of health care delivery to increase patients' satisfaction and ensure health services are consolidated and remain accessible to every citizen, hence the implementation of MS ISO 9001:2008. It is considered that the new standards will also lead to cost reduction, enhance job satisfaction and develop medical tourism.

It is to be recalled that the Cardiac Centre at Pamplemousses has been ISO certified since 2005 and the Moka Eye Hospital since October 2002. The Blood Transfusion Service at Candos is in the process of being accredited with the quality system of ISO standards.

In the context of the implementation of MS ISO 9001:2008 in the health sector, a workshop was organized on 27 April 2009 at Pailles to sensitize stakeholders.

Environment Protection

USD 900 000 for Sustainable Management of Persistent Organic Pollutants Project

A work plan on the management and coordination of activities and priority interventions on the situational analysis of the Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) issue in Mauritius has been revised and agreed upon by stakeholders at a workshop on POPs on 22 and 23 April 2009 in Balaclava. The project is to be funded by UNDP to the tune of US$ 900, 000.

The work plan has been prepared this year on the basis of the National Implementation Plan (NIP) on POPs which was developed in 2005 with the assistance of the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Ministry of Environment and National Development Unit.

Under the GEF, the UNDP has earmarked a total of USD 900 000 to fund the project which will address the first two priorities outlined in the NIP. They are the disposal of obsolete POP chemicals and decontamination of POPs–infested sites and the introduction of alternative and integrated vector control strategies for malaria.

The Ministry of Environment and NDU and the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life will work in collaboration for a period of four years to implement the first two measures of the NIP. Furthermore, a team of consultants, both national and international, will be recruited by June 2009, to work on the project. Other measures include medical waste management and research into dioxins and furans from bagasse burning.
A five-day Marine Navigation Course for 50 Silver and Gold Award participants was organised by the Ministry of Youth and Sports in collaboration with the National Coast Guard from 20 to 25 April 2009 under the National Youth Achievement Award (NYAA) Programme. The Course was held at the Marine Training Establishment, National Coast Guard, La Cambuse.

The aim was to develop a sense of discipline among the young participants as well as build up skills in navigation. They were hence introduced to basic navigation skills, compass reading, boat handling and first aid training, amongst others. Moreover, participants also benefited from rescue drills and safety at sea exercises.

Another group of 75 young people followed a Police Service Course from 13 to 17 April 2009 at the Police Training School in Beau Bassin, organised in collaboration with the Police Department.

Ethics, values, norms police-public partnership programmes, protection of the environment, juvenile delinquency, victim support, human rights, delinquency, drugs and alcohol were on the agenda.

The course was meant to develop a culture of discipline among the youth, to encourage them to respect the law and abide by their civic obligations. Emphasis was laid on the need to respect norms set within the society, on youth deviancy and on proactive crime prevention. Participants were given an insight of the duties and responsibilities that devolve upon members of the Mauritian Police Force. In addition to the academic aspect of the Course, participants also benefited from physical training and activities such as drills and workouts.

The above courses have been organized in the context of the National Youth Achievement Award programme for the past four years. A new course on Personal Safety and Security will shortly be included in the programme.

The National Youth Achievement Award is a challenging programme which is offered by the Ministry of Youth and Sports to young Mauritians aged between 14 to 25 years for 43 years now. It is internationally known as the International Award Programme for Young People and exists in more than 126 countries around the world. Around 5 000 young people in Mauritius and Rodrigues, out of whom about 3 300 girls, are currently enrolled at the three different levels of the programme, that is, bronze, silver and gold.

In Brief

- A CCTV street surveillance system was inaugurated at Flic en Flac on 24 April. It comprises a network of 83 cameras located in 72 monitoring points across the village including the public beach. The device is expected to detect and prevent criminal activities especially against tourists and it will also serve to monitor traffic movement. By next year around 270 surveillance cameras will be installed in Port Louis and 70 in Grand Baie.

- An agreement providing for enhanced exchange and mutual cooperation in the trade and economic fields between women entrepreneurs of Mauritius and China was signed on 16 April during the visit of the Minister of Women’s Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare, Mrs Indranee Seebun, to China.

The National Women’s Council of Mauritius and the All China Women Federation (ACWF) will be the agencies responsible for the implementation of the cooperation programme.

The ACWF is the biggest non-governmental organization in China and has a membership of around 70 000. In October 2006, the ACWF donated equipment worth Rs 1 million for training programmes run by the National Women Development Centre in Phoenix.
March 2008 Floods
Fact-finding Committee recommends creation of Disaster Management Centre

The committee was set up on 30 March 2008 and chaired by Justice S.B. Domah with Mr. R. Vaghjee and Mr. J. Rosalie as assessors. It was also mandated to look into weather conditions and meteorological forecasts in connection with floods, the adequacy of the warning and other public sensitization systems, as well as preventive and relief measures taken in such conditions by authorities and stakeholders, and make recommendations. The report was submitted on 23 March 2009.

According to the findings of the committee, the floods caused by adverse weather a few days before and on 26 March 2008 were the result of peak surges in different places. The committee states that the situation early on the morning of 26 March was unclear so that it did not enable the issue of a torrential rain warning. It also concluded that the secondary flooding having occurred in various parts of Mauritius resulted from the absence of proper drainage systems owing to residential developments and built-up areas.

The committee attributes this state of matters to the attitude of authorities, citizens and developers, who, it says, limit development to buildings without proper planning, regardless of consequences on human security and the environment.

The committee makes a series of recommendations, among which the need for setting up a permanent disaster management cell as it considers that natural disaster management now urgently calls for institutionalization, for more effectiveness and efficiency in protecting and saving life and property.

National Disaster Management Centre

Hence, the committee recommends the setting up of a national Disaster Management Centre (DMC) that would operate under the aegis of the office of the Prime Minister, after the appropriate legislation is passed by the National Assembly.

The DMC, as an apex centre, would undertake advance risk management for cyclones and other natural disasters, trigger the appropriate alert system, engage the relevant logistics and assist in relief and rehabilitative operations. The action of the DMC would be characterized by promptness,
fluidity, celerity and effectiveness. This body would complement the mandate of the Cyclone and Natural Disasters Committee which is the central policy organ for cyclones and other disasters.

In short, the DMC would assume responsibilities for all the components of disaster management including gathering, compiling and processing information and data, conducting research, running public sensitization programmes, deciding the timely issue of warnings, establishing a communication network among all stakeholders and taking appropriate action to safeguard life and property.

**Integrated Flood Management Strategy**

The committee also recommends the adoption of an Integrated Flood Management Strategy. The strategy for flood control would lie in a wider context of watershed management that would be compatible with the *Maurice Ile Durable* concept. The committee underscores the urgent need for Mauritius to reconsider its overall strategy of addressing the problem of floods at the current stage of its development, especially with regard to its policy of sustainable development.

Hence, the Integrated Flood Management Strategy would integrate land resource management with water resource management so as maximize benefits from both and minimize loss of life and property. In this context, the government would be expected to carry out a study, with international expertise if necessary, of absolutely all catchment areas comprising rivers, rivulets, canals and drains with a view to devising a flood management strategy in line with the new international concept of land and water resource management and with the *Maurice Ile Durable* policy.

**Other Recommendations**

The other recommendations consist of complementary measures that would create a comprehensive disaster management system and ensure its efficient operation.

Among these:

- a national network for drains, which could contribute to judicious use of drainage water for the benefit of the flora and fauna.
- the creation of a flood risk map, to serve for sensitization, and in times of disaster and for land management.
- an information campaign that would help the public grasp the implications of climate change and consequently adopt an appropriate approach and that would also help inculcating a civic culture.
- a sustainable urban and rural development plan that would help to minimize the impact of climate change and extreme weather events and bring about the adoption of a lifestyle that takes into account the new realities.

The fact-finding committee also recommends legislative measures in favour of enhanced public interest and public safety, training in disaster response, a dedicated and user friendly website for meteorological services, a focal role for the Meteorological Services for weather events, a review of the powers of the Morcellement Board and a revisited scheme for closing schools in inclement weather as well as separate protocols for each weather event, further customized for each region and each school taking into account the risks and threats for each specific school and region.