

MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT -

THE MAURITIAN PERSPECTIVE

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

During this presentation, I shall address the experience and perspectives of Mauritius and elaborate on some of our policy issues with regard to circular Migration and development.

INTRODUCTION

As a background, it is to be noted that Mauritius joined the International Organization for Migration in June 2006 and is therefore a young member to the IOM family. Since then Mauritius has embarked on a few projects, one of which relates to developing labour migration.

IOM has financed a study for Mauritius on an Overseas Employment Strategy Plan for Mauritian Nationals. Some of the main actions proposed in the study are ways of enhancing:

- Job opportunities of Mauritians overseas
- Organizational capacity to handle overseas recruitment
- Employability of Mauritian workers overseas

This project resulted in a strategy designed for placing workers in foreign countries, among others.

In fact, the ongoing reform programme in Mauritius to restructure the economy will inevitably result in labour retrenchment, mainly in the textile and sugar sectors and it

is proposed to provide the workers of these sectors with appropriate skills to facilitate their temporary migration to countries where the demand for such skills is high.

The Government of Mauritius is thus encouraging circular migration of unskilled and semi skilled workers who have lost their jobs on closure of industries. In this regard, with the assistance of the IOM, Mauritius has embarked on a labour migration project with Canadian companies.

IOM identifies companies wishing to recruit low and semi skilled labour in Mauritius to work in the agro industry and food processing sector in Canada. A trilateral Agreement is then signed between Government of Mauritius, IOM and the foreign company.

The first labour migration in Mauritius involved MAPLE LEAF FOODS, the largest food processing company in Canada. MAPLE LEAF FOODS recruited a total of 72 workers who left for Canada in March 2008 on a 2 year work visa. It is to be pointed out that an open selection exercise is carried out by IOM together with Mauritian Authorities and the employer delegates its staff to carry out the final selection exercise.

In fact, MAPLE LEAF FOODS has been interested in a second labour migration project for the recruitment of 120 additional workers. Around 2,000 applications were received. The selected workers will be leaving for Canada in July 2008.

The third labour migration project to be developed is with LAKESIDE PACKERS. The company proposes to hire some 75 workers to work in its plant and based on the success of this recruitment, will consider Mauritius again for future labour needs.

In fact, the labour migration project is gathering momentum and 4 other companies from ALBERTA FOOD PROCESSING ASSOCIATION will recruit and other trades will also be included.

FRANCE

Mauritius is also discussing a bilateral agreement with France for the issue of different types of circulation visas for various economic activities for professionals and other skilled persons.

CIRCULAR MIGRATION

To some extent the result of these labour migration projects is that the Mauritian diaspora is increasing further. It is interesting to note that Mauritius is initially itself a diasporic country with settlers from China, India and Africa. Mauritius has thereafter known two important emigration phases, one in the independence period after 1968, and the second in the 1980's; whereby many Mauritians moved to France, Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, South Africa. As such, the total numbers of Mauritian who have left the country and are still abroad is not exactly known but consist of a broad mix of talented persons and professionals as well as low/semi skilled ones who have succeeded in a variety of careers.

Similarly to other countries, with a significant diaspora, the Mauritian diaspora constitutes a valuable resource.

Mauritian Government wants to encourage the Mauritian population to participate actively in its development.

The International Organisation for Migration will assist in attracting investment from the Mauritian diaspora, as well as opening new avenues for Mauritians to learn new skills abroad and work, make savings before returning home to invest in any business.

The aim of Government is to offer those Mauritian citizens who have a spirit of enterprise but a few resources, to take temporary employment abroad, to acquire skills and capital and set up their own business when they come back, thus participating in the country development potential.

The short term temporary migration strategy is as follows:

- Maximize the development potential of migrants returning home after a limited stay abroad.
- Encourage remittance flows to enhance development impacts.

- Facilitate the return of the Mauritian Diaspora.

MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

In the context of Government's policy to encourage the Mauritian Diaspora to return to Mauritius and to participate in the development of the country, IOM has financed a study on the Diaspora Mobilisation Strategy. Some of the main recommendations of the study which was submitted in May 2007 are to:-

- Encourage the Diaspora to invest in projects of the Empowerment Programme.
- Involving the Diaspora in collaborative research and development projects.
- Advise banks to provide attractive schemes offering competitive returns to the Diaspora.
- Reach out to the Diaspora through the Board of Investment which is the apex body for investment in Mauritius, and provide information on the new business environment in Mauritius.

THE EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMME

The reforming budget of 2006 aimed at higher and inclusive growth and established a five year Rs 5 billion Empowerment Programme. It has become today an important tool in efforts to reskill those who have lost jobs in declining sectors, to reintegrate those who are left behind and to prevent those on the periphery from sliding into poverty.

Under the Empowerment Programme more than 4,000 unemployed and some 500 retrenched women have been trained, technical support has been given to some 100 SMEs from various sectors and access to finance has been given to more than 480 entrepreneurs through the booster and quasi equity loan schemes.

This positive momentum of the Empowerment Programme must now be maintained so that it expands its reach to cover the broadest possible areas of socio-

economic inclusion. This evolution is also essential for the closer and more systematic monitoring of outputs and outcomes that is necessary to ensure effective delivery.

One of the sub committees of the Empowerment Programme is that of circular migration for labour migration. However, a sub-committee on Small and Medium Enterprises provides technical and financial support to existing as well as new enterprises. It aims at encouraging new entrepreneurs to engage in innovating activities and assist in developing their export potential fully.

The International Trade Centre provides counseling to SMEs on new product ideas and diversification, capacity building in new product design and new technique and development. With the assistance of a French network of experienced artisans, SMEs engaged in production of stylish furniture have been given support, and other projects touch the handicraft sector for souvenir for tourists. Four touristic villages are also under construction.

BROADENING THE CIRCLE OF OPPORTUNITIES

Government has therefore broadened the circle of opportunities by setting up an innovative and comprehensive Economic Empowerment Programme and radically improves the support framework for new entrepreneurs and SMEs.

INVESTMENT FACILITATION

On investment facilitation, we will

- i. make it easier to start a business by getting rid of trade licences and do away with a very cumbersome system with complex and long procedures;
- ii. facilitate access to existing business premises by doing away with the need for a development permit;
- iii. rationalize the 40 activities covered by development permits into three clusters: services, industrial and commercial;

- iv. work towards pre-designated development areas where the development permit would not be necessary and would be integrated into the building permit;
- v. facilitate foreign investment by establishing clear guidelines that allow starting up without government clearance;

MOBILISING DIASPORA RESOURCES

The Mauritian diaspora overseas represents a substantial economic force of people who have gained international experience, distinguished themselves in several professions and fields, gained entrepreneurial acumen and have savings that can be used as project finance. However, the Mauritian Diaspora is unorganized, at times unidentified and often ignored. Thus, there is an urgent need to identify and encourage Mauritians and their offspring with talent, skills, know-how and capital to invest in Mauritius

ACTION PLANNED

- i) Learn from other countries that have succeeded in attracting their overseas residents back to play an important role in the economic development of their countries – i.e India, Singapore, Taiwan.
- ii) A global data-bank of valuable Mauritians settled overseas – and that of their descendants who have distinguished themselves at the international level.
- iii) Set up an Advising Committee to work out a comprehensive programme of action to bring Mobilising the Mauritian Diaspora into Mauritius. To work with PMO and Ministry of Finance with regard specific package of incentives to be offered and have to treat descendants of Mauritians willing to come back to Mauritius.
- iv) Work out a special programme for descendants of Mauritians who do not hold Mauritian citizenship to enable them to take short term employment in Mauritius under the “Service to Mauritius Programme.”

- v) To create a network of Mauritians settled overseas who could be used to promote the goodwill of Mauritius internationally.
- vi) To organize workshops in selected overseas capitals/cities to reach out to the Mauritian diaspora with a view to inviting some of them back to Mauritius.
- vii) Organise, over a year, a major conference in Mauritius on the diaspora and invite leading Mauritians to attend.

MODERNISING GOVERNMENT

In its Budget Speech introducing measures for financial year 2008/09, the Minister of Finance and Economic Development has emphasized that Government's efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness must be equal to the challenging tasks of building an Attractive, Open, Inclusive, Modern and Green Country. Therefore top quality human resources, processes and institution in the public sector. Programme based Budgeting has been introduced to make more judicious use of public money.

Government is setting up a Capacity Building Programme to be jointly managed by a Government-UNDP team to efficiently support reforms and identifying international and domestic experts. A '*Service to Mauritius Programme*' has been created to attract brightest young people both Mauritians, residents and non residents and international to serve in Government. Non residents coming to serve the public sector for a maximum of three years will be exempted from work and resident permits.

Major projects have also been announced. A number of projects in line with reviewing fundamental assumption for economic development – more particularly to reduce reliance on fossil fuel.

The "*Maurice Ile Durable*" project has been provided with funds to :-

- Explored potential for local sources of renewable energy to replace imports (biofuel solid wastes)
- Protection of the environment through recycling
- Public Private Partnership for wind energy
- Land Based Oceanic industry

Mauritius has renewable sources of energy on land, in the air and in the sea and have to be fully harnessed.

As has rightly been pointed out by Krishna Kumar, IOM Consultant for the diaspora to benefit its country of origin, the elements of mutual trust, confidence and respect whereby the diaspora are engaged as strategic partners in development.

WORKSHOP ON CIRCULAR MIGRATION

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mauritius will host a Workshop on Circular Migration in September 2008. The Workshop is being organized jointly with the European Union (EU). The Workshop will focus mainly on the ways and means of developing concrete circular migration projects.

The main objectives of the workshop on Circular migration are:

- (a) First, it is a follow-up to the Global Forum on Migration and Development held in Brussels in July 2007, where a session on circular migration was co-chaired by the European Commission and the Government of Mauritius. Discussions at this workshop session proved that circular migration is a concept that deserves due attention for policy-makers around the world and may constitute a fruitful form of international cooperation for the benefit at all stakeholders.
- (b) Secondly, the workshop is intended to support the European Commission's work on circular migration with the broader framework at the Global Approach to migration. The workshop is also helpful to the Commission in implementing the new thematic programme budget line for the periods 2007 – 2013, as support to pilot projects promoting circular migration will be among the programme's priorities.

- (c) Thirdly, for the Government of Mauritius, circular migration is becoming an important component of the next stage of national economic development, reshaping Mauritian's future to meet the challenges of globalisation.