

## Policy Makers

Rationale behind a 24/7 economy In order to respond to today's increasingly competitive environment and the forces of globalisation, business activities can no longer afford to cease operations at 5pm. Instead, the economy should continue to function efficiently and smoothly round-the-clock. Globalisation requires economies to transform from the traditional industrial model of yesteryears into modern, post-industrial ones. Many countries/cities such as Singapore, New York, London and Mumbai have responded to the globalisation challenges much earlier and are already functioning on a 24/7 mode. To maintain or enhance their international competitiveness, many others are expected to emulate these pace-setters, including Mauritius. Indeed, Mauritius is now standing at crossroads. We have already lost many of our preferential trade benefits and it is becoming increasingly difficult to compete with low-cost, emerging economies in traditional sectors such as textile. In addition, the threat of global recession reaching our shores is looming. The traditional working schedule of 9am-to-4pm has become obsolete and poses a serious threat to the growth potential of the emerging sectors of the economy such as ITES-BPO, Financial services and the Seafood hub. These sectors are having difficulty recruiting staff to work during the so-called 'unsocial hours'. Paradoxically, especially in the textile and construction sectors, firms need to rely on foreign labour while Mauritius, at the same time, is presently facing a relatively high unemployment rate (7.8 percent unemployment rate according to CSO's forecast). Re-engineering of the national economy Changing economic trajectory is not an easy task, especially since a lot of people have become used to their comfort zones. Consensus has to be developed at the national level on the new paradigm. Undoubtedly re-engineering the national economy entails some pain prior to enjoying the gains. While transforming Mauritius into a 24/7 economy is a worthy goal... &hellip;..it will simply not be possible if all stakeholders do not participate actively in the consultative process currently being initiated. This campaign aims to enlist the support of all key stakeholders in facilitating the transition to a 24/7 economic model. It is recognised that the challenge is immense and that the 24/7 model will not appear overnight. Strategies need to be clearly identified and acted upon. Adequate infrastructures need to be built; security and safety measures need to be enhanced; the public transport system need to be revitalised; the relevant laws need to be made more conducive to a 24/7 economic model; HR policies must be reviewed accordingly; childcare, elderly-care and after school facilities should be available etc. As some would say, the task is almost Herculean. The Government of Mauritius is conscious that a proper planning, systematic approach and a holistic turnaround is required to drive this transition in the right direction. This sensitisation campaign is only the stepping stone and the real challenge is to be able to rally the nation behind the initiative and invite all stakeholders to participate and contribute in a constructive manner. A series of workshops and seminars will be held in the forthcoming months to identify and debate on the portfolio of strategies that need to be implemented to make the 24/7 model a reality. In addition, HRDC will be enlisting the support of the relevant authorities and stakeholders in order to ensure that the necessary actions and measures are taken. These strategies, if implemented fully, will lay the foundation for a revolution &ndash; a revolution that is not merely desirable, but necessary for our survival and prosperity. OTHER CHALLENGES Information and Communications Technologies (ICT)

Economic development is mostly influenced by new technologies, which when ushered in new eras, transform the way business and social interactions are conducted (e.g. steam, electricity, railways, telephone and digital technologies).

The latest wave, with the advent of computers, networks and mobile communication, has prompted the concept of the "knowledge-based economy" which has even more radically transformed business and social interactions. Digital technology is an enabler as it allows for constant communication, irrespective of time zones and countries. It consequently provides the ability for an economy to operate 24 hours a day.

The implementation of many flexible work practices such as working from home and telecommuting rely to a huge extent of the availability of these new technological devices and the internet. It is therefore of utmost importance that the penetration of ICT in each Mauritian household is enlarged through enhanced bandwidth and improved internet connections at affordable rates.

### Challenges for energy provision

As the 24/7 economy continues to grow, the challenge is to manage and reduce energy consumption. This includes buildings, systems, and the mix of new technologies that will be deployed over the next 20 years or so. The idea being that despite the possible rise in demand for energy due to round-the-clock operations, our energy policy-makers should ensure that this does not take place at the expense of ecological and economic sustainability. We will probably need to review our modes of energy consumption, explore new avenues for sources of energy (e.g. renewable energy) and encourage ecologically friendly behaviour (such as the sR, i.e. reduce, reuse, recycle) and so on. The "Maurice ile durable" project is a worthy cause.

### Amendments to legislations

Mauritius is already moulding its legal framework for de-regulation and making procedures more relaxed. However, to make the 24/7 model concept feasible and practicable, some laws need to be reviewed in order to protect the employee and ensure that employers operating in a 24/7 system abide by some important health and safety regulations for instance. Sick building syndrome is a common health problem in developed countries because the workplace infrastructures (air

ventilation system) and buildings may not have been designed to operate on a 24/7 basis. Other legislations impacting indirectly on the feasibility model will need to be reviewed accordingly.

#### Security, transport and essential services

There is a general perception among the public that the level of crimes has been on rise lately and that the issue of security should be addressed as a matter of priority. Individuals must feel safe to move around at night. To achieve this, a wide range of strategies have been identified including more frequent police patrols, improved street lighting, bus stops clearly lit with affixed bus timetables, CCTV in all towns and big villages, more severe actions against offenders and criminals through the introduction of harsher penalties for crime/theft. These measures will not only attract more customers, but will go a long way in making both employees and their families feel safer.

Availability of an adequate and efficient public transport system will also help attract more employees to work during non-traditional hours and is a pre-requisite to a 24/7 economy.

Enhanced childcare and elderly care services need to be provided at atypical hours as far as possible with the assistance of employers. Legislation pertaining to opening hours of service provision might also need review.

While 24/7 service is a worthy goal, it will simply not be possible if all the stakeholders do not participate actively. This is why we ask all stakeholders and particularly policy-makers to reflect over the challenges ahead and to factor in the 24/7 model within their policies in order to work for the welfare of our country.