

ACHIEVING EDUCATION FOR ALL



The experience of Mauritius

Armoogum Parsuramen

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1. INTRODUCTION

Mauritius is undoubtedly one of the more successful countries in the region to achieve primary education for all, and its example offers helpful lessons for all. Primary education is free and non discriminatory and there is no disparity between the enrollment of girls and boys. The level of attainment has been improving over the years through consistent efforts to strengthen primary schooling.

Mauritius is also one of the countries which has made a decisive breakthrough to a modern economy, its per capita income being US\$ 2 700 in 1996. This is in stark comparison to per capita incomes in the majority of Sub-Saharan Africa which are generally well below \$1000 per annum. Mauritius's successful transition is very much based on its solid foundation of primary education for all, secondary education for a large proportion of the population, and a strong tertiary educational sector. Education has remained prominent in the national priorities of successive governments, reflecting a national consensus which transcends political party loyalty. The political process of building a national consensus on the essential need to provide a good quality primary, secondary and tertiary educational foundation as a basis for all forms of national development, including economic development, constitutes the basis for Mauritius's success as a nation.

Mauritius's success in achieving universal education demonstrates that education for all is not a utopia, but a goal which can be reached. However, it requires a peaceful, stable social and political environment, a strong and sincere political will and leadership, commitment of all the partners, involvement of the community and a clear sighted and rational vision of education as an integral part of the human development process. This vision was clearly enunciated in the White Paper on Education in 1984 which stated:

Let us always remember that, in education, we are concerned with the future prosperity, and even the survival of our nation. The future lives of our children should unite rather than divide us.

It is pertinent to note that Mauritius, like many of its neighbours, underwent a painful structural adjustment programme in the 1980s without sacrificing its gains in the field of education, and indeed improving substantially in this area throughout the period of structural adjustment. Because of its clear vision of a future development based firmly on human resource development as its most precious resource and most critical strategy for development, Mauritius was able to combine the discipline of structural adjustment with educational improvement. It may be important to note that by the time structural adjustment began, Mauritius had already achieved primary education for all and secondary education for a substantial proportion of the population. However substantial improvements were necessary, and these were made during the period.

We are fortunate to have Armoogum Parsuramen, Minister of Education for Mauritius for over thirteen years (1984-1996) agree to share his invaluable experience and

analysis with us through the authorship of this monogram. His story is one of successive governments maintaining the emphasis on education, and through this consistency achieving the present stage of development.

Fay Chung,

Director
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Chapter 1

MAURITIUS: ECONOMIC, DEMOGRAPHIC AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Mauritius is a small island covering 2040 square kilometers, including the Island of Rodrigues and several smaller islands. From 1638 to 1710, it was under Dutch settlement and from 1725 to 1810, under French settlement. In 1810, the British conquered the island and Mauritius became a British colony within the British Empire. In 1968, the country gained independence and became a sovereign state with a democratically elected Government, based on the Westminster model. The Constitution of Mauritius is founded on the principle of respect for fundamental rights and freedoms. It guarantees elections every five years. In 1992, Mauritius became a Republic, with a non-elected President as Head of State.

The population of Mauritius in 1996 was slightly more than 1 million with one of the highest rates of population density. Mauritius has no indigenous population. It hosts many cultures and religions as its population derives its ancestral roots from Africa, China, Europe, and India. Since the time of the French settlement, slaves were brought from Madagascar and Western Africa. Following the abolition of slavery, indentured labourers from India were brought to the island. The population also consists of a relatively small community of Chinese. The languages in Mauritius are English, French, Hindi, Tamil, Urdu, Arabic, Mandarin, Marathi, Telugu, Bhojpuri and Creole, which is widely spoken.

Mauritius has no mineral resources. Sugar cane occupies most of its cultivable land and was its main export until the 1970's when an export processing zone was established and greater encouragement was given to the tourism industry. As from 1979, there was a marked deceleration of the economy, as sugar prices continued to decline in the world market. The effects of the decline were tempered by the benefits Mauritius derived from the EEC prices under the Sugar Protocol of the Lome Convention. The decline was accompanied by a slow down in the manufacturing sector. In the 1980's, the country faced large balance of payment deficit and a growing debt service burden, coupled with a high rate of unemployment, inflation and huge debts.

But after 1983, the economy regained momentum through a cautious and well planned economic strategy. By the year 1990, unemployment had been almost eliminated and the country had to resort to imported labour. The GDP growth rate had reached 7 % and per capita income had doubled to about 2700 US dollars.

Between 1983 and 1992, real income rose at an annual rate of 3 % and the percentage of people living below the poverty line had been reduced from 28 % to 10 %, according to a World Bank study.¹ In 1991, the UNDP Human Development Report classified Mauritius among countries *with a high level of human development and which can therefore shift their focus to social services at higher levels.*² Since 1992, efforts are being made to develop the financial sector through offshore and free port activities. The liberalization of trade and the impending withdrawal of preferential trade arrangements have increased the need for improved productivity and upgrading of skills.

The implications of economic growth on the employment structure have mainly been witnessed in the substantial increase of women in employment and the need for new skills, especially in the manufacturing sector. There has also been an enhancement of the standard of living with higher aspirations and increased demand for education.

¹ World Bank Staff Appraisal Report 1995

² UNDP Human Development Report

Chapter 2

THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN MAURITIUS

PRE -PRIMARY EDUCATION

The education system in Mauritius bears the influence of British education. Pre-primary education is provided by private schools and is fee paying. There are about 1500 pre-primary schools of different size and standard in the island and about 85% of children attend pre-primary schools. Government has been lending support to the sector through -

- grants to the Parent Teacher Associations
- soft term loans for the improvement of the schools
- equipment and basic kits
- setting up of a Pre school Trust Fund
- operating resource centres and a toy library
- teacher training and
- by making available buildings for the running of pre-primary classes

Children aged 3 to 5 are normally eligible for pre-primary education. The norms for pre-primary education have been spelt out by law enacted by the Ministry of Education.

PRIMARY EDUCATION

Primary schooling is free and was made compulsory in 1993. It normally covers six years with the opportunity for one repeat of the sixth grade. Until 1982, there was a Primary School Leaving Certificate at the end of six or seven years of primary education and a Junior scholarships examination which students took in order to benefit from scholarships and admission to limited seats in a few selected government secondary schools. In 1982, the two examinations were merged into one single examination, known as the **Certificate of Primary Examination, (CPE)** combining both the selection and the assessment functions. Over time, the selection objective has become predominant and has led to strong competition and a distortion of the aims and objectives of the primary education. Since it is the sole criteria for admission to a limited number of selected secondary schools, it has a high importance within the education system and is a controversial issue. The competitiveness of the examination has also resulted in an abuse of private tuition and neglect of co-curricular activities and nonexaminable subjects. Besides free schooling,

Government provides free textbooks, medical care and training of teachers. School meals were provided with the assistance of the World Food Programme until 1996.

There are 279 primary schools operating in Mauritius, out of which, 52 are owned by the Roman Catholic Education Authority. The primary curriculum includes English, Mathematics, French and Environmental Studies. In addition to these, seven ancestral languages are taught and are examinable but they are optional. Other components of the curriculum are Movement, Creative Education and Education in Human Values.

The main problems in the sector are the competitiveness of the CPE, the relatively high failure rate at the CPE examination, inadequate attention to non examinable subjects, persistent low performance in some schools, the rate of repetition, abuse of private tuition and dropping out of about 25 % of pupils from the primary education system.

SECONDARY EDUCATION

Secondary education is free. About 80 % of secondary school places are in private secondary schools and the remaining in state secondary schools. Enrollment in secondary schools was 42,356 for boys and 44,541 for girls in 1994. Total enrollment increased from 81,706 in 1992 to 85,522 in 1993 and to 87,177 in 1994.

The State is responsible for 22 % of total secondary school population and about 36 to 40 % of the Government recurrent education expenditure is allocated to the secondary sector.

Secondary schooling leads to the School Certificate after five years of studies, and the Higher School Certificate after two additional years of studies. The two examinations are held in collaboration with the University of Cambridge Examinations Syndicate. In recent years, the curriculum has been broadened to include more technical oriented subjects. Students have the option to choose either the technical, or the economics or the science or the arts streams. Government provides limited number of scholarships to students who obtain the best Higher School Certificate results to pursue higher studies in UK. The pass rate at SC has gradually improved from 62.9 % in 1992 to 65.9 % in 1994 and for Higher School Certificate from 53.7% in 1992 to 63.3 % in 1994.

Government provides text books to needy students of secondary schools and assistance through the Ministry of Social Security for payment of examination fees. As regards private secondary schools, their operational costs are met by Government and a loan scheme has been established to enable them to invest in infrastructural development. The main problems in the sector are the wide disparity between schools, inequalities between rural and urban schools and the insufficient number of secondary schools of good quality.

TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Technical education is provided by one polytechnic and one non engineering polytechnic set up recently. The Lycee Polytechnique of Flacq offers middle level technical training in automechanics, production, maintenance mechanics, electrotechnics, building construction, and electronics. There are two Industrial Trade Training Centres which offer short courses in plumbing, pipe fitting, masonry and concrete work.

TERTIARY EDUCATION

Tertiary education is free. The University of Mauritius offers a variety of degree, diploma and postgraduate courses, in a number of subjects, including law, management, humanities, social studies, sciences, engineering and agriculture. The University building has been extended in 1993 and its enrollment has more than doubled over the past twenty years. The University also promotes research .

The Mauritius Institute of Education is engaged in teacher training , ranging from two to three years. It has embarked into a distance education training programme which allows the Institute to cater for larger groups of students. The main thrust of the Institute is to upgrade the qualifications of the existing teaching force and to provide continuous education for teachers, including remedial education and teaching of children with special needs.

The Mahatma Gandhi Institute provides courses in fine arts, music , Asian languages and dance and undertakes research in Indian and Mauritian studies, including history and culture. Research efforts have been encouraged in recent years by the Tertiary Education Commission, an organization which coordinates tertiary education activities. The Mauritius College of the Air is responsible for distance education through the use of the media.

Education Statistics

	1981	1991	1994
No of primary schools	258	272	279
No of secondary schools	148	122	123
No of pupils in secondary schools	78332	79327	89581
Pupil teacher ratio	25	21	20
Percentage pass at CPE	51.1%	57.82%	61.2%
Percentage pass at SC	42.8%	62.7%	66.4%
Percentage pass at HSC	38.6%	60.0%	63.2%
Enrolment at MIE	298	609	2564
Enrolment at University	388	1650	2186

Budget -education	Rs 2.2m	Rs 904m	R1.8 billion
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Chapter 3

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: THE GROWTH OF POLITICAL WILL FOR EDUCATION FOR ALL IN THE COLONIAL, POST-COLONIAL AND STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PERIODS

Initial efforts to provide education in Mauritius started with the work of missionaries as was the case in many former colonies. Despite the actions of dedicated people like Rev Jean Lebrun, Pere Laval and others, education remained outside the reach of the masses for many years. In the 1940s, with the rise of the political emancipation movement, claims for education increased because people came to view education as a major avenue for social mobility and a means of avoiding oppressive working conditions. In 1941, there were 50 government primary schools and 75 grant aided schools, admitting about 40,000 children. In 1947, the new political class became more committed to literacy as a means to improving the lives of people and enabling them to take their destiny into their own hands. The Plan for Mauritius spelt out the objective of ensuring ***education for all***, on the principle that³ *a literate and intelligent population is the best guarantee of future economic wisdom*. This intensified in 1948, when a simple literacy test became a criteria for eligibility to vote. A policy of expansion of education facilities was adopted both by the Government and Education Authorities in order to satisfy the demand for education.

In 1956, the Education Act was passed providing that no child should be denied access to primary schools on grounds of race and religion. The Act gave wide powers to the Minister to ensure that education facilities were available in all regions. Government had also established a grant in aid system to support those schools run by Education authorities. One precondition for this grant was that grant aided schools should be open to all children irrespective of race and religion. The enrollment in primary schools increased from 85,446 in 1955 to 126,173 in 1960. Immediately after independence in 1968, school facilities were inadequate and often sub standard. The Government invested heavily in expanding school facilities and improving the school infrastructure. The University of Mauritius, the Mauritius Institute of Education, the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, the Mauritius College of the Air were opened during the period 1968 - 1981 and 15 new state secondary schools were built during the same period.

³ R. Ramdoyal - The development of education in Mauritius

By the year 1981, the enrollment rate in primary education had reached around 95%. However, though the policy of expansion had overlooked some of fundamental aspects of education. These were outlined in the report of the Commission of Inquiry in 1982⁴ and the White Paper for Education in 1984 -

- The education system was not relevant to the changing needs of the economy, given the practical orientation and technical skills that were required to service the EPZ sector.
- There was low internal efficiency and lack of equity in access to educational resources.
- The quality of education needed to be enhanced through improved instructional materials and teacher training.
- The competitive nature of the CPE examination and the number of children who actually pass the examination were causes of concern.
- The level of drop outs from the primary cycle was too high;
- There was no monitoring of the resources used to ensure that every rupee spent on education was effectively benefiting children.

Structural Adjustment Conditions

At the same time, in 1981 the country faced heavy recession with rising inflation, unemployment, and budget deficits. Structural adjustment plans of the IMF and the World Bank proposed a number of conditions which focussed on the reduction of expenditure on education. These were mainly -

- Expenditure on education to be contained within 4 % of the GDP and 14 % of the recurrent expenditure by 1990;
- No major capital expenditure to be envisaged for the next three years and no project entailing heavy recurrent expenditure to be undertaken;
- Sources of income to be investigated. They might be [a] participation by parents and community to certain expenses [shoes, school feeding programme, sports and other activities] [b] participation of school leavers to educational expenses as soon as they start working [c] participation of MIE students to training expenses;

⁴ We have all been children - Report of Commission of Enquiry - 1984

- Pupil teacher ratio at primary level with no recruitment from 1985 and 1988 to be 35:1 in 1987 and 40:1 in 1990;
- National Form III examination will be held as from end of 1984 and the flow of pupils from Form III to Form IV will be strictly controlled to ensure that only the best qualified proceed to further secondary education. Entry requirements to Form VI will be strictly tightened as from January 1984;
- Sub standard secondary schools to be phased out as from 1983.

The Government elected in 1982 had started implementing some of these measures. It contained educational expenditures in the 1982/ 1983 budget. It closed 21 private secondary schools on the eve of the new year without any prior consultation and dialogue with those concerned and more particularly without Any provision to compensate the staff who were seriously affected by this decision. This resulted in tragic human problems , led to strikes and general unrest in the education sector and demotivated the teaching force.

The further application of the structural adjustment conditions in the education sector would have been detrimental to education as it called for limited investment in education and would have considerably narrowed access to education at all levels while increasing drop outs . In no circumstances, was the Government prepared to move ahead with the structural adjustment conditions as far as education was concerned since it knew that investment in education was the major channel for economic and social development of the country. Government decided that it would not implement the conditions which referred to education.

However the 1984, the White Paper whilst clearly spelling out the main policy guidelines for the future of education, also emphasized the need for the education system to be cost effective. Thus whilst Mauritius refused to go along with the received wisdom of the time that budget cuts would lead to economic growth irrespective of human resource development levels, it nevertheless did judiciously incorporate the World Bank/IMF emphasis on cost effectiveness and efficiency.

Through this prudent policy of combining educational improvement with structural adjustment, the educational sector moved a step further towards education for all between the years 1985 and 1991. The main achievements as far as basic education is concerned were -

- 14 new primary schools were constructed, about 37 extended and more than 50 refurbished and improved, thus increasing access to primary education by making schools available in almost every region of the island;
- Schools found in unsuitable rented buildings were acquired and renovated ;

- Automatic promotion was abolished to enable students to repeat classes and benefit from remedial care ;
- A pastoral care scheme was established to support children with family, economic, psychological and other problems;
- Private tuition for students of Standard 1 to Standard III was banned as a measure to control abuse of private tuition and protect younger children;
- Teacher training was intensified with special training in remedial work;
- The primary curriculum was revised to be in line with the developments in the social and economic sectors;
- School libraries were strengthened and schools were provided with audio visual facilities;
- The pass rate at CPE increased from 52.9% in 1982 to 61% in 1990;
- Enrollment had reached 97 %;
- After a Workshop on low performing schools, Government introduced a project for the distribution of textbooks free of charge to all primary school children; and
- The pupil teacher ratio was improved by the recruitment of about 700 teachers;
- A grant scheme was established for Parent Teacher Associations to enable them to participate more actively in the school activities.

Secondary education was fee paying until 1976, when Government decided to make secondary education free. Despite structural adjustment problems in the 1980s, Government's investment in education was not reduced and free secondary education was maintained.

According to a World Bank evaluation, in the year 1991, the gross rate of enrollment of the 6 to 11 age group had reached 99.4%, the net enrolment rate was 97 % and there was no difference between the participation rates of boys and girls. There were increased primary and secondary education facilities, an on-going teacher training programme and expanded opportunities for technical and tertiary education.

Still under the structural adjustment programme, the Master Plan for Education was prepared in 1991 after national consultations, providing for short, medium and long term strategies for educational development up to the year 2000. This Master Plan played a critical role in further developing a national consensus on how education should move forward.

Chapter 4

THE 1991 MASTER PLAN FOR EDUCATION

Why a Master Plan for Education?

By the year 1991, there had been substantial progression as far as enrollment, performance, equity and quality were concerned. The primary enrollment rate had reached 97%, education was free at all levels, teaching and learning materials were available to all teachers and students, the curricula was being regularly updated, parents contributed actively to the development of education. But there were some problems that continued to affect the efficiency of the system and caused a certain amount of frustration and discontent among parents, students, teachers and the public as a whole. These issues persistently recurred in national debates in the media and in consultations with educational partners. They could not be addressed in isolation, independently from one another as they were invariably related to the structure of the education system. Some of the most important shortcomings were -

- a65535 a small percentage of students were still not attending school;
- b65535 about 25 % of school children dropped out of the primary school without having achieved literacy or numeracy and had no other avenue for further education; they were left to themselves;
- c65535 there were high repetition rates and absence of remedial action and support to the slow learners;
- d65535 the extreme competitiveness of the system fostered private tuition defeated the purpose of free education and distorted the primary aims of education which were to ensure the wholesome development of the child's personality;
- e65535 disparities and unevenness between rural and urban areas, between private and state schools;
- f65535 lack of relevance of the curriculum to the expanding economic and the changing social needs;
- g65535 the education system excluded a number of children who were mainly from some of the economically disadvantaged areas of the country.

Furthermore, Mauritius had a mean educational attainment of 6.9 years of schooling as compared to 9 years for Taiwan, Hong Kong and Korea; access to secondary education was still limited to about 48.5 % of the 12 to 17 age-group, as compared to 80 % in Singapore, the enrollment in higher education was only about 1%; there was need to improve the quality of teaching, to encourage the teaching of science and technology and to improve the management of the Ministry of Education.

Other reasons which motivated Government to initiate a wide ranging reform programme were -

- At the Jomtien Conference, concerns had also been expressed that education for all should not be pursued in a narrow sectoral way and that education policy should be placed within its broader social, cultural, political and economic context. W.H Draper III, Administrator of UNDP, stressed that basic education should be pursued not merely as a sectoral target, but as an integral part of a human development strategy.⁵
- A new vision of education had emerged in recent years described in a Human Resource Document of the Commonwealth Secretariat as *a vision which placed the people at the heart of development*.⁶ The Human Development Report of UNDP equally renewed emphasis on the concept of *development woven around the people, not people around development*.⁷
- The historical overview of the evolution of education in Mauritius indicates that education reform and policy have often been results of political and economic circumstances and crises that prevailed at different times of our history. They had rarely been the outcome of careful planning. Many reports and recommendations had been produced but most of them were on ad-hoc basis and did not take a comprehensive view of reforms in education. There had been no attempt to plan the long term development of education in a consistent and coherent manner. Previous studies and recommendations did not integrate the education system within the larger economic and social context.
- The fact that the system had developed in an unplanned manner, and that structural reforms had never been envisaged was one forceful plea for a plan which would provide continuity and ensure long term human development. There was consensus among many actors in the education sector, political parties, private sector organizations and opinion leaders including the media that the time had come for a comprehensive review of the education system, for the formulation of policies which would be in the interest of the nation.

⁵ Final Report - World Conference on Education for All - 1990

⁶ Commonwealth Secretariat - Foundations for the Future - 1993

⁷ UNDP- Human Development Report - 1991

- The need for a plausible education strategy was one of the prerequisites for international financing. This was clearly stated by the World Bank after the publication of the White Paper on Education in 1984 -

*the newly stated Government policy for education, as contained in the White Paper, represents the result of much careful reflection on the problem involved. It combines pedagogical, practical, financial and political elements in a way which is more responsible, complete and realistic than were many previous approaches to this policy. The days of irresponsible expansion of education are over. Nevertheless, any future Bank lending for education should be conditioned on an understanding and agreement regarding how policy is to be implemented, and how key issues within it are to be handled, over both the short and long terms.*⁸

- Another imperative for comprehensive review of the role of education was that economic progress had improved the standard of living and raised the aspirations of people. The industrialization process had generated profound transformations in the social environment, creating new types of social problems with higher rates of divorce, crime, suicide, drugs, child abuse, violence. Greater demands were being placed on education as working parents found lesser time for their children. Jacques Delors has drawn attention to this role of education -

*Education must help to engender a new humanism, one that contains an essential component and sets considerable store of knowledge of and respect for the cultures and spiritual values of different civilizations as a much needed counterweight to a globalization of the world that would be seen only in economic and technological terms.*⁹

The education provided to children had manifold objectives; it had to cater for an ethical mission, for environmental concerns, for the promotion of cultural understanding, solidarity and peace. We had to reflect on how the education system could be empowered to fulfill its expanded objectives and cope with the new situations.

- Another justification for a reform of the education was the economic factor. Mauritius had achieved remarkable economic growth. It had to maintain the momentum and to steer its way in an increasingly competitive world. This required more skill intensive activities, a more educated workforce and a competent managerial body. The eventual globalization of the world economy with the liberalization of trade called for increased productivity. There was a need to place emphasis on science and technology and to make the curriculum more responsive to economic requirements. The Government was conscious of the fact that the shortcomings of the education system would seriously impede economic development. This was emphasized at the donors' meeting on the Human Resource Development Program of Mauritius in 1990. The need for *an effective education system*

⁸ World Bank Education Sector Review - 1985

⁹ Learning the Treasure Within- Report to the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century - Jacques Delors - 1996

responding to the needs of Mauritius in the medium or long term perspective was emphasized. The World Bank representative expressed the wish that an overall strategy for education was needed and that the Bank would like to take the opportunity of exploring ways in which it can help in the longer run. A World Bank study stated *In the 21st century, the quality of a country's human resource will determine its ability to compete in international markets and assure the well being of its citizens.*¹⁰

- There was equally the political commitment given to the people. Education, as we are aware is a key element for political parties and occupies a prominent place in political manifestoes. The Government had been elected on the basis of an agenda for change, with pledges to modernize the education system and make it more equitable. It had to translate its political will into concrete facts. Education was one of the essential tools which would enable the Government to fulfill its vision of the future, of a progressive, prosperous and peaceful nation.
- Last, but probably the most decisive element was the plea of the Jomtien Conference on Education for All in 1990 which culminated in the Charter for Education for All. It gave the encouragement and the inspiration for action as it drew out the guidelines for reforms and demonstrated that international support and collaboration could be enlisted in what was termed as the grand alliance to support educational development. This is clearly stated in the statement of the Director General of Unesco -

¹⁰ Knight and Wasty - Human Resource Development - Comparative Trends in Resource Allocation in Latin America, Asia and Europe
EDI Working Paper 1992

The World Conference on Education for All is, above all, a summons for action. Our common objective is to mobilize societies as a whole for the cause of education, to reaffirm flagging commitments, to join complementary forces and demonstrate international solidarity, to co-operate and learn from each other, and before this century ends, to make the right to education a daily reality for all.¹¹

Choosing the Right Approach: Community Participation as a Keystone to Development

There were different approaches that could have been adopted for the preparation of the plan - one option was to have a plan prepared by experts and technicians; another option was to take decisions at the level of the Ministry and the government. However, we decided to avoid such approaches as previous experience in education had shown that education is a sector which involves many people; that decisions imposed from above are not always perceived positively. In fact, in a report to Unesco, Jacques Delors affirms that

The main parties contributing to the success of educational reforms are, first of all, the local community, including parents, heads and teachers; secondly the public authorities; and thirdly the international community. Many past failures have been due to insufficient involvement of one or more of these partners. Attempts to impose educational reforms from top down, or from outside have obviously failed.¹²

The Jomtien Conference had drawn attention to the need for *new and revitalized partnerships* and Article 9 of the Charter spelt out that *if the basic learning needs of all are to be met through a much broader scope of action than in the past it will be essential to mobilize existing, new financial and human resources, public, private and voluntary.*

Participatory Approach

¹¹ Final Report - World Conference of Education for All - 1990

¹² Learning the Treasure Within- Report to the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century - Jacques Delors - 1996

Past experience in Mauritius and in other countries had shown that reports and plans written by experts and technicians in distant offices, without consultations at grassroots level were sometimes not realistic or not acceptable to those directly concerned. This is illustrated by the structural adjustment programmes which have done more disservice than brought benefits to education in many countries. A World University Service study revealed that the programmes

have *exacerbated poverty and deprivation of substantial sections of the populations and are threatening the fabric of social and educational services*.¹³ In Mauritius, in 1982, structural adjustment programmes proposed drastic cuts, in educational expenditure, including freezing of post, review of free education, withholding of capital projects. They would have worked against the interest of the poor and the marginal groups. The program's proposal to close private secondary schools was implemented in 1982 and it resulted in tragic human problems. It demotivated the teaching force and created instability in the secondary education sector.

Further given the fact that we live in a vibrant, democratic society where people maintain an enthusiastic and lively interest for educational issues, I was aware that the people of Mauritius would be willing to contribute and that they should be given the opportunity to do so. I felt that our various partners in education as well as the community at large should not feel isolated in an exercise that would mould the future of their children and the country.

For all these reasons, I chose the participatory approach as I wished the plan to reflect the aspirations of the people, to rally popular support and to reflect national commitment. We were able to create a national interest for the exercise, to motivate partners to reflect on crucial educational issues and to find solutions as a team. I did not want the people to be passive recipients but I hoped that they would identify themselves with the plan.

The participatory process has certain disadvantages. Groups might come with proposals to promote their specific interests such as pay rise. Another risk in a multi-cultural context is that diverging proposals from groups which have opposing interests would lead to emotional debates, increase tension and result in deadlock. Political groups might exercise political pressure and exploit the opportunity for indiscriminate criticism.

These difficulties were avoided through dialogue, by sensitizing people about the importance of the plan. We structured the debates and discussions, so that the proposals emanating from groups and individuals would reflect a national concern rather than specific and sectoral interests. I was present at most

¹³ Education in the Developing World - Conflict and Crisis - Sarah Graham-Brown on behalf of World University Service -1991

of the consultations and discussed with the parties concerned and replied to their queries. In fact, the idea of a master plan for education was welcomed favourably and there was little opposition. The participatory process eased out any resistance and prepared the grounds for the plan to be accepted eventually.

Steps Taken to Ensure Participation

One of my first actions was to enlist the participation of the major stake holders. This was achieved through the following steps -

- The approval of Government as one of the major stakeholders was sought;
- Heads of educational organizations, who had the power of decision were involved in consultations;
- Representatives of teachers, students, parents, education authorities, NGO's, the private sector, private schools, special schools were consulted;
- The public was invited through public advertisement to make suggestions;
- The media participated by arousing debates on controversial issues;
- Question and answer sessions were held with various partners of the education sector.

Participants were chosen on the basis of their experience, their ability to take decisions, and their roles as opinion leaders in their respective sectors. They held key positions in their respective organizations. We did not exclude anyone who was willing to contribute but we ensured that all of them were sincerely committed to the preparation of the plan. I kept myself informed of all the suggestions made by various parties and took note of the criticisms and proposals made in the press almost daily. The whole consultation was characterized by transparency and frank dialogue. Participants were provided with all relevant papers and reports.

We took care to ensure that no one was missed out in the consultation process. I personally visited Rodrigues, and Agalega, islands forming part of the Mauritian territory. I discussed with the local people and ascertained their needs.

The Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare was involved in order to ensure that gender considerations were not overlooked; the Ministry of Environment in order to include the environmental concerns, the Ministry of Social Security for special schools and assistance for needy children, the Ministry of Youth and Sports for physical education and the promotion of sports. This is not an exhaustive list but it gives an indication of the range of consultations carried out.

Participation of International Bodies

5.11 At the Jomtien Conference, the international organizations had promised to increase their assistance to educational projects in developing countries. The World Bank, UNDP and UNICEF pledged to double their financial assistance to education. Bearing this in mind, I contacted UNDP, Unesco and the World Bank in the initial stages. The response was positive with UNDP assuming a coordinating role and Unesco and the World Bank providing technical inputs. The Resident Representative attended all the meetings of the Steering Committee and followed up closely the preparation steps. Other international organizations contributed extensively by sending experts for those areas where we lacked the expertise. For example Unesco experts provided guidance on the use of models in education sector analysis and implications assessment. Consultancy was provided for the formulation of proposals for technical and vocational education.

The fact that UNDP, Unesco and the World Bank associated themselves with the Mauritius endeavor from the very outset, added to our confidence and the credibility of the exercise in the eyes of the Mauritian public. It reinforced our motivation and determination.

Preparation of the Plan Structure Established

- A Steering Committee was set up under my chairmanship bringing together the main decision makers and senior administrative and technical staff of the Ministry, the representatives of the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, and the Resident Representative UNDP.
- A Working Group was set up chaired by a coordinator, to deal with the day to day matters, to follow up on preparation of papers and to report to the Steering Committee. A distinct Master Plan preparation cell was established at the Ministry with staff assigned full time to the unit.
- Sectoral sub-committees were set up to study specific aspects or sectors and to submit papers. The services of external experts were obtained through UNDP to help in preparing the proposals in those areas where expertise was lacking.

- A Drafting group was set up to edit the drafts produced by the various groups and to compile them in a comprehensive document.
- The draft proposals submitted by the sub groups were examined by the Steering Committee, and where the need was felt for re-orientation of a paper, or for redrafting, the paper was referred back to the sub group.
- At the top of this structure was the Cabinet, which gave its support and helped to create the confidence needed. Cabinet facilitated the task of the Committee by giving its approval to certain crucial policies and thus providing direction to the Committee in its work. The National Assembly was informed through statements and replies to parliamentary questions on the developments.
- The Prime Minister, as the head of government was fully committed to the cause of education and his frequent presence at functions in educational institutions was a great encouragement. His vision of education was made known through in his public statements. This is expressed in his preface to the Master Plan -

A proper educational system has a key role to play in the economic and social development of our country. Our prosperity, indeed our survival, depends on the quality of our labour force. To maintain prosperity we need to improve further on the knowledge, skills imparted to our young people. The world does not owe us a living; we must earn that living by our own efforts. And central to those efforts, must be the seriousness with which we plan the future of our educational system to achieve best results.¹⁴

Setting Targets and Goals

The fundamental principles of the Jomtien Charter on Education for All were -

“ Education is a fundamental right for all people, women and men of all ages throughout the world.”

“ Education can help ensure a safer, healthier, more prosperous and environmentally sound world, while simultaneously contributing to social, economic progress, tolerance, and international cooperation.”

¹⁴ Preface to the Master Plan for Education - 1991

Our objectives were based on these internationally accepted principles and our own local needs and aims. Jacques Hallak has written that the real challenge that political leaders face is the setting of objectives. He points out that *policy makers must, at the same time take into consideration the need for (I) correcting imbalances, (ii) reaching the target of universal literacy, (iii) reducing inequalities of access to education (iv) expanding the coverage, (v) improving the quality, and increasing the efficiency in the use of resources*¹⁵. Our educational problems had centred around the problems of inequality, competitiveness, lack of relevance and insufficient access to higher levels of education. The objectives we set for the plan were as follows -

¹⁵Investing into the Future - Jacques Hallak - UNDP

1. Every child should reach an agreed-upon standard of basic education;
2. The quality of education should be improved at all levels;
3. Differences in life time opportunities resulting from inequalities in the education system should be reduced by improving standards in low achieving schools;
4. The education system should contribute to the continued economic and social development of the country;
5. The abilities and aptitudes of each individual passing through the system should be developed to the fullest practical extent;
6. The management and structure of the education system should promote most effective use of resources.

These objectives reflected the concerns of almost all those involved in education as well as in the economic and social sectors. There was general consensus on these objectives which reconciled diverse interests with the national interest.

Planning Process

In the course of the exercise, it was found that the Government had to be consulted on politically sensitive decisions which would have far reaching implications. Thus a Green Paper on Nine Year Schooling was prepared with the collaboration of Unesco and was approved by Cabinet. It proposed a new structure which would ensure that children who fail the Certificate of Primary Education would be provided with vocational and technical education as well as basic education for three years after which they might opt to reintegrate into the normal stream or continue with the technical stream.

Other decisions for which Cabinet approval was sought before the completion of the plan included

- The review of primary examination system,
- The setting of a National Centre for Curriculum Research and Development,
- A review of the administrative structure of the Ministry and the creation of national inspectorate,
- The establishment of a Teacher's Council, and measures to improve teachers conditions of work.

The plan emerged through stages -

- [a] identification of problems
- [b] analysis of potential solutions in the context of the plan's objectives
- [c] formulation of proposals at official and technical levels
- [d] acceptance of solutions at the political level.

This is illustrated in the case of the nine year schooling project.

(i) One of the most pressing problems of the education system was inequality. There was a worrying rate of drop outs at the level of primary education, with about 8 % of children leaving school without having acquired the basic literacy and numeracy skills. Inequalities were being perpetuated by the education system, as it had been observed that the highest dropout and failure rates were persistently recorded in a number of schools located in disadvantaged areas.

(ii) In 1987, a Workshop was carried out on Low Performance in primary schools and it was found that the main causes were -

- [a] Lack of parental interest and support;
- [b] poor living conditions;
- [c] poor social environment
- [d] lack of remedial care;
- [e] teachers' inability and lack of training to deal with such children;
- [f] language problems.

(iii) The Mauritius Examinations Syndicate carried out a survey based on 800 children from 40 schools and the most important predictors of success were found to be general intelligence, extra educational facilities and the socio-economic status of the parents.

(iv) In 1990, the Government appointed a high level committee to examine the objective to be met by a nine year schooling system and the structural changes required. The Committee had recommended a seven year schooling system . The report of the Committee was discussed by the Master Plan Steering Committee and the Working Group. A special committee was set up to clarify the proposal. Following the work of the committees, it was agreed that nine year schooling should be integrated in the Master Plan.

Time Frame

A schedule for the preparation of the plan was drawn out. We started our work in April 1990. The time limit for the completion was December 1990. The time frame was not realistic. It took us longer than expected to formulate certain proposals, to have consultations and to reach agreement on important issues. It was only in August 1991, after about 14 months that the plan was ready.

It is important to have a time frame. In this respect, the international organizations helped us to observe the time table by pressing us from time to time. There was also the question of our own credibility towards these organizations and towards the Mauritian public. A long delay would have put into question our sense of professionalism and seriousness and at the same time undermine the confidence of the population and the press.

In order to respect the time frame, I monitored personally the committees, followed up daily with the Working Group, and the Master Plan unit at the Ministry about the state of things. I pressurized the sub committees, the staff working on the various papers and tried to ensure that the papers were forthcoming. The staff had to work under strong pressure, but they did it with sincerity and dedication.

Mobilizing Resources for Implementation

Local

After the publication of the Plan, resources had to be mobilized. Allocation of funds to the education sector depends largely on the Ministry of Finance, which itself has to grapple with the complex allocation of resources to different sectors, in the preparation of the annual budget. The support of World Bank and of the UNDP was very helpful in persuading the Ministry of Finance and the Cabinet to support the increase of resources to education. The President of the World Bank, Barber Conable rightly stated at Jomtien-

Ministers of Finance, as well as those working in development Banks, should be pleased to note that education produces substantial value for money. This is reflected both in national accounts and

*in individual earnings, As people are educated, earnings grow, so do savings, so does investment, and in turn, so does the well being of society overall*¹⁶. The UNDP Administrator also added that *education is the root of all development spending in education is a highly productive investment. Let finance ministers, unwilling to commit adequate national budgets to education ponder over these facts of life.*¹⁷

In Mauritius, in previous years, the education sector had not benefitted from substantial increases and a number of capital projects could not be implemented at the desired pace. The percentage of Government expenditure allocated to education was reduced from 10.9 % in 1984 to 9.8% in 1986. This was considered as a low percentage when compared to the regional African and Asian averages which allocated 17% of recurrent expenditure to education.¹⁸ The Master Plan, which had been accepted by the population and had the appreciation of international organizations, now played an important part in allowing me to persuade my Cabinet colleagues and the Minister of Finance, in particular, of the need to increase funding to education. The Ministry of Finance was reluctant to commit funds over a long period but we gave them the assurance that we would constantly bear in mind the costs implied, that we would regularly consult them and include their representative in our steering committee.

International Collaboration

It was agreed to hold a Donors' meeting, which Unesco proposed to host at its head quarters. With the assistance of UNDP, a list of international donors was drawn up and invitations were issued to them from Mauritius. The delegation to the donors' meeting was led by the Minister of Finance and included the Minister of Economic Planning and myself.

¹⁶ Final Report- World Conference on Education for All -1990

¹⁷ Idem as 12

¹⁸ World Bank Project Appraisal -1993

Our main argument was to prove that the Government of Mauritius was fully committed to the implementation of the Plan; it had already allocated substantial financial resources for education. In his address to the donors, the Minister of Finance and leader of the delegation underlined that -

*The implementation of the Master Plan will require around 61 million Us Dollars. Mauritius will meet out of its own resources about one third of the total project cost. We are seeking external financing resources and technical assistance to meet the balance of 42 million US Dollars, the bulk of which will be spent on imports of equipment, materials and services. Additionally, we shall cover all the recurrent costs. This is ample evidence of our seriousness of purpose and good will in funding locally an important share of the overall costs.*¹⁹

Other arguments that we advanced to the donors were that -

[a] Investment in education had been beneficial to the country as a whole. We illustrated the fact that the efforts of the government to maintain free education and its constant investment in education had yielded rich dividends. Over the past decade, Mauritius had gained 16 ranks in the Human Development index and was ranked in the Human Development Report as one of the countries with a *high human development rate*.²⁰

[b] Investment in education should be global concern; disparities in education and level of human development are a major hindrance to freedom of the individual, to respect of human rights and to world peace.

[c] Mauritius had a pragmatic approach to economic management and the Government had given the assurance it was fully committed to the implementation of the plan and ensure the rational utilization of donors' resources.

¹⁹ Report of Donors meeting -1991

²⁰ Human Development Report -1991

Unesco played a pivotal role - first by hosting the meeting. Second by associating itself with the preparation of the plan and third, by making an urging appeal to the donors on our behalf. The Director General of Unesco made the following plea -

I appeal to all the donor countries to play their part in ensuring that the commitment of the government of Mauritius to educational development, implying a human-centred development of the people, by the people, for the people will bear early fruit and will serve as a model for other countries in the African region and beyond.²¹ He pointed out that the presence here of three Ministers - of Education, Finance and Education underscores that Mauritius is addressing the key issue of human development in the right way. Too often Ministers of Education cannot count on such a joint and coherent approach and financial decisions do not benefit from proper technical and conceptual inputs.²²

Rationale for Donor Assistance

Assistance from donors has a number of prerequisites. Each of the international organizations present at the donors meeting specified its own criteria for recognizing the merits of the Master Plan. The donors criteria can be summarized as follows -

[a] conformity of the objectives to the donors' ideals and principles and the World Charter on Education for All;

[b] feasibility of the plan;

[c] support at local and regional level to the plan and the level of participation in preparation of the plan;

[d] the seriousness of purpose of the government and the commitment to implement the plan;

[e] the relevance of the plan to the national economic and social needs;

[f] the existence of necessary conditions for effective implementation and the efficient use of resources.

Implementation

The Master Plan contains about 300 proposals and it was obvious that priorities had to be established . The task was complex; implementation had to be at different levels. Some of the proposals needed further in-depth study and research .

National Education Council

²¹ Idem

²² Idem

One of our first task was to set up a National Education Council which comprised representatives of all the major partners, including teachers and parents. The National Education Council set up sub-committees which were entrusted with specific assignments. Thus one Sub Committee had to examine a review of the secondary education structure and to make recommendations, after consultations with all parties concerned.

Blueprints

High level Committees were also set up to examine other issues . I personally chaired a committee to work on a policy paper for the teaching of science. The Committee produced a White Paper on Science which is the basis for an action plan. Blueprints and policy papers were prepared on a number of themes, namely -

- A White Paper on Science [1992]
- Blue print on Physical Education and Sports in Schools [1994]
- Blue print on Computer Education [1992]
- Programme on Project Schools [1994]
- Planning for Implementation of Quality Improvement of Project Schools [1994]
- Science Education - Action Plan [1993]
- School Mapping Report [1993]
- NEC report on Review of the Structure of Secondary Education [1995]

Institutional Development Plans

At the tertiary education level, a Tertiary Education Development Plan was prepared and each tertiary institution was asked to draft its own institutional development plan, incorporating plans for research, staff development, introduction of new courses and improvement of the infrastructure, equipment and material. Example - a Plan for the setting up of a Distance Education Unit was prepared with the help of ADB and the ADB consultant was in Mauritius to help in establishing the Unit.

Implementation Agencies

Implementation agencies were identified. Example - for the review of examinations, the agency was the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate ; for distance education, the agency was the Mauritius College of the Air.

Steering Committee

At the level of the Ministry, a Master Plan Steering Committee, composed of senior staff of the ministry and the heads of educational parastatal bodies was set up under my chairmanship to provide operational and policy guidelines for the implementation of the plan. It reviews the operational plans and the budgets associated with the plans. I chaired regular meetings so as to follow up on the implementation process.

Coordination and Monitoring

8.7 A Master Plan Coordinating Unit was created at the Ministry with a full time manager, who is supported by an accountant and a procurement specialist. The MPCU team works in collaboration with the various implementing agencies. Its main task is to coordinate and monitor the implementation of all sector policies contained in the plan and ensure that development targets are met. The MPCU liaises with the Ministries of Economic Planning and Finance with respect to allocation of funds. It reviews project proposals prepared by implementation agencies for consistency .

A Project Implementation Unit [PIU] has been instituted to manage the implementation of ADB financed projects. It assumes responsibility for all procurement matters and for supervising all civil works under the proposed project; it consults the relevant bodies for all civil works, equipment, technical assistance, preparation of equipment lists , of bid documents, invite tenders, participate in bid evaluations and prepare and administer contracts. It also prepares the disbursement applications and keeps the loan accounts. The staff working in the unit were selected on the basis of their previous experience with the World Bank first and second education projects.

Implementation Schedule

An implementation schedule had been worked out. The procurement and disbursement schedules provided the guidelines for planning the physical aspects of project implementation. Monitoring and evaluation indicators had been established with the World Bank. They were carried out by the Implementation agencies with the MPCU assuming a coordinating role. The MPCU was expected to record progress and project performance . Mid term reviews were undertaken by the World Bank and other donor agencies.

Strengthening Professional Capacity

One of the most important elements of the implementation was the professional capacity of the Ministry and the related organization to carry out the various projects within the time schedule. The World Bank provided support for capacity building and endow the staff with analytical, management and decision making skills. This was achieved through-

[a] the setting up of an Education Management Information System, fully integrated within the operating units of the Ministry;

[b] improving operational linkages with the planning and finance ministries;

[c] Workshops and training programmes were organized to upgrade the professional skills of the staff.

The World Bank also supported research and studies in appropriate fields in order to enable rational and qualitative decision making. Five research areas were identified, namely Promotion of science and mathematics teaching, efficiency of language instruction, early childhood education, special education, management of private sector education.

Plans cannot be implemented without the participation of the teachers, heads of schools and curriculum developers. At different stages of the implementation process, we kept them informed. Workshops were held to help them understand the new projects and their own responsibilities.

How the Plan Aimed at Achieving Universal Basic Education Nine Year Schooling System

One of the major reforms proposed in the master plan was the introduction of the nine year schooling based on the fundamental principles that -

- a. Every child should receive basic education, including both skills, such as reading and writing and acquire that amount of knowledge required for citizens to operate effectively in society;
- b. Education being the largest user of public funds, it must organize itself so as to achieve maximum efficiency in the use of resources allocated to it;
- c. The country needs a workforce that is functionally literate and numerate as our future progress depends on the general level of education of our people.

A Green paper was prepared on the nine year schooling system . It stated that though our primary education system had ensured primary education throughout the country equally for boys and girls there were serious gaps in the system. There were as follows -

- The system provided for six years of primary school with automatic promotion leading to the CPE. Many pupils have seven years primary schooling as they repeat one year. Some 7000 to 8000 children leave school annually as young as the age of 12 or 13 and there is no further education for them. Many of them have great difficulty to read and write properly.
- About 20 % of CPE failures fail in all subjects. They have not acquired essential skills and hence are not prepared for prevocational schools.
- Provision for repeating Standard VI has not remedied the situation ; while passes at first sitting average 55%, the overall pass rate after repetition of Standard VI is only 67 %. All this is wasteful both of resources and of the abilities of the children
- The structure and learning content and examinations system do not recognize adequately that children possess different learning abilities and talents and that they develop at different paces.

- The children who leave school at the age of 12 or 13 are not legally permitted to take any employment or enter apprenticeship before the age of 15 and therefore are left to idle .There is no provision for them to continue receiving any education.
- The CPE is designed to qualify pupils for secondary school based on a one time pass/ fail assessment. It does not measure actual development learning of life skills.

Taking into consideration these factors, the plan proposed the nine year schooling which provides that -

- I. Primary school should be of six year duration, all pupils would be assessed on a school based system with national guidelines at the end of the third year. Those who are found below the required performance level would be channeled to a longer track of four years leading to the CPE.
- II. All pupils who pass the CPE would move to the secondary schools. Those who do not succeed would be directed to post primary programmes, today known as the Basic Secondary schools. The post primary education programme would be of three years duration focussing on consolidating basic literacy and numeracy skills and some basic vocational preparation.
- III. The nine year schooling system would enable children to acquire an acceptable level of basic education while not holding back children with greater potential. It would eliminate the gap between the end of schooling and the minimum age for employment or apprenticeship. It would reduce the risk of abandoning school leavers without meaningful employment. It will ensure greater equity and move closer to basic education for all.

Basic Secondary Schools

In the context of the nine year schooling, basic secondary schools have been set up, to accommodate pupils who are unable to cope with the purely academic stream. Existing prevocational centres have been taken over by the Ministry of Education . They run three year programmes comprising of basic numeracy and literacy, while stressing on practical subjects.

Project Schools

The problem of low performance was identified as a persistent problem in 13 schools which had less than 30 % passes and in 20 schools which had less than 20 % passes over four years. Two studies were carried out on low performance namely

- a Workshop on Low Achieving Primary schools; [1987] and

- A study by the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate on the Determinants of Performance in Primary Schools with special reference to failures at CPE level, [1991]

The causes of low performance were linked to the social and family environment as well as to the school's attitude towards slow learners. It was found that low performance was part of a cycle of poverty, family and social problems which perpetuated the situation of marginalisation and exclusion in certain particular areas, mainly suburban areas of the country. A school with poor reputation would be caught up in a self-reinforcing cycle of low expectations, low morale and low performance, parents would be insufficiently informed, school lacked amenities, etc..

The Project school programme placed the child at the centre of school activities, stressed on the need for early diagnosis and remediation, provides for strong linkages between the school and the community and the need for continuous concentration on the core competencies of reading, writing and numeracy. It centred on the school environment, the family and social environment. In brief the programme took a holistic view of the problem of marginalisation within the primary school system.

The programme consisted of classroom based remedial teaching, which entailed training of teachers in order to equip them with the skills for diagnosis and remediation. Teachers were trained in special education, in remedial and pastoral care techniques. The Master Plan recommended the following measures -

- a. It was found that a number of children had no opportunity to attend pre-primary classes. It was recommended that Government would encourage the setting up of pre-primary classes in the disadvantaged areas as a priority. To this end Government provides buildings within primary schools and the basic kits as well as teacher training;
- b. It was found that the school environment was often in deplorable condition and not conducive to proper learning. It was proposed that the schools infrastructure should be improved so as to create a healthier environment. A special grant of Rs 50,000 was provided to schools in disadvantaged areas for school improvement in addition to the regular grants to the Parent Teacher associations. Priority was given to those schools for repairs and renovation works and improvement of the physical amenities of the schools;
- c. A programme of regular inspection was established with the aim of providing guidance and support to teachers;
- d. The practice of automatic promotion was abolished enabling children with poor performance to repeat classes and benefit from remedial care;
- e. A pastoral care scheme was introduced with the aim of providing assistance, guidance to students specially on conduct, values, health and supporting them whenever they faced personal, family or social problems;

- f. Supplementary education classes were allowed as a means to help slow learners and those who could not afford to pay for private tuition classes; and
- g. Participation of parents in school activities was encouraged.
- h. The principal aim of the Project School was to ensure that no one is excluded from the education system and that every child leaves school after having acquired the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and the problem solving skills required by the average citizen. At the same time the programme addressed the delicate issue of social exclusion and marginalisation, which was the root of many social problems.

Compulsory Education

Another measure which aimed at reaching out to those who are left out from the education system was the implementation of compulsory education. Though enrollment in primary schools reached 97 %, a number of children dropped out after a few years or had frequent and long periods of absences from school. The reasons were mainly the family responsibilities thrust upon them, or the economic imperatives of the family or the inability of the child to cope with the learning process.

Surveys carried out in primary schools revealed that the rate of absenteeism was high in certain regions of the island and that the percentage of drop outs was around 1 %. A research project carried out by the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate pointed out that children who failed CPE were found to have been absent twice as much as those who passed; those who failed in all four subjects had absented themselves on average nearly six weeks from school each year. The report further stated that suburban pupils and more particularly coastal pupils constituted the weakest link in the educational system and would seem to require appropriate attention for their upliftment.

In order to remedy the situation, in 1991 the Education Act was amended providing that primary education would be compulsory. Though the act provides for severe legal sanctions against parents who do not comply with the provisions of the Act, this has not been put into practice. Focus have been placed on persuasion and dissemination of information. Sensitization campaigns were held to inform parents of the importance of education and that education is a basic human right of the child. With the help of UNICEF and the consent of the Ministry of Education, one Non Governmental Organization implemented a project whereby parents were contacted after school hours and pupils who had frequent absences were traced back and brought into the school system. At the same time, the Ministry of Women's Right and Child Protection introduced legislation and set up administrative measures to reduce child abuse and to protect children who were under threat.

Community Participation

One of the central points of the education strategy was community participation; the plan formulation was itself based on national consensus and was prepared after consultations with all the partners in the sector. The plan states that effective community participation can support a number of educational projects and help Government to decentralize education activities.

It was considered that the community and parents should participate fully in the education sector and be allowed to take part in the decision making process. A system of grants to Parent Teachers Associations was introduced comprising of a basic grant and a matching grant , whereby Government would pay a sum equivalent to the amount collected by parents. These grants are destined for the improvement of school facilities. The result proved to be positive as parents participated fully in the school improvement programme and helped to strengthen libraries, canteens, organize fund raising activities, purchase equipment and other requirements of the school.

In order to encourage greater participation, specially at decision making level the setting up of Regional Education Boards was recommended and the legislation has already been enacted for the creation of such boards. The main function of each Board would be to advise on the improvement of education in the region falling under its jurisdiction, to organize and foster educational activities, to sensitize parents and identify problems in their region and initiate activities to promote the welfare of students. Members of the Board would be drawn from the respective regions.

A National Education Council was set up by legislation , including the major partners of the education sector, namely parents, teachers, managers of private schools, the education authorities. The main responsibility of the Council is to advise Government on national education policy, to review the implementation of education plans and policies for the effective provision of education. The existence of the Council has ensured a concerted , global, integrated and consultative approach to educational issues . It is an effective instrument for consultation and consensus building.

School Development Plans

Each school was encouraged to prepare its own school development plan stating its mission objectives, with specific objectives and an implementation plan. The aim of the school development plan is to facilitate attainment of national goals and objectives by processing available inputs for conversion into performance outputs in a systematic manner at the school level. The plan covers the curricula, teaching learning process, diagnosis and remediation, achievement levels of pupils, availability of staff, students absenteeism, drop out rate, behaviour and discipline, involvement of parents and mobilization of community

resources etc..Each target area needs to define responsibilities and the time duration. Termwise reports have to be submitted to management and evaluation has to be carried out at the end of the year and after the CPE results to assess the achievements, shortfalls and future course of action. Special training courses were run to give heads of schools the necessary tools for an effective and proper management of their schools. The expected objective of the school is to strengthen school capacity to manage its resources effectively.

Teaching Learning Resources

Teachers are the most crucial elements in any education system. The success or failure of any reform project depends largely on their ability to implement the reform and on their motivation, skills and commitment.

In 1994, 67% out of a total personnel in education were primary school teachers. The reform programme placed great emphasis on the training of teachers. New batches of teachers were recruited and 1200 posts of Deputy Head teachers were established giving increased chances of promotion to teachers.

A training programme for teachers was established leading to an advanced certificate. This enabled teachers to upgrade their qualifications and methods of teaching. It was also planned to review the content and relevance of teacher education programmes.

Additional teaching aids were provided in schools, namely audio visual methods and television and video sets to enhance teaching. A Bibliobus projects was started in 1992 with the support of the French government ; the bibliobus catered for a number of schools in the remote and the disadvantaged areas.

Infrastructure

The plan recommended that every school should have a pleasant, healthy and safe environment in order to allow teachers and pupils to give the best of themselves. In all schools there should be adequate number of classrooms, playgrounds, library and television and other facilities. The reform programme proposed the construction of 13 new primary schools in areas which are under-served. All new schools were to be adequately built, a unit was established for repairs. Pre-primary classes, school libraries and other amenities were set up in schools.

Examinations

The examinations system has been considered as one of the foremost causes of unhealthy competition, and for generating wide scale private tuition; putting undue strain on children and causing a neglect of co-curricular activities which were non examinable. It had also found, as stated in the White paper on education, that *the competitive pressure work against children who are too poor to pay for private tuition and the slower learners who are considered to have little chance and are therefore neglected.*

The plan provided that examinations should be more reliable in measuring standards of achievement. One major reform has been the introduction of the Essential Learning Competencies , that is the level of attainment which should normally be expected from a child leaving the primary school and the Desirable Learning Competencies for students of higher ability. The CPE papers were redesigned to incorporate ELC'S and DLC's; the first operational examination based on the new format was held in 1994. A pilot project for Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation was launched in 15 schools at the level of Standard IV.

Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation

One of the means of reviewing examinations was the continuous evaluation which would record the child's progress , reflecting changes over time and his individual character and personality. The scheme was geared towards the full development of the child and obtaining the right indicators of the development of the child. It was tried in 1984, revived in 1989 in a small number of schools on a pilot basis. The scheme experienced some difficulties because of the slow adaptation of teachers and heads of schools to the process and their inability to implement the scheme effectively. In the Master Plan for Education, it is stated that the Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation in schools would establish a sound system of assessment. The scheme was to be established in the CPE examinable subjects from 1992 to 1994 and in the practical areas from 1993 to 1995. The overall objective was that the scheme should in the long term supplement the CPE examination. The scheme has unfortunately made little progress.

Curriculum

The curriculum was redesigned to cater for the Essential Learning Competencies and the Desirable Learning Competencies. Some aspects of the syllabus which were overloaded were reviewed. Emphasis was laid on problem solving skills and ability to apply knowledge in dealing with real life problems in teaching and learning process.

Education in Human Values was introduced aiming at the development of the child's personality and preparing him to face the problems in life. The programme was prepared in consultation with all the religious groups in the country so as to include the core values common to all the religions and teachers were trained to run the programme efficiently.

Promoting value based and health oriented education was intended to protect children from social ills, and to make them more responsible and conscious of their role in society. The programme was special support to children from disadvantaged areas whose family environment was defective and non supportive.

Appropriate syllabuses for movement and creative education were prepared and a blue print for physical education was published providing for training of teachers and the creation of necessary conditions for the teaching of the subject in primary schools.

Special Education

9.24 Our efforts to achieve basic education for all, included children with special disabilities. Our reform programme proposed that early identification of children with special needs would be undertaken, an assessment and referral centre would be set up to guide and counsel parents and to provide further training to teachers. It planned the opening of more special schools in other regions of the island so as to improve access to education. A training programme was established for teachers and an incentive scheme for teachers who worked in special schools. Government also established a grant system for Parent Teachers Associations of special schools.

Girls' Education

There is no discrimination based on gender in the education system. The Constitution of the Mauritius has been amended to prohibit sex discrimination. There is no disparity in the enrollment of girls and boys in schools. Actually , there are slightly more girls than boys at all levels of primary and secondary schools, except in the final years of secondary education.

PERCENTAGE ATTENDING SCHOOL BY AGE AND SEX

AGE	BOYS		GIRLS	
	1972	1990	1972	1990
10	93.6	95.9	91.1	96.4
11	88.9	90.6	84.1	91.6
12	71.5	75.1	59.6	76.1
13	56.7	65.2	44.1	66.6

PERCENTAGE PASS RATE AT CPE

YEAR	BOYS	GIRLS
1990	54.49	60.89
1991	53.18	59.34
1992	56.24	62.89
1993	54.18	59.93

Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNT

The achievement of basic education is a long term process which spreads over several decades. The work started in the 1940s and each successive government has contributed in its own way to the attainment of the goal. However it has to be pointed out that it was not an easy task, but one which requires a strong leadership, determination, political and social peace and stability, national mobilization and financial and human resources.

Political commitment is important in any reform strategy. In Mauritius, the political commitment was strong in the 1940's as the acquisition of basic education was considered as a means of achieving political emancipation and improving the lives of the people. In the 1980s Government reaffirmed its commitment to invest in education. First it refused to implement the structural adjustment programme on education and continued to inject money in the expansion and improvement of education. The Prime Minister and Cabinet as whole were conscious of the relevance of education in the national economy. In my capacity as Minister, I provided the link between the Ministry and the Cabinet; gave directions to heads of organizations; called for papers; asked for evaluation and progress reports. The result is that investment in education has given positive results. According to the UNDP Human Development Report 1996, *Mauritius is one of the successful countries which have managed to achieve rapid growth in per capita GNP and employment. In these countries, investment in human capital mainly through education and access to social services has paid rich dividends. This has created a vicious circle in which worker productivity has risen and triggered increase in real wage, which in turn attracted more investment in human capital. Establishing strong link between growth and human*

development offers a high pay off. The placement of Mauritius in the UNDP Human Development Index 1996 is 54th .

The exercise is a test, a challenge for policy makers with its lot of satisfaction and frustrations. It requires much dedication and determination. There is the need to create the right atmosphere for frank dialogue, to be accessible to others, to be ready to listen to people and to accept new ideas. It is important to have an open-minded approach, a great degree of resilience and patience. Every effort should be made to motivate the participation of others, to reinforce their self confidence and create mutual respect and trust. Without the participation of all the partners in the education sector, it would not be possible to achieve basic education. The teachers are the most important components of the education sector; they have to be involved, to be given the opportunity to give their views and take part in the decision making process. They must be active partners. Parents and the community cannot be ignored in the exercise. Without their support and their participation, education reforms would never succeed. We have to build up the partnership that would give effective results.

TEACHERS

The lessons drawn are numerous and instructive. In the preparation phase, we found out that the policy of consultation led to certain difficulties. Groups came with their own sectoral interests. For teachers, the main preoccupation was salary. We are aware that the success of the implementation depends to large extent on teachers which constitute the essential link with students. Teachers claimed that the master plan did not address the issue of salary, which they stated is the main factor of teachers' motivation. Teachers have persistently asked for a review of their status which they consider has been downgraded over the years in terms of salary scales and relativity with other grades. The Master Plan could not address this problem because the whole issue of salaries and conditions of service were not within its jurisdiction. We requested ILO to conduct a special seminar on the status of teachers to create greater confidence and transparency among the teaching community and to ensure that international standards were being observed in this area. The Teachers' unions were appreciative of this initiative and recommended that a teachers Code of Ethics and a Teacher's Council be set up.

Languages

In a multi-cultural environment, we have in some cases to choose middle of the road policies in a spirit of compromise, rather than policy based on sound pedagogical and social considerations. The language issue, which is highly complex is an example where no consensus has been reached up to now. Language has for years been a subject of debate

in Mauritius. Schools teach English and French and seven Oriental languages, which are ancestral languages but are not compulsory either at primary or secondary level. The struggle to place the ancestral languages on the same footing as English and French has become a political issue more than a pedagogical issue. In addition to these languages, there have been claims for the teaching of Creole.

In 1983, a Select Committee was set up to look into the issue. It was chaired by me in my capacity as Minister of Education. The Committee produced its report in 1984, recommending the inclusion of the Asian languages for certification at CPE as from 1987 and for ranking at CPE as from 1987, together with the introduction of a new subject to compensate those who do not wish to study an Asian language. The Recommendation regarding certification was implemented but the part of the recommendation regarding ranking could not be implemented as the introduction of a fifth subject in the curriculum would place a heavy burden on students.

A Select Committee was appointed in 1991 to look into the question of Oriental languages and another one to look into the problems of confessional schools. The Select Committees had to resort to solutions of compromise; i.e. that the Asian languages be counted for ranking as from 1996 and that confessional secondary schools reserve 50 % of their seats for admission on their own criteria. The report on confessional schools was implemented with immediate effect. The report on Asian languages was contested in court, which ruled that it was unconstitutional to count the languages for ranking as from 1996. The Report on Confessional schools is also being contested in court.

The two reports have given cause for frustration and discontent among the different communities in the island. They are both considered as unjust and unfair. The lesson to be drawn from this situation is that there is no clear cut solution to the problem as there are many emotional and communal considerations attached to the issue of language. No Government has up to now been able to spell out a clear policy on language teaching. The task is indeed difficult and complex and the master plan itself could not probe in depth into the issue and make clear recommendations to the Government.

Private Tuition

Private tuition is another complex and sensitive issue which we could not address fully in the master plan. It is a problem which has been existing in Mauritius for over a century and has become so deep rooted that it is not possible to find an immediate solution thereto. It is linked to many causes - the type of society that we live in, the competitiveness of our education system, the limited access to secondary education and higher education, shortage of good secondary schools, the high cost of tertiary education and the need to obtain scholarships. In 1984, the Government asked the University to carry out a study of private tuition and it few attention to the fact that 70 % of parents favour private tuition.

Private tuition per se is not a problem, but it is increasingly being run on a commercial basis and there is an abuse of private tuition by students, causing stress and fatigue among students. The report did not make any clear recommendations on how to address the problem.

A national debate including a debate in parliament was organized and following that, Government took the following measures -

- prohibition of private tuition to children in standards I to III,
 - the number of hours for private tuition was limited;
- and a sensitization campaign was held to make parents aware of the implications of abuse of private tuition.

The Master Plan has not made any recommendations relating directly to private tuition, but the long term reforms that it has proposed aims at reducing private tuition eventually.

Procedures

We have had to face the problem of rigid bureaucratic procedures. These are inevitable in government organizations which have a duty of accountability towards Parliament and the public at large. Every new project and the mode of spending as well as the allocation of contracts were likely to be questioned. We have tried to accelerate matters at various times but it has not been possible to avoid delays specially in major building projects.

Resistance to Change

It was also noted that it is difficult to change attitudes. Long established practices and institutions were so deeply entrenched in the Mauritius way of life that it was not possible to change them. A report proposing modifications to the structure of secondary education met with resistance from various quarters and the recommendations had to be shelved. The report on private costs on education drew attention to the fact that the private tuition is accepted by about 70 % of parents and that any solution to the problem had to take into account the diverse interests involved. Changing attitudes is a long term process. In the case of technical and vocational education, we had to try to improve the perception of people and remove the stigma towards these subjects.

Religious and Cultural Values

Another experience which is worth mentioning is the need to consider all the religious, traditional and cultural values and beliefs that prevail in plural society. Any policy or decision that appears offensive to one or more groups living in Mauritius might create unnecessary tension and unrest. In the case of the teaching of values in schools, all the religious groups were consulted before the curriculum was finalized so that it is acceptable to all.

Marginalization

The problem of marginalization is another important issue which we had to deal with. Many reasons have been attributed to this problem - industrialization, urbanization, the economic and social conditions, the agglomeration of certain categories of people in few regions, lack of parental care and inadequate support in schools. Our schools and our teachers were not equipped to face these problems; as a result the problem increased in intensity and became a burning political issue. The project schools scheme has been introduced to deal with this problem, but we still need to build up our expertise and professional support to eliminate the problem.

Other Lessons

Some other lessons that we have drawn are-

[a] Projects which threaten the jobs, the promotion prospects and existing structures are difficult to implement. The proposal to establish a National inspectorate has proved difficult to implement because of the effect on the existing structure.

[b] A project involving action by one small group is more likely to succeed than one involving coordination between a number of agencies performing a wide range of activities. School building programmes are more likely to be successfully implemented than proposals involving a wide range of disparate activities.

[c] A programme is more likely to succeed if the implementing agency has relevant experience or professional skills. The revision of the CPE depended on the professional skills at the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate.

[d] A project which has a strong body of support will be easier to implement than one lacking such support.

[e] A project that is a continuation of an existing programme has a greater chance of success than one that involves a new departure in education policy.

[f] A free flow of information is an essential element for success. For radical changes to be accepted they must be understood,. Those principally affected - teachers, parents and others - should understand what it is intended and why and what is expected of them.

[g] People are generally very reluctant to change existing structures though they agree that there is need for change. The example of private tuition is illustrative of this resistance to change established practices.

Time Scale of Change

The implementation of the reform strategy spans over a number of years and some of the actions that have been initiated will not show immediate results. The inability to show immediate results makes the task of drafters of the plan and the political stakeholders ungrateful, as people cannot appreciate the policies in their right perspective, they are often impatient to see results, and do not spare criticisms. As the consequences of our educational policies are not felt within one political mandate, and are most likely to benefit a successor government, the exercise may be frustrating for politicians.

The outcome has hitherto been positive as far as basic education is concerned. In 1994, there were 279 primary schools, and enrollment was around 98 %. There was a decline in the number of repeaters from 10,410 in 1992 to 8,087 in 1994. The number of deputy head teachers and head teachers increased from 438 to 967. The CPE pass rate improved from 57.82 % in 1991 to 61.2 % in 1994.

Positive Outcomes

But, there are many positive aspects to the task that we have undertaken in Mauritius-

[a] For the first time, a comprehensive plan has been worked out, reflecting political will and support of all the local stakeholders and illustrating wide national consensus; it has placed education within the wider social and political context.

[b] The plan provides a framework for action over the short , medium and long terms. It ensures continuity and coherence in education policy even after a change of government. The newly elected government is continuing with the implementation of the projects contained in the plan.

[c] For the first time, several international organizations have associated with the Government in the preparation of the plan and have offered assistance of such magnitude without any restrictive pre-conditions.

[d] The plan has the commitment of all the partners and of other sectors of the economy. It has obtained broad consensus.

[e] The plan has the appreciation and has been used as a model by international organizations. I was personally invited to share the Mauritian experience at an international Forum on Education and the Donors to African Education.

[f] The Plan served not only Mauritius but has been used as a model by other countries. We have the satisfaction of having contributed to the development of education in our neighboring countries.

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NOTES ON THE AUTHOR

Armoogum Parsuramen, (born 30 June 1951) was Minister of Education, Arts and Culture in Mauritius from 1983 to 1991 and Minister of Education and Science from 1991 to 1995. Elected in national parliamentary elections in 1982, 1983, 1987 and 1991. Has been Chairman of National Unesco Commission from 1986 to 1995. Has participated in several ministerial conferences and meetings. Has acted as Chairman General Conference of ACCT (1986), Chairman, Caucus and Bureau of African Ministers of Education, Association for the Development of African Education (1991-1995), Member of the Bureau, African Ministers of Education and Steering Committee of the Association for the Development of African Education, (1993-1995) Vice President, Bureau des Ministres Francophones de L'Enseignement Superieur et de la Recherche (1994-1995), Elected member of the Executive Board of Unesco, (16 Nov 1995 to April 1996). Initiated the preparation and implementation of a master plan for education in Mauritius, which has laid down a long term strategy for educational development.

SUMMARY

Achieving Basic Education - THE MAURITIAN EXPERIENCE

Mauritius is a small island state, a democratic sovereign republic with a population of about 1.1 million and a wide diversity of languages, religions and cultures. Its monocrop, sugar based economy shifted to an export oriented manufacturing industry in the 1970's and it is now encouraging the fast expansion of its financial sector. After a period of economic recession with high rate of unemployment in the late 1970's, the country experienced rapid economic growth in the mid-1980's with a GDP growth rate of 7%, a capita income of 2700 US \$, the elimination of unemployment and a significant decline in the percentage of people living below poverty level.

Education is free from primary to tertiary level and Government provides substantial assistance to the pre-primary sector. The efforts to achieve universal basic education really started in the 1940's and the immediate post independence period witnessed a fast expansion of basic education facilities. Between the years 1968 and 1981, the Government established primary education institutions all over the island. In 1982, the Government faced serious financial problems with huge deficits, and a high rate of unemployment and inflation. It had the option of reducing investment in education as prescribed by the structural adjustment programme or continuing to finance the expansion and the improvement of education. The Government rejected the structural adjustment programme which would have narrowed access to basic education and implemented various educational projects.

Consequently, by the year 1990, the gross enrollment rate in primary schools had reached 99.4% and there were no differences in the participation rates of girls and boys while considerable improvements had been made to the physical condition of schools, the conditions of work and the training teachers. However there remained number of drawbacks which hindered the efficiency of the system, namely the high rate of drop outs at the primary education level, [about 25 %] and the lack of remedial action, the extreme competitiveness of the system, the inequalities between schools and regions and the lack of relevance of the content of education to the economic and social needs of the country.

The formulation of a Master Plan for Education became essential for various reasons the need to address the long standing and deep rooted problems in the education sector , the need to adapt the education system to the profound changes that had taken place in Mauritian society , the need to fulfil our political responsibility towards the people. However the most important reason was the World Conference on Education for All which created a new impulse and gave encouragement to developing countries and stressed on the new concept of education as an integral part of development and a basic human right.

The approach that was adopted for the preparation of the master plan was one of wide national consultations involving all the partners in education as the past experience of Mauritius and other countries in implementing structural adjustment programmes, formulated without taking into account the views and aspirations of those directly concerned, had given disastrous results. The participatory approach had its own problems as it gave the opportunity for passionate sectoral or political debates and defense of vested interests but on the whole it was very positive because it mobilized attention on education and allowed every one to make proposals; it facilitated the acceptance of the plan once when it was ready. International support was enlisted right from the start with UNDP playing a coordinating role and Unesco, World Bank providing expertise wherever required.

The preparation of the plan needed an administrative structure backed by technical support. This was ensured by establishing a National Steering Committee and sub committees. Consultations were held through the media, seminars, workshops and meetings. Goals and targets were set for the education sector on the basis of the World Charter on Education for All and the needs of the education system in Mauritius. The goals centered around achieving education for all, improving quality, removing inequalities, making the education system more responsive to the economic and social development, improving the management and the use of resources in the system. The problems were identified, analyzed and potential solutions examined and proposals were formulated.. Some of the major decisions, such the nine year schooling were approved by the Government even before the plan was finalized.

The next step was to mobilize resources for financing. The government committed itself to provide one third of the costs. A donors meeting held in Paris with the assistance of Unesco, obtained pledges from various international bodies. The prerequisites for funding were the credibility of the plan, the seriousness of purpose and political will of the government, the responsiveness of the plan to the needs of the country, and the plan's compatibility with the World Charter on Education for All .

For the implementation, a National Education Council and various sub committees have been working on those proposals which need deeper study. A Steering Committee is monitoring the implementation; Blue prints, institutional development plans, white papers have been prepared. With the assistance of the international agencies, the professional capacity of the ministry has been enhanced, time frames established and monitoring indicators identified for each project.

The whole exercise has been very instructive. Some of the problems were the inability to address some complex and sensitive issues such as language, the resistance to change in some cases, the difficulties in implementing proposals that affect the career and promotion prospects, the rigidity of bureaucracy, the politicization of educational issues, and the teachers quest for higher pay. The positive aspects were that for the first time a long term plan for education had been prepared and international associations had pledged such a substantial support for education and the plan was being used as an example by other countries.

One of the fundamental elements of the plan was the achievement of basic education for all. The plan proposed a nine year education system which would aim at giving to every child the opportunity to achieve basic education. It also laid emphasis on the low performing schools, the disadvantaged children, and the problems of exclusion which deprived children from education. The strategy proposed in the plan placed much importance on compulsory education, the reform of the examinations in order to give a faire chance to all children.

The experience of Mauritius revealed that consultations, dialogue, the participation of all teachers, parents and the community at large , political commitment and determination, and the government's faith in the basic principles of education for all were indispensable requirements for the achievement of basic education for all.