Budget 2018-2019 focusing on widening circles of opportunities, encouraging consumption of local products, rejuvenating the agricultural sector and bringing reform to the financial and banking services sector in line with the international tax landscape, amongst others, was presented at the National Assembly by the Prime Minister, Minister of Home Affairs, External Communications and National Development Unit and Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Mr Pravind Kumar Jugnauth on 14 June 2018.
Budget 2018-2019 highlights digitisation and innovation as one of the main pathways to pursue the country’s transformative journey to attain the status of an Inclusive High-Income country. It sets out measures aiming to create new opportunities for private investment and job creation by accelerating the country’s move to an age of digitisation through Artificial Intelligence (AI), blockchain technologies and Fintech.

The Budget announces the setting up of a Mauritius Artificial Intelligence Council, comprising members from the public and private sectors, as well as international experts in this new field to strengthen the foundations and ecosystem for AI to develop. Moreover, a Steering Committee under the Prime Minister’s Office will be set up. It will comprise representatives of relevant Ministries to ensure greater coherence in the digitisation of public-sector services and the monitoring of its implementation in a timely manner.

The Budget also indicates that the Central Electricity Board will offer a special rate of electricity to accredited data centre operators having at least a Tier 3 infrastructure to support the development of data hosting which is a key component in the digital eco-system.

As regards capacity building in the digital sector, Government will set up a new scholarship scheme for 50 students annually who wish to specialise in digital technologies, including AI and Blockchain. The Budget also intends to provide the necessary support to the University of Mauritius to double its intake of students in Computer Science and Software Engineering to 240 and for the training of 2 000 more students in primary schools and 2 500 students in secondary schools in coding.

The Financial Services Commission will also create new licensable activities, namely Custodian of Digital Assets and Digital Asset Marketplace, which will provide a regulated environment for the safe custody of digital assets by investors and enable digital assets exchange. The Regulator will also put in place guidelines on investment in crypto currency as a digital asset and will ensure that applicants for Fintech activities have appropriate cyber-security and cyber-resilience policies and capacities.

Budget 2018-2019: Advancing a more inclusive and equitable quality education

In line with the ongoing educational reform, the Budget provides for major educational changes and transformations and for bringing significant improvement in the education infrastructure. The aim is to create a more inclusive and equitable quality education for the population. To this end, a sum of Rs 17.2 billion has been earmarked for the implementation of key measures at the secondary, Technical and Vocational Education Training and tertiary education levels. These include:

- Setting up of the Special Education Needs (SEN) Authority for SEN students who require specifically designed learning environment to achieve inclusion of all learners irrespective of their disabilities;
- Fourfold increase in the annual per capita grant for teaching aids, utilities, furniture and equipment for SEN students from Rs 1 300 to Rs 5 200. Primary, secondary and tertiary students will now benefit from taxi fares when attending schools;
- Increase in income tax deduction in respect of a dependent child who is pursuing tertiary studies from Rs 135 000 to Rs 200 000 if abroad, and from Rs 135 000 to a maximum amount of Rs 175 000 if studying locally;
- Recruitment of 114 Secondary School Educators;
- Construction of two pre-primary units at Grand Baie and at Montagne Ory;
- Provision of hot meals at Pointe aux Piments and Bois des Amourettes Government Schools on a pilot basis;
- Extension of the Tablette project to Grade Three students;
- Reconstruction of seven Government schools;
- Construction of gym in six State secondary schools;
- Construction of new Science Blocks at three secondary schools; and
- Setting up of Specialist rooms for Food and Textile Studies and Design and Technology in all regional State Secondary Schools.
Budget 2018-2019: Focus on sustainable environment

Budget 2018-2019 underlines the need to mobilise resources to address environmental issues that the country is facing. In this respect, an amount of Rs 2 billion will be transferred to the National Environment Fund, created under an Act of Parliament in 2002.

The Fund will be revamped to further mobilise funding from international sources such as the Green Climate Fund and the Global Environment Facility. Some Rs 450 million have also been mobilised from the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre and the Adaptation Fund Board of the United Nations.

The Fund will be used to:

- Construct drain infrastructure in more than 25 flood prone regions across the country;
- Equip the 12 Local Authorities to undertake continuous maintenance and cleaning of drains, rivers and canals;
- Acquire a high resolution and aerial 3D imagery Digital Elevation Model to update our flood map and prepare a full-fledged Land Drainage Master Plan;
- Rehabilitate, protect and manage beaches, lagoons and coral reefs;
- Carry out the Clean Up Mauritius and Embellishment Campaign – “Moris Nou Zoli Pei”;
- Expand Solid Waste Management facilities and develop a comprehensive Waste Recycling Framework;
- Undertake Landslide Management initiatives;
- Conduct of Disaster Risk Reduction Operations

Furthermore, to better protect lives and properties and support the victims of floods and other calamities, Budget 2018-2019 is making provision for the acquisition of three additional automatic rainfall monitoring stations over the next three years to get real time data on flash floods in vulnerable regions.

Other measures include: the recruitment of 114 additional firefighters who will be trained in the Swift Water and Rope Rescue Programme; the recruitment of another 100 firefighters and 30 Fire Station Officers to increase inspection and enforcement in buildings; the recruitment of 100 Officers in the inspectorate cadre of the Local Authorities for stricter control of planning conditions; and the operation of the Doppler Weather Radar by October this year.

Sustainable development

The Budget also indicates a new measure aiming to eliminate waste through recycling. This involves promoting the protection of the environment and recycling activities to reduce waste. With a view to promoting local recycling of used PET bottles, the financial incentive given to local manufacturers will be increased from Rs 5 to Rs 15 per kilo of used PET bottles.

In order to better control pollution caused by vehicles, Budget 2018-2019 announces new measures including the importation of new autocycles and motorcycles being restricted to those complying with Euro standards; ban of those fitted with 2-stroke engines and emitting high level of pollutants; establishing an appropriate legislative framework to regulate the disposal of vehicles in specialised Scrap Yard at the end of their economic life; ban on vehicles declared total loss to be used again on the roads and mandatory scrapping of these vehicles.

As regards the granting of Morcellement Permit, it will be reviewed with a provision for a Drain Impact Assessment to be undertaken as part of the EIA report. The legal framework will be amended to allow for pulling down of illegal constructions, especially those affecting the drainage system. An audit of rivers and water courses will also be carried out to assess their carrying capacity with a view to taking remedial action. Climate resiliency will be integrated in all infrastructure projects of the public sector including new Social Housing projects.

The Budget also focused on the issue of proliferation of stray dogs that has an impact on the environment. In this context, Government is earmarking two plots of land to be provided to NGOs to develop shelters for the stray animals.
Budget 2018-2019: Major projects to enhance health care services

Budget 2018-2019 enunciates Government’s endeavour to lift up the quality of life of the population by investing massively in the health sector. In this regard, a budget of Rs 12.2 billion has been earmarked to undertake major projects.

Projects in the pipeline include the construction of a National Health Care Waste facility, a New Sewerage Treatment Plant at Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital, a New Neurosurgery Unit at Dr A. G. Jeetoo Hospital, a new Area Health Centre at Chemin Grenier, and several Community Health Centres across the island.

In a bid to enhance health care facilities, provision is being made for the upgrading of existing primary health care infrastructures and construction of new ones so as to enhance the health care system and make of Mauritius a medical centre of excellence. They include: improving neonatal services in hospitals; specialised services to address chronic conditions related to non-communicable diseases; construction of new Teaching Hospital in Flacq; developing a medical hub at Côte d’Or City which comprises a modern Eye Hospital, a warehouse for medical products, a New National Health Laboratory Services Centre and the AYUSH Hospital for ayurvedic treatment; setting up of a New Cancer Centre; and acquisition of a fully-fledged mobile caravan to promote early detection of breast and cervical cancer.

Budget 2018-2019 also makes provision of Rs 100 million for e-Health and the recruitment of 10 Specialists, 10 Community Physicians, 7 Clinical Psychologists, 50 Trainee Nurses and 30 Trainee Midwives.

Moreover, the Nursing Council Act will thus be amended so as to allow private Health Care institutions to recruit in addition to General Nurse, Midwife and Mental Health Nurse, other trained qualified nurses in other fields to better respond to the emerging needs of the profession.

Budget 2018-2019: Providing decent dwelling to the most vulnerable

Budget 2018-2019 underpins the objective of Government to ensure that the quality of life of the most vulnerable is enhanced by allowing them to live in dignity in a decent dwelling. In this context, a vast programme of construction of decent houses and apartments for low income families will be undertaken with the aim to create an inclusive and equitable society by giving them access to safe and affordable housing options.

Some 6,800 new social housing units will be constructed over the next two years with a project value of Rs 12.7 billion. These social housing units will be in Ground-Plus-Three buildings and will be constructed on 19 sites across the country, equipped with crèches, commercial and recreational facilities.

Moreover, the Budget earmarks a sum of Rs 1.3 billion for the completion of 3,041 housing units and some Rs 176 million for the rehabilitation of 41 NHDC housing estates which are more than 20 years old to enhance the living conditions of some 6,200 families.

Budget 2018-2019 underlines the elaboration of a measure aiming to support families in their efforts to invest in a house, which consists of an increase of the maximum grant for the casting of roof slab for families earning up to Rs 10,000 monthly, from Rs 75,000 to Rs 100,000. For families earning between Rs 10,001 – Rs 15,000, the maximum grant is being increased from Rs 40,000 to Rs 70,000; and families earning between Rs 15,001 and Rs 20,000, will benefit from a maximum grant of Rs 50,000.

As regards residential and business loan applications, the Bank of Mauritius has agreed to remove all restrictions on commercial banks with regard to limits applicable on loans, be it for residential or business purposes. With this measure, consumers and businesses will be able to fully benefit from the loan facilities offered by commercial banks without necessarily having to finance part of the property upfront.
Budget 2018-2019 seeks to foster a new wave of import substitution industry and revive export-led production, a key strategy to not only boost private investment and generate jobs but also to reduce our trade and current account deficits.

Emphasis is being laid on the promotion of the production of food crops since the country is ushering in a new era of import substitution. Key measures in this regard include:

- a Sheltered Farming Scheme supporting the setting up 100 farms over the next two years;
- a Mini Sheltered Farming Scheme serving to promote micro gardens, vertical agriculture and roof top gardening, under which, a grant of up to Rs 10,000 will be given to eligible families.
- sheltered farms will be equipped with rain harvesting systems and photovoltaic technology to move towards a sustainable development model;
- Provision of funds for the sensitisation and training of households in aquaponics for the production of water adaptive vegetables in freshwater ponds and basins;
- the Albion Fisheries Research Centre will provide fish fingerlings freely for the aquaponics projects;
- a new Scheme promoting a mix of agricultural and electricity production to give small planters and cooperatives the opportunity to improve their income; and
- a land data bank to map out abandoned agricultural lands throughout the island to bring them back under cultivation.

Furthermore, several measures will be implemented to give a boost to the Food Security Programme. A sum of Rs 30 million will be provided towards a new Crop Insurance Scheme for planters to be operated by the Small Farmers Welfare Fund. Subsidy for the production of onion and potato seeds will be increased.

A National Animal Identification System to electronically identify each animal with a unique number to better protecting livestock from outbreak of diseases will be set up. A new system for the collection, slaughter and sale of pigs by the Mauritius Meat Authority to provide an outlet for the sale of fattened pigs at a reasonable price and ensure timely payment to the breeders and offering a solution to a heavy financial burden that some pig breeders have been carrying for too long will also be implemented.

As regards the tea sector, a monthly income support of 50 cents per kilo of tea leaves harvested by small planters during the three months winter period, that is July to September, will be given to small tea growers.

The Budget also announces Government’s intent to set up a Ministerial Committee to assess the situation as regards to the cane industry that has been buffeted by a sharp decrease in the world sugar price, and to subsequently come up with an appropriate action plan for the cane industry to meet its challenges. In this context, in order to support planters, in particular small planters, the Budget makes provision for the Mauritius Cane Industry Authority to meet the 17 shortfall arising from the suspension of CESS payments for Crop 2018 and for an increase in customs duty on import of sugar from 15 % to 80 %.
Budget 2018-2019 provides for major infrastructural projects

Budget 2018-2019 earmarks a sum of Rs 37 billion for the development of transport infrastructure over the next three years in line to Government’s venture to modernising land transport. The major infrastructural projects include the implementation of the Metro Express project.

Furthermore, Rs 12 billion has been provided for the construction and upgrading of roads under the Road Decongestion Programme. They include:
- Jumbo-Phoenix roundabouts;
- A1M1 bridge linking Coromandel to Sorèze;
- fly-over at Decaen Street, Port Louis;
- third lane on the M2 between Jin Fei roundabout and Port Louis;
- Cap Malheureux bypass;
- motorway Terre Rouge-Verdun will be made fully operational by December 2019;
- fly-over across Motorway M1 at Hillcrest Avenue in Quatre Bornes;
- upgrading of Radier St Martin at Bel Ombre;
- upgrading of Ebène Flyover; and
- construction of the La Vige - La Brasserie Link.

Some Rs 3 billion will be invested in three major projects to expand the port facilities and improve its productivity, in line with the vision of transforming the port into a regional hub. These include: the construction of breakwaters, a fishing port at Fort William and the Cruise Terminal Building in addition to the recruitment and training of 150 more staff at the Cargo Handling Corporation Ltd to be able to operate on a 24/7 basis.

As regards air transport, the Budget indicates that the Airport of Mauritius Limited will initiate procedures for the extension of the new passenger terminal. The aim is to ultimately increase passenger handling capacity to 8 million annually. The old passenger terminal which is being refurbished will be completed in December this year and will cater for an additional 500 000 passengers annually.

Budget 2018-2019: Promoting a sports culture and a healthy nation

Budget 2018/2019 lays emphasis on the promotion of sports culture with the vision of developing healthier citizens, and a stronger nation. It provides for the first National Sports and Physical Activity Policy for Mauritius for which Rs 38 million is earmarked to formulate sports and physical activity programmes to motivate and encourage regular participation of children, youth, adults and senior citizens. The policy seeks to, amongst others, promote activities to provide physical, mental, emotional and social experiences for all ages; improve the standards of coaches and tutors; and increase accessibility, and implement a sports infrastructure maintenance policy.

Moreover, Budget 2018/2019 underlines Government’s aim to nurture promising athletes to attain excellence through a carefully development plan. Major projects to offer the necessary infrastructure and equipment to athletes will be undertaken. These include: the construction of a Swimming Pool in Rivière des Anguilles and at Camp Garreau; Multi-sports Complex in Plaine Magnien and Case Noyale; Malherbes Multipurpose Gymnasium; Plein Bois Football Ground; a Gymnasium at Médine and a Sports Complex at Cottage. In addition, an amount of Rs 375 million will be provided for the upgrading of 17 sporting facilities, including two in Rodrigues to enable citizens practise sports activities in their neighbourhood.

The Budget also makes provision to facilitate employability of high level sportsmen and sportswomen and giving them due recognition for their contributions. It also announces the introduction of the State Recognition Allowance Scheme for Retired Athletes, aiming to give due recognition to athletes who have won medals at African and international games and championships.

As for the ‘Jeux des Iles de l’Ocean Indien’ 2019, Rs 195 million has been allocated for the organisation of the games at the Côte d’Or Sports Complex and an additional Rs 75 million to support athletes training.
Budget 2018-2019: Enhancing the employability of youth

Budget 2018/2019 elaborates major policies to enhance the employability of the youth. It underlines key measures to develop a comprehensive approach to tackle youth unemployment. These include:

• Provision of Rs 1 billion to target some 14,000 unemployed;
• Technical training for some 3,000 youths at the National Skills Development Programme (NSDP);
• Launching of the Youth Service Programme for an initial batch of 1,000 young adults aged 17 to 25 to develop soft skills such as team building, discipline, communication and work ethics to improve their employability;
• Award of a 'Certificat de Compétence' to successful trainees under the NSDP; and
• Training for some 3,000 unemployed in the National Apprenticeship Programme run by the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development.

Moreover, the budget announces the introduction of the SME Employment Scheme, targeting some 1,000 graduates, in view of introducing them to the SME sector while boosting the sector and developing their entrepreneurial spirit.

In addition, the Youth Employment Programme will now cater for post HSC unemployed and put some 3,500 youngsters in job placements.

Another major initiative is the Work@Home Scheme that will be introduced to raise productivity and empower more women to join the labour force. This initiative seeks to promote work at home, and is expected to provide some 3,500 new job opportunities. Government will allow for a double deduction from tax, of the wage and salary costs of employees under the Work@Home for the first two years.

Additionally, employers will be granted an annual tax credit of five percent for three years on investment in the required IT system.

Laying of foundation stone of Solar Photovoltaic Farm in Henrietta

The laying of the foundation stone ceremony of a Solar Photovoltaic (PV) farm project in Henrietta to the tune of some Rs 75 million marks another major stride in the country’s vision to reduce its dependence on the use of fossil fuel for energy production and a more modern, sustainable and dynamic energy sector.

The Solar PV Farm is located close to the Tamandir Falls Dam and covers a surface area of 20,000 square metres. The project, which is being led by the Central Electricity Board, comprises the design, supply, installation, testing and commissioning of a 2 MWp grid-tie ground-mounted solar PV farm with all necessary accessories supporting the structures and interconnection facilities. The equipment to be installed consists of 5,900 solar photovoltaic panels, inverters, ground-mounting structures, switchgears and transformers.

The construction of the solar farm started in April 2018 and is expected to be operational by the end of November 2018. It will generate approximately 3GWh of renewable energy annually, thus cutting down the equivalent emission of around 3,000 tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

The Henrietta Solar PV Farm will also accelerate the integration of renewable energy into the generation mix and as a result help Government to achieve the target of 35% renewable energy in the energy mix by 2025, and by 2019 the total number of Solar PV Farms in Mauritius will reach 11.
A Validation Workshop on Digital Mauritius 2030 Strategy and Digital Government Transformation Strategy 2018-2022 was held at the Westin Turtle Bay Resort and Spa in Balaclava on 07 June 2018.

The Validation Workshop comprised plenary sessions as well as presentation on the Digital Government Transformation Strategy 2018. A Video Clip on Service Mobile Apps “Nou La Pou Ou” was also launched on the occasion. “Nou La Pou Ou” englobes Smart Police, Smart Traffic and Consumer Rights Apps.

The strategic plan on Digital Mauritius 2030 covers a number of measures and Government will have the responsibility for follow-up and review, at the national, regional and global levels, in relation to the progress made in implementing sustainable ICT policies that promote the industry’s growth and multiplies the resulting benefits for its citizens.

It also formulates short, medium and long term recommendations on five specific themes, namely: ICT Infrastructure including Broadcasting; E-Government and Business Facilitation; Talent Management; Cyber Security and Cybercrime; and Innovation and Emerging Technologies.

As regards the Digital Government Transformation Strategy 2018-2022, it has been formulated to provide directions for a Digital Government aligned with Vision 2030, the Public Sector Business Transformation Strategy and Digital Mauritius 2030. It sets the course for accelerated public sector digitalisation efforts to enhance operational effectiveness and efficiency and provide better service to citizens, businesses and Government institutions.

As at date, 100 e-services have been launched with innovative and modern technologies in a bid to easing the everyday life of citizens. The Smart Traffic App has been launched to help the Mauritius Police Force to tackle road traffic congestions. As for the Emergency Alert System App, it will act as an important tool for the National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Centre. Seven additional Apps are being designed and a Domestic Violence and Child Abuse App will be launched shortly.

Mauritius to accede to WHO Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products

Mauritius will accede to the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products to the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

The objective of the Protocol is to eliminate all forms of illicit trade in tobacco products.

The Protocol was developed in response to the growing illicit trade in tobacco products which bypasses legal control procedures and contributes to the spread of the tobacco epidemic by making tobacco products cheaper and easily available. Illicit trade in tobacco products also causes substantial losses in Government revenues and contributes to funding of transnational criminal activities.
Citizens to benefit from launch of four Mobile applications

Four Mobile Applications, namely the Search Gov, Emergency Alert, School Companion, and the Family Welfare were launched in Ebène on 25 June 2018 with the objective of transforming the country into a more connected and modern society as well as enhancing the quality of life of the citizens.

The four applications add to the other three mobile applications, namely Smart Traffic, Smart Police, and Consumer Rights launched in March 2018, in line with the 2017-2018 budgetary measure of developing Mobile Applications to provide information on public service as part of Government’s strategy to move towards a fully-fledged digital society.

Features of the Mobile Applications

Search Gov is an intuitive and user friendly application which provides simple ways to search for information including available government e-services, citizen related documents, government agency contact information, latest news and government policies and cabinet decisions. It offers a list of applications implemented on the Government App Store.

Emergency alert acts as a channel of communication between the National Emergency Operations Command and the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Centre (NDRRMC) as well as members of the general public and provide warning/alert notifications on disasters. The news functionalities in the application will allow users to know more about the activities of the NDRRMC.

School companion provides parents/students with up-to-date information on school results, attendance report, education progress, school activities and events. It enables notifications per class as well as per school so that the parents are notified of any urgency. Parents can also view News and Events pertaining to the school of their children.

Family welfare allows citizens to report cases related to child or domestic abuse. The users can access emergency contacts to seek help in emergencies. The application also enables quick and effective interaction with the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare.

The mobile applications can be downloaded on Google Play, Apple Store and on mauritiusapps.govmu.org.

World Hydrography Day

A series of activities were organised on the occasion of the World Hydrography Day, commemorated on 21 June 2018. The theme for this year is “Bathymetry – the foundation for sustainable seas, oceans and waterways”.

An opening ceremony was held on-board Mauritius Coast Guard Ship Barracuda on 27 June 2018 and on the same occasion, the newly designed logo of the Mauritius Hydrographic Service was unveiled.

Moreover, the new chart “Approaches to Grand Port” was handed over to the Ministry of Housing and Lands by the Indian High Commissioner. An exhibition of hydrographic and cartography assets, nautical products and recent work undertaken by the Hydrography Unit of the Ministry of Housing and Lands at Port Louis Harbour and Mahebourg was also organised.
Launching of the Macadamia Project

The Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security and the Food and Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (FAREI) launched the Macadamia project on 07 June 2018 at the FAREI Research Station in Réduit. The project aims at encouraging the cultivation of macadamia as an alternative crop for diversification, boosting the agricultural sector of the country as well as contributing to the Gross Domestic Product.

Mauritian macadamia industry is expected to grow exponentially in the foreseeable future. As at date, 100 arpents of abandoned lands, resulting from planters not cultivating sugarcane anymore as the industry is not as flourishing as in the past, have already been identified to set up macadamia orchards. Moreover, Budget 2017-2018 made provision for Rs 5 million to launch research and development in the macadamia project. This amount has been earmarked as the production of macadamia nuts has the potential to bring higher revenue than the sugar cane industry.

The actual market rate of macadamia nut is Rs 800 per kilogram and is expected to generate a return of Rs 800 000 per hectare. The plants will take approximately 7 to 8 years to become productive. However, in order to generate income in the initial years, farmers have the possibility to intercrop with short cycle crops and diversify the production as part of an agroforestry strategy by growing shade tolerant speciality crops such as vanilla.

The Macadamia plant is a genus of four species of trees indigenous to Australia and constituting part of the plant family Proteaceae. They are native to north eastern New South Wales and central and south eastern Queensland. Macadamia nuts are small buttery flavoured nuts cultivated from the macadamia nut trees. The two species of macadamia which are commercially cultivated are Macadamia integrifolia and Macadamia tetraphylla. They contain a wide range of health-promoting nutrients such as carbohydrates, vitamin A, iron, protein, thiamine and folate, and are known to have antimicrobial, antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties. These plants can be grown in regions where mango, avocados and papaya amongst others grow well.