

IMPLEMENTATION OF EDUCATION REFORMS IN MAURITIUS

Setting the scene

Education, it is agreed today, has the function to reform and transform society instead of maintaining the status quo. It is thus its underlying responsibility to promote social justice specifically in schools and more generally, and through the spin-off factor, in society at large.

In this connection, the world of education and training rests on the major assumptions that political and social participation, and self-fulfilment are inherent to the kind of instruction and knowledge being transmitted. At its heart therefore lies the inculcation of the notion of democratic rights and responsibilities, respect for Human Rights, Accountability and Ethical behaviour.

At a more pragmatic and down-to-earth level, there are other issues that need to be considered, of which the following are central:

- Attending to differences in gender, race, social class, and ability, that result in political, social, economic, and educational disadvantage and inequality;
- Environmental and ecological concerns;
- School leadership and the teaching/learning process;
- The development of critical thinking and problem-solving attitudes;
- Inclusiveness in education, such that the needs of not only those with special needs but also the talented are catered for.

With around 1.2 million people living in the Republic of Mauritius with few natural resources, Mauritians know that to survive and prosper, they must make themselves relevant to the world and provide services and products which are required by the international community. Undoubtedly, the key to value-added is an internationally benchmarked quality education and training. We believe that a good education system is the key to maximize the talents and potential of our population and to give our people the means to support themselves and build a better life for themselves and their children.

It must be stated, however, that not only have all successive governments emphasised the centrality of education as a primary driver of development but also that the successive transitions in the economy have dictated the type of education to be provided to the population. In fact, if the first level of development in Mauritius in the '60s and early '70s threw into relief the need for basic education and functional literacy and numeracy for all, today, as the country surfs on the third wave of economic and technological expansion with the identification of new niche areas, the conditions for success have changed drastically.

Indeed, after analysing the difficulties being faced by our textile industries and sugar factories, everyone agrees that our country needs to rethink its development to meet the new daunting challenges. The future competitiveness of the Mauritian economy is challenged by the erosion of the trade preferences and the emergence of low-cost competitors like China and India. According to the International Monetary Fund Mauritius is one of the economies that are most vulnerable to a fall in export revenues following the phasing out of trade preference treatments. Therefore, in order to have sustainable economic growth, Mauritius will need to explore other areas of development. The suggested potential areas of opportunity like ICT, Financial services,..... require skilled human resources. Therefore, we cannot afford to waste our human resources.