The Director General of UNESCO, Mr Federico Mayor, in the donors’ meeting on the mobilization of resources for implementation of the Mauritian Education Master Plan, made the following remark: “...the Master Plan for Education – a remarkable document which is notable for its conciseness of formulation and comprehensiveness of scope, for its farsightedness and for the common sense that informs its policy proposals and suggestions for action, including its proposed Projects”. Indeed, Mauritius was one of the pioneers in implementing the ‘Jomtien Declaration’ through its Education Master Plan.

In this study, the author attempts to explain the rationale of the Master Plan, how it was designed, what steps were taken to ensure participation of different social groups in the design of the Plan, how the national consensus was built, how the international agencies were involved, what structure was established to mobilize and allocate resources for the Plan, to implement, monitor and evaluate the achievements of the Plan, what difficulties were encountered, how they were overcome and what lessons could be drawn from this experience. Written by the principal architect of the Plan, the Minister of Education, the study gives important methodological lessons for planners and policy-makers.

Author
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Master Plan for education for the Year 2000: the Mauritian experience

Armoogum Parsuramen

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Contents

Introduction 7

1. Economic and political background 7
2. Brief description of the education system of Mauritius 8
3. Historical evolution 9

Chapter I. Justification for a plan for education 11

Chapter II. Approach adopted 17

1. Nature and scope of our participatory approach 18
2. Structural adjustment programmes: the Mauritian response 18
3. Steps taken to ensure participation 22
4. The national consensus-building process 22
5. Participation of international bodies and its implications 23

Chapter III. Preparation of the plan 25

1. Structure established 25
2. Setting targets and goals 26
3. Time-frame 30
4. Approval of plan 30
5. Comments by international organizations 31
Chapter IV. Mobilizing resources for implementation

1. Local
2. International collaboration
3. Rationale for donor assistance

Chapter V. Implementation

1. National Education Council
2. Blueprints
3. School development plans
4. Institutional development plans
5. Implementation agencies
6. Steering Committee
7. Co-ordination
8. Strengthening professional capacity
9. Cost and Financing Review Committee
10. Implementation schedule
11. Monitoring and evaluation

Chapter VI. Lessons to be drawn

1. Language issue, revisited
2. Private tuition: a complex issue
3. Nation building in a plural society

Conclusion

1. Personal experience

Appendix I. Basic country data 1991 and latest year

Bibliography
1. Economic and political background

1.1 Mauritius is a small island covering 1,870 square kilometres. The State of Mauritius includes the islands of Rodrigues, Agalega and several other smaller islands. Mauritius had no indigenous population. As a result of successive French and British colonization, the importation of slaves from Africa and indentured labourers from India and the settlement of a small community of Chinese traders, the Mauritian society is characterized by a wide diversity of cultures, religions, languages, and traditions. By the year 1990, the population size was around 1.06 million.

1.2 In 1968, the country gained independence and became a sovereign state with a democratically elected government. The Constitution of Mauritius is founded on the principle of respect for fundamental rights and freedom. It guarantees elections every five years. In 1992, Mauritius became a Republic, with a non-elected President as Head of State.

1.3 Mauritius has no mineral resources. Sugar was its main export until the 1970s, when an export processing zone was established and greater encouragement was given to the tourism industry. In the 1980s, the country faced heavy recession, 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 per cent and per capita
income had doubled to about US$2,700. Between 1983 and 1992, real income
rose at an annual rate of 3 per cent and the percentage of people living below
the poverty line had been reduced from 20 per cent to 5 per cent, according
to a World Bank study. Since 1992, efforts have been made to develop the
financial sector through Offshore and Freeport activities. The liberalization
of trade and the impending withdrawal of preferential trade arrangements
have increased the need for improved productivity and upgrading of skills.
(See Appendix I for basic country data).

2. Brief description of the education system of Mauritius

2.1 The education system of Mauritius has come under the influence
of the British education system. Pre-primary education is provided by private
schools and is fee-paying. Government has been lending support to the sector
through grants, soft-term loans, equipment, teacher training and by making
available buildings for the holding of pre-primary classes.

2.2 Primary schooling lasts for six years, with the opportunity for one
repeat of the sixth grade. It leads to the highly competitive Certificate of
Primary Education (CPE), which is the criterion for admission to a limited
number of selected secondary schools and for access to certain categories
of unskilled jobs. Primary education is free and it was made compulsory in
the year 1991.

2.3 There are 267 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 environment 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.
2.4 Secondary education is free. About 80 per cent of secondary school places are in private secondary schools and the remainder in state secondary schools. Secondary schooling leads to the School Certificate after five years of studies and Higher School Certificate after another two years. 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. Children who do not reach the required standard at CPE are offered the opportunity to attend free basic secondary schools for three years.

2.5 Technical education is free and is provided by one polytechnic and one non-engineering polytechnic, set up recently. Tertiary education is also free. The University of Mauritius offers a wide variety of degree, diploma and postgraduate courses, while the Mauritius Institute of Education is engaged in teacher training, and the Mahatma Gandhi Institute provides courses in fine arts, music and dance. Research efforts have been encouraged in recent years by the Tertiary Education Commission, an organization which co-ordinates tertiary educational activities. The Mauritius College of the Air is responsible for distance education through the use of the media.

3. Historical evolution

3.1 Initial efforts to provide education in Mauritius started with the work of missionaries, as was the case in many former colonies. 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. This led to a policy of expansion of education facilities both by the government and education authorities.

3.2 Secondary education was fee-paying until 1976, when the government decided to make secondary education free. In 1982, following
serious economic problems, the World Bank and IMF proposed structural adjustment programmes which prescribed drastic cuts in education expenditure and called for a review of free education. Nevertheless, government’s investment in education was not reduced and free secondary education was maintained.

3.3 In 1982, a Commission of Inquiry was set up to look into the education system. In 1984, a White Paper on Education was published; it placed emphasis on quality, equity, relevance and cost effectiveness. With the implementation of policies based on the Paper, by the year 1990, education indicators showed improvements at all levels. According to a World Bank evaluation, in the year 1991 the gross enrolment rate of the 6 to 11 years age group had reached 99.4 per cent, the net enrolment rate was 98 per cent and there was no difference between the participation rates of boys and girls. There were increased primary and secondary education facilities, an ongoing teacher training programme and expanded opportunities for technical and tertiary education.

3.4 In the year 1991, the Master Plan for Education was prepared after national consultations, providing for short-, medium- and long-term strategy for educational development.
Chapter I
Justification for a plan for education

1. At the Jomtien Conference, concerns were 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”.¹

A new vision of education had emerged in recent years. The Human Resource Document of the Commonwealth Secretariat described it “as a vision which placed the people at the heart of development”.² The Human Development Report of UNDP equally renewed emphasis on the concept of “development woven around the people, not people around development”.³

2. The historical overview of the development of education in Mauritius indicates that educational reform and policy have often been the results of political and economical circumstances and crises that prevailed at different times in Mauritius’ history. They had rarely been the outcome of careful planning. Many reports and recommendations had been produced but most of them were on an ad hoc basis and did not take a comprehensive view of

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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.

3. 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.

4. 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 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 term”.

5. Education has always been one of the central preoccupations of the Mauritian people. Over the past years, there has been substantial progress in

the sector. The primary enrolment rate had reached 98 per cent, education was free at all levels, including university. Teaching and learning materials were available to all teachers and students, the curricula were being regularly updated, and parents contributed actively to the development of education.

6. However, there were still some problems that affected 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, i.e. independently from one another, as they were invariably related to the structure of the education system. Some of the major shortcomings were:

- between 10 to 20 per cent of children were still not attending school;
- around 25 per cent of schoolchildren dropped out of primary school;
- high repetition rates and absence of remedial action and support for the slow learners;
- extreme competitiveness of the system, which fostered private tuition;
- disparities and unevenness between rural and urban areas, between private and state schools; and
- lack of relevance of the curriculum to the expanding economic and changing social needs.

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 per cent of the 12 to 17 years age group, as compared to 80 per cent in Singapore; the enrolment in higher education was only about 1 per cent; there was a 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.
7. Government could not remain indifferent to these shortcomings in the education sector. Education was constantly under scrutiny both in Parliament and outside. We were aware that an accumulation of unsolved problems and frustrations would be detrimental to social peace and harmony. This had already been illustrated by a national students protest march in 1975, arising out of a number of deep-rooted problems in the education sector.

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 such as higher rates of divorce, crime, suicide, drugs, child abuse, and violence. Greater demands were being placed on education as working parents found less time for their children. Jacques Delors has drawn attention to this new role of education:

   “Education must help to engender a new humanism, one that contains an essential component and sets considerable store of knowledge 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”.5

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

9. Another justification for a reform of the education system was the economic factor. Mauritius had achieved remarkable economic growth. It

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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 Programme of Mauritius in 1990. The need for “an effective education responding to the needs of Mauritius in the medium- or long-term perspective” was emphasized. The World Bank representative expressed the view that an overall strategy for education was needed and that the Bank would like to take the opportunity of exploring ways in which it could help in the longer run. A World Bank study stated that “in the twenty-first 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”. In fact we were convinced that a national commitment to Education is an investment in ever-renewable human resources that are more durable and more flexible than capital plant and equipment.

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 manifestos. 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 fulfil its vision of the future of a progressive, prosperous and peaceful nation.

11. 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 on Education for All. It gave the encouragement and the inspiration for action as it drew out guidelines for reforms and demonstrated that international support and collaboration could be enlisted in what was termed the grand alliance to support educational development. This is clearly declared in the statement of the Director-General of UNESCO:

“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 cooperate and learn from each other and, before this century ends, to make the right to education a daily reality for all”.

12. On my way back from The World Conference on Education for All, I was aware that after Jomtien, we could not remain complacent; we were expected to take initiatives especially in the developing countries. As the Minister of Education, I had to give the start signal and take the lead. I knew that a clear and credible strategy for educational development would enable Mauritius to benefit from international support.

13. There was a clear political strategy in my mind. I considered that something original could emanate from Mauritius. Without underestimating the difficulties that might arise in reforming a system that had been in existence for over a century, I was determined to move ahead. I knew that besides yielding political dividends, the exercise would benefit my fellow countrymen as a whole. I had the full confidence of the Prime Minister and the government and I was confident that the international community would not hesitate to lend its collaboration to a well-designed plan.

Chapter II
Approach adopted

1. There were different approaches that could have been adopted for the preparation of the plan: one 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 my own 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 recent 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”.8

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 and new financial and human resources, public, private and voluntary.

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1. Nature and scope of our participatory approach

1.1 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 grass-roots level, were sometimes unrealistic 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”.9 The development path that Mauritius followed may provide useful reflections to developing countries facing a situation of severe economic constraints.

2. Structural adjustment programmes: the Mauritian response

In Mauritius, in 1982, due to a very difficult economic situation, structural adjustment programmes proposed drastic cuts in educational expenditure, including freezing of posts, review of free education, and withholding of capital projects. The Summary of Education Policy Paper dated 27 October 1982, agreed with the World Bank, prescribed drastic measures, some of which were:

“The objective of government is now to contain expenditure at its current level for the next eight years and to ensure better quality by careful rationalization and strict control of resources with due consideration to manpower requirements”.

The following specific measures were agreed upon:

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(1) (i) Expenditure on Education will be contained within 4 per cent of GDP and 14 per cent of Total Government Recurrent Budget by 1990; (ii) no major Capital Expenditure is envisaged for the next three years and it will be ensured that no project entailing heavy recurrent expenditure will be undertaken; (iii) sources of income are being investigated. They might be (a) participation of parents and community in certain expenses (shoes, school-feeding programme, sports and other activities); (b) participation of school-leavers in educational expenses as soon as they start working; (c) participation of Mauritius Institute of Education students in training expenses. Precise proposals will be presented to government not later than 31 March 1983. It is to be noted that the University of Mauritius is now functioning on a fee-paying basis.

(2) The 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 for Form VI will be tightened as from January 1984.

(3) Substandard private secondary schools will 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 would be seriously affected by this decision. This resulted in tragic human problems. It led to strikes and general unrest in the education sector, demotivated the teaching force and created instability in the secondary education sector.

At that critical time, following a major split in the then coalition government, I became Minister of Education on 28 March, 1983 and, according to the conditions of the Structural Adjustment Programme, I was supposed to carry on with the implementation of these drastic measures and to submit concrete proposals to the Bank on 31 March, 1983. With the full support of the Prime Minister and the newly constituted government, we decided to
dissociate from the adjustment measures and accordingly to change the course of the history of education in Mauritius. For political, economic and educational reasons we insisted upon having the human resource development strategy as a major focus against any attempt at implanting imported structural adjustment models of development co-operation in our country, and decided to have a policy of continuous dialogue with the nation on all important matters. The Prime Minister pleaded with great vision and determination with the World Bank and IMF for investment in our human resources. This appeal is well illustrated in the White Paper on Education (1984):

“Our main resource is our people. It is on their abilities and skills that the nation’s future well-being must be based. In so far as education helps to build these qualities it is basic to our development”.10

I must here express appreciation to the World Bank and the IMF for accepting our plea. They were convinced by our strategy and our vision for a better Mauritius. It is useful to observe that this strategy has paid dividends and contributed tremendously to the enabling environment that preceded our country’s unprecedented economic growth. In fact, at the donors meeting in 1991, the World Bank’s representative complimented Mauritius for its vision for education in the context of the structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s:

“Countries which build up their human capital as Mauritius has done in the past decade, have usually been richly rewarded. In our view, improved opportunities for the population in education and skills training, and more particularly for education, should remain as in the past, the central element of future development in Mauritius”.11

2.1 Further, given the fact that we live in a vibrant, democratic society where people maintain an enthusiastic and lively interest in 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.

2.2 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 people to be passive recipients but I hoped that they would identify themselves with the plan. This approach was part of a deliberate strategy to promote sustainable and endogenous human resource capacities for the preparation, implementation and follow-up activities of the Mauritius Master Plan for Education and beyond.

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

2.4 These difficulties were avoided through dialogue, by sensitizing people about the importance of the plan and by creating the appropriate mechanism and modalities for the management of conflicting interests. 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 of the consultations and discussed with the parties concerned and replied to their queries. In fact, the idea of a master plan was received favourably and there was little opposition. The participatory approach eased out any resistance and prepared the ground for the plan to be eventually accepted.
3. Steps taken to ensure participation

3.1 One of my first actions was to enlist the participation of the major stakeholders. This was achieved through the following steps:

- The approval of government as one of the major stakeholders was sought.
- The National Assembly was involved in the exercise. Members of the House were kept informed of all developments through replies to Parliamentary questions, Ministerial statements on key issues, and participation of Members in debates on motions and appropriate legislations in the education sector. I made it a point to invite all Members of the House to treat Education as a non-partisan issue and bring their contribution in the preparation of the Master Plan for Mauritius.

4. The national consensus-building process

- Heads of educational organizations who had the power of decision were involved in consultations.
- Representatives of teachers, students, parents, education authorities, NGOs, the private sector, private schools, and 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.

4.1 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 in the press almost daily. The whole consultation was characterized by transparency and frank dialogue. Participants were provided with all relevant papers and reports.

4.2 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 the issues with the local people and ascertained their needs. I also made it a point to ensure the active involvement of the student community – the beneficiaries of the system – in the exercise. In fact they were given the opportunity to formulate their views on education at meetings with the Prime Minister and myself and during a special *Journée de reflexion*. The chapter in the plan on the students was based on the consultations with them.

4.3 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; and 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.

5. **Participation of international bodies and its implications**

5.1 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 basic education. Bearing this in mind, I contacted UNDP and UNESCO in the initial stages. UNDP agreed to act as co-ordinator for mobilization of international resources. UNESCO addressed a letter to me in May 1990, stating that UNESCO and the World Bank “believed that the preparation of the plan and subsequent action programmes require competent and experienced international inputs, and that UNESCO and the World Bank
joining forces and working together under your leadership might be a good way of providing such inputs”.

5.2 The response was positive, with UNDP assuming a co-ordinating 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. We requested ILO to conduct a seminar on the Status of teachers in Mauritius. The chapter in the Master Plan on Teachers’ Conditions of Work was largely based on the recommendations of the Seminar. Consultancy was provided for the formulation of proposals for technical and vocational education.

5.3 The UNDP Office played a central role as facilitator. The fact that UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank associated themselves with the Mauritius endeavour 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.

5.4 There are certain problems which some countries face in dealing with international co-operation. International experts may not fully understand the local social and cultural contexts during their brief stay in the country. They might have conflicts with local experts, resulting in tensions and delays in the preparation of the plan, and they might not be fully aware of the political commitments. There are sometimes wide gaps between the work methods, managerial and professional practices of the experts and the local staff. However, these disadvantages were allayed by constant dialogue and consultation. I personally met and discussed issues with the experts quite regularly and kept them informed of our political orientations. We had no hesitation in stating our reservations on their proposals. I acted as an arbitrator to smooth out tensions.
Chapter III
Preparation of the plan

1. Structure established

1.1 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 of the Resident Representative of UNDP.

1.2 A Working Group was set up, chaired by a co-ordinator, 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.

1.3 Sectoral subcommittees 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.

1.4 A Drafting Group was set up to edit the drafts produced by the various groups and to compile them in a comprehensive document.

1.5 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.
1.6 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, thus providing direction to the Committee in its work. The National Assembly was regularly kept informed of all the developments taking place in the process.

1.7 The Prime Minister was fully committed to the cause of education. In 1983 he took the crucial decision to reject the structural adjustment measures for education and provided full support to investment in education. I wish also to point out that during the period of the preparation of the plan (1990-1991), he was holding the portfolio of the Ministry of Finance. He ensured that the Ministry of Finance gave necessary financial clearances to important policy decisions relating to the plan proposals. His frequent presence at functions in educational institutions was a great encouragement. His vision of education was made known through his public statements. This is expressed in his preface to the Master Plan:

“A proper education 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 and 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 education system to achieve best results”.12

2. Setting targets and goals

2.1 The fundamental principles of the Charter on Education for All are:

“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 co-operation”.

2.2 Our objectives were based on these internationally accepted principles and on our own local needs and aims. Setting the objectives, according to Jacques Hallak, is “the real challenge that political leaders face”. 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”.13 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:

(a) every child should reach an agreed-upon standard of basic education;
(b) the quality of education should be improved at all levels;
(c) differences in lifetime opportunities resulting from inequalities in the education system should be reduced by improving standards in low-achieving schools;
(d) the education system should contribute to the continued economic and social development of the country;
(e) the abilities and aptitudes of each individual passing through the system should be developed to the fullest practical extent; and
(f) the management and structure of the education system should promote most effective use of resources.

2.3 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.

2.4 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 failed the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) 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.

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

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

2.6 The plan emerged through these various 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; and
(d) acceptance of solutions at the political level.
2.7 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 per cent 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 drop-out 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; and
(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.
3. **Time-frame**

3.1 A calendar for the implementation of the plan was drawn up. We started our work in April 1990. The time limit for the completion was December 1990, but 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.

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

3.3 In order to respect the time-frame, I personally monitored the committees and followed up daily with the Working Group, and the Master Plan unit at the Ministry regarding the state of affairs. I pressurized the subcommittees and the staff working on the various papers and tried to ensure that the papers were forthcoming. In one instance I even used the World Bank to get some institutions to speed up their Institutional Development Plan (IDP). The staff had to work under strong pressure, but they did it with sincerity and dedication.

4. **Approval of plan**

4.1 When the plan was finally prepared, we submitted it to Cabinet for approval. The fact that I had already obtained Cabinet approval on major elements of the plan as they were approved by the preparatory committees greatly facilitated its approval. We carefully prepared the Cabinet Memorandum seeking government approval for the Master Plan. The plan was approved at its first presentation to Cabinet. This, my fellow Ministers
of Education will appreciate, is a record, because it is not so easy for Ministers of Education to get such major education policy decisions through Cabinet at one go. It is an indication of the good strategy we adopted in the plan preparation exercise. We then organized a two-day National seminar with local and international partners, to examine all the proposals in the plan to build up consensus and to reinforce the feeling of ownership. This process proved to be very useful in getting the support of all stakeholders in the implementation of the plan. I then submitted the deliberations of the two-day Seminar to Cabinet for its consideration. We brought some minor adjustments to the plan in the light of these consultations. I made a statement in the National Assembly and circulated a copy of the plan to each Member of the House and invited them to forward to me their observations for consideration during the implementation stage. The plan was also widely circulated to all the representatives of the education family in Mauritius, to all our international partners and to all Member States of UNESCO at the General Conference of 1991.

5. **Comments by international organizations**

(a) **UNDP – Donors Meeting 1991**

“We at UNDP feel extremely gratified that Mauritius has taken the lead of the African Region in so short a time by producing what we consider to be a first-class production in the form of this Master Plan ... We would be looking forward to sharing this extraordinary effort by Mauritius with other countries”.

(b) **World Bank – Donors Meeting 1991**

“The Master Plan provides an excellent framework for expanding the scope and improving the quality of the Mauritian education system and for producing the manpower needed to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century”.
(c) African Development Bank – Donors Meeting 1991

“I wish to congratulate the authorities of Mauritius who spared no effort to produce a master plan which is realistic, feasible and viable to say the least”.

(d) Director-General, UNESCO – Donors Meeting 1991

“This new education strategy is contained in the Master Plan for Education – a remarkable document which is notable for its conciseness of formulation and comprehensiveness of scope, for its farsightedness and for the common sense that informs its policy proposals and suggestions for action, including its proposed Projects. The way the Master Plan has been prepared is also remarkable. National consensus has been achieved through wide involvement of all the important sectors in education ...”

(e) Swiss Investment Development Agency – Donors Meeting 1991

“Impressive and comprehensive plan. The approach adopted involving national staff at all levels, including intersectoral co-operation, is a promising example of how education plans could become effective implementation of the World Charter in Education for All”.
Chapter IV
Mobilizing resources for implementation

1. Local

1.1 While it is very important to have a good plan, it is still more important to have the means to implement it. Therefore, immediately after the publication of the plan, we set about mobilizing resources required for its realization. The strategy needed for this phase was already planned. We knew that 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 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".14

The UNDP Administrator 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".15

15. Idem as 12.
1.2 In Mauritius, in previous years, mainly because of serious economic constraints, the education sector had not benefited 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 per cent in 1984 to 9.8 per cent in 1986. This was considered as a low percentage when compared to the African and Asian averages, which allocated 17 per cent of recurrent expenditure to education.16

1.3 Equipped with the Master Plan which had been accepted by the population and had the appreciation of international organizations, I personally had the confidence and powers of persuasion to convince my Cabinet colleagues and the Minister of Finance, in particular.

1.4 The Ministry of Finance was reluctant to commit funds over a long period but we gave it the assurance that we would constantly bear in mind the costs implied, that we would regularly consult it and include its representative on our Steering Committee. We also included a representative of the Ministry of Economic Planning, to enable the Ministry to bring its contribution in ensuring that we were working within the framework of the National Development Plan objectives. The presence of the representatives of the two key ministries greatly facilitated the ministries’ support for the Master Plan. This intersectoral approach was important at both national and international levels.

2. **International collaboration**

2.1 I wanted to make sure that after having prepared the plan, the Ministry would have not only annual local resources, but also longer-term indispensable loans from donors committed to it, to ensure its smooth implementation. I therefore requested government to hold a meeting of donors. We approached UNESCO and the Director-General spontaneously agreed to host the meeting at its Headquarters. The fact that UNESCO was hosting

the meeting was of great benefit to us. 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. Here I must add that the idea of getting the Ministers of Finance and Economic Planning with me was a clear political strategy to ensure their support of the plan!

2.2 Our main task 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 US$61 million. 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 US$42 million, 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 goodwill in funding locally an important share of the overall costs”.  


2.3 Other arguments that we advanced to the donors were that:

(1) 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.  

(2) Investment in education should be a 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.

(3) Mauritius had a pragmatic approach to economic management and the government had given the assurance that it was fully committed to the implementation of the plan and that it would ensure the rational utilization of donors’ resources.

2.4 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 urgent appeal to donors on our behalf. The Director-General of UNESCO made the following plea:

“I appeal to all the donor countries and organizations 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”.19

2.5 He pointed out that the “presence here of three Ministers – of Education, Finance and Economic Planning ? 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”.20

3. Rationale for donor assistance

3.1 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.

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3.2 The World Bank representative at the meeting stated that: “We are strongly supportive of the ESMP, not only for the constructive policies that it articulates, but also the way it is based on a true national consensus on the policies themselves”.21

3.3 The UNDP representative affirmed that “the Programme for the Development of Education is of necessity ambitious with an innovative policy of a nine-year education for all and major improvements in quality, relevance and equality at all levels of education. It fits well with the Programme approach recommended by our Governing Council and the clarity of objectives and the complementarity of the inputs would contribute significantly to the programmes”.22

3.4 The African Development Bank representative stated that the prescriptions and orientations of the plan were in perfect agreement with most of the guiding principles of ADB for lending in education in Africa. “The five major areas of concern in the Master Plan – Quality, Equity, Relevance, Efficiency and Financing are well among the major problem areas which the ADB has set out to tackle in Africa”.23

3.5 For the Director-General of UNESCO, (the Plan) “is an ambitious endeavour, which to succeed well, will require full support and co-operation of all concerned, including the country’s external partners. UNESCO, which you chose, along with UNDP, as your principal international partners for the preparation of the plan, is ready to assist the government in its implementation”.24

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22. Idem.
3.6 The Donors Consultative Meeting was a success. Seven countries and 11 international organizations participated in the meeting. Pledges of assistance totalling US$49.1 million (as against the required amount of US$42 million) were made towards the cost of the plan. This included US$44 million in loans from the World Bank, the African Development Bank and the Caisse française de développement; and US$5.1 million in grants from the EEC, USAID, UNDP, UNESCO and UNICEF.

3.7 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 for the plan and the level of participation in the 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; and
(f) the existence of the necessary conditions for effective implementation and the efficient use of resources.
Chapter V
Implementation

1. The Master Plan contains about 300 policy measures dealing with the inputs as well as expected outcomes with multi-level dimensions. These measures are regulative and structural, procedural as well as distributive. With the collaboration of the World Bank we prepared a Policy Action Plan designed to guide implementation of the policy measures. The format covers major components disaggregated into main and sub-action points, time framework and agencies responsible for follow-up action in this direction. The task was complex, and implementation had to be at different levels. Some of the proposals needed further in-depth study and research. The White Paper on Education reminded us that if we want to get results it is not enough to have a good plan and the resources to implement it:

“Mauritius is littered with the remains of old programmes which have never been implemented; of good intentions which have never been translated into practice. Any serious plan must be concerned with how it is to be carried out, and the machinery which will be needed to do so”.

In order to equip itself for the implementation of the plan, the Ministry of Education developed a reorganization plan with, initially, a better delineation of responsibilities for planning, operations and administration, and, eventually, a programme of staff development and reassignment.

1. National Education Council

1.1 One of our first tasks was to set up a National Education Council which comprised representatives of all the major partners, including teachers,
students and parents. The National Education Council set up subcommittees which were entrusted with specific assignments. Thus, for example, one subcommittee had to examine a review of the secondary education structure and to make recommendations, after consultations with all parties concerned.

2. Blueprints

2.1 High-level committees were also set up to examine other issues. We ensured the active participation of the key actors in all the committees and other initiatives. 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 served as the basis for an action plan. In order to facilitate implementation, blueprints and policy papers were prepared on a number of themes, namely:

- Blueprint on Physical education and sports in schools (1994)
- Blueprint on Computer education (1992)
- Programme on Project schools (1994)
- Planning for Implementation of quality improvement of project schools (1994)
- School mapping report (1993)

3. School development plans

3.1 All schools – primary and secondary – were requested to prepare their School Development Plans (SDP) as a tool for implementation at their level. I placed a lot of emphasis on the SDP and sensitized heads of schools on its usefulness in helping school to achieve their objectives in a systematic manner and as a mechanism for operationalization of participatory planning
Implementation

and implementation. Each school set up its own School-level Advisory Committee, which was responsible for the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the SDP.

4. Institutional development plans

4.1 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. An 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.

5. Implementation agencies

5.1 Implementation agencies were identified. An example: for the review of examinations, the agency was the Mauritius Examination Syndicate; for distance education, the agency was the Mauritius College of the Air.

6. Steering Committee

6.1 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.

7. Co-ordination

7.1 A Master Plan Co-ordinating Unit (MPCU) 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 implementation agencies. Its main task is to co-ordinate 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.

7.2 A Project Implementation Unit [PIU] has been instituted to manage the implementation of ADB and World Bank 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 and of bid documents. It invites tenders, participates in bid evaluations, prepares and administers 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.

8. Strengthening professional capacity

8.1 One of the most important elements of implementation is the professional capacity of the Ministry and of the related organizations to carry out the various projects within the time schedule. The World Bank provided support for capacity-building and endowed the staff with analytical, management and decision 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) the improvement of the operational linkages with the planning and finance ministries; and
(c) the organization of workshops and training programmes to upgrade the professional skills of the staff.
8.2 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: (1) promotion of science and mathematics teaching; (2) efficiency of language teaching; (3) early childhood education; (4) special education; and (5) management of private sector education.

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

9. Cost and Financing Review Committee

9.1 Many elements in the plan called for additional resources. The implementation of the plan would involve an increase in budgetary spending on education. But finance is not unlimited; government has many other priorities. I was concerned at ensuring value for money in the use of the scarce resources put at our disposal. I convinced my colleagues in government that I would make it a priority to ensure cost-effectiveness and avoid wastage. This initiative coming from the Ministry of Education was well appreciated both by government and the donors. We therefore set up a Committee on Cost and Financing Management in the Ministry. Its objectives were to:

(a) examine the main areas of expenditure of the Ministry with a view to improving cost/effectiveness;

(b) identify ways and means of:

- improving the allocation, control and monitoring of financial resources;
- reducing unit cost by improving efficiency;
- finding extrabudgetary resources for education.
The Committee has, with the help of a foreign expert, produced a plan of action which has been approved in principle by government. In view of their sensitive nature, the measures proposed had to be discussed with all parties concerned before they could be considered for implementation. There is scope for savings and better use of scarce human and physical resources. One measure which was implemented in 1994 concerning the alternative use of surplus primary school inputs due to decline in child population, and optimum utilization of available resources at secondary and post-secondary level, resulted in a saving of US$5 million.

10. Implementation schedule

10.1 An implementation schedule has been worked out. The Policy Action Plan provides the framework for planning the implementation of the policy measures. The procurement and disbursement schedules provide the guidelines for planning the physical aspects of project implementation.

11. Monitoring and evaluation

11.1 Key Monitoring and Evaluation Indicators have been established with the World Bank and other donors. The monitoring and evaluation of project performance was carried out by the implementation agencies, with the MPCU assuming a co-ordinating role. The MPCU is expected to record progress and project performance. Mid-term reviews, in addition to an annual joint Donor-Government review, are undertaken by the government and the donors. In April 1995 a major Master Plan Review Workshop was organized with the participation of all the donors and the local partners. The review was principally meant to evaluate overall progress in the plan and project implementation relative to programme and project objectives; and to identify constraints and bottlenecks by reviewing the adequacy of policies and regulatory framework for the plan. On the basis of the findings and recommendations of the mid-term review, the projects were accordingly modified after proper consultations with government and the donors concerned.
Chapter VI
Lessons to be drawn

1. The lessons drawn are numerous and instructive. In the preparation phase, we found 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 a large extent on teachers, who constitute the essential link with students. Teachers claimed that the Master Plan did not address the issue of salary, which they stated was the main factor of teachers’ motivation. Teachers have persistently asked for a review of their status, which they considered has been downgraded over the years in terms of salary and relativity with other grades. The Master Plan could not address this problem because the whole issue of salaries and conditions of service was not within its jurisdiction. We strategically 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, although they were expecting the Master Plan to fully consider the salary issue.

1. Language issue, revisited

1.1 In a multicultural 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. In addition to English, French, mathematics, and environmental studies, which are compulsory subjects, children in primary schools have the option of taking a third language, commonly called Asian Language (AL). There
are seven such languages and the choice of the third language is made by parents on the basis of their linguistic groupings. Some 70 per cent of primary school children take a third language. AL, however, was not counted for certification or ranking at CPE. In 1981 a pressure group for the promotion of AL succeeded in getting the government to consider the inclusion of AL at CPE. But the then government had to abandon consideration of this issue in the light of serious political conflict within and outside government. Those parents whose children were not studying a third language objected strongly.

In 1983 the matter was raised by the promoters of these languages as an issue during the electoral campaign. In 1984 a Parliamentary Select Committee was set up to examine this issue. In my capacity as Minister of Education, I was elected to chair the Committee. The main political party from the opposition, which had agreed to form part of the Committee, resigned mid-way with the hope of drawing political benefits by not associating itself with the Report. The Committee recommended the inclusion of ancestral languages for certification as from 1987 and, as for ranking, recommended that the Ministry should first introduce a new fifth subject for students not taking a third language in addition to the four compulsory examinable subjects, and then consider AL for ranking in six years’ time. The government approved the recommendations but could not implement the ranking proposal in view of the difficulty faced in introducing the fifth subject. No further action was taken on the issue of ranking.

In 1990 my political party Movement Socialiste Militant (MSM) and the then opposition party Mouvement Militant Mauricien (MMM) formed an electoral agreement and two politically ‘sensitive’ issues were included in the accord. One was the inclusion of Asian languages for ranking at CPE and the other was the reservation of seats for children of Catholic faith (who were not normally taking a third language) in the grant-aided confessional schools. These two issues were of great political interest to the groups concerned and we felt that since both issues were concerned with admission to secondary schools, we should deal with them simultaneously and find lasting
Lessons to be drawn

solutions. In 1991 we contested the General Election with the promise in the electoral manifestos that government would find lasting solutions to these two issues. We won the election by an absolute majority. We set up two Parliamentary Select Committees to deal with each of these issues. This time, I decided not to form part of the Select Committees, to allow them to work independently from the Ministry of Education. By the time the Select Committees submitted their reports the MMM had left the government for other reasons, although it participated in the work of the Committees until the end. The report on the language issue, which recommended inclusion of AL for ranking, was approved unanimously, whereas the one Report on the Confessional schools, which recommended 50 per cent reserved seats for Catholic pupils, was rejected by two out of the nine members. To honour the commitment to the nation taken in its electoral manifesto, the government and the Prime Minister, in particular, decided to go ahead with the implementation of the two reports. The one on the Confessional schools was implemented immediately (1994) and the one on the languages was to be implemented a year later (1995), as recommended by the committee, in view of some technical implications.

In 1995, an important pressure group of parents whose children were not taking a third language came up to contest the legality of the recommendation to include AL for ranking on the grounds that their children were being offered only four subjects, while the others were being offered five subjects. The reaction from the promoters of AL was spontaneous. They contested the implementation of the recommendation of the Select Committee report on reserved seats for Catholic students. Both matters were referred to court. The court judgement on the language issue was delivered a few weeks before the crucial CPE was held. This created turmoil in the country, especially since the other Select Committee’s Report on reserved seats in Confessional schools had already been implemented. The 70 per cent of primary school children who had prepared themselves for the third language were in great despair. The Prime Minister and the government had to take a decision. We were fully conscious of the complex and sensitive political nature
of this situation; but we were in government and we had to find a solution. Government decided to get all the opposition political parties represented in Parliament which were publicly advocating consideration of AL for ranking purposes to assume their responsibility and accordingly proposed an amendment to the Constitution of Mauritius to endorse the recommendations of the two Select Committees’ report. The government was determined to deal with these issues once and for all, as it felt that the case of reserved seats might have a similar fate in court. The opposition did not vote for the amendment. Some Members of Parliament on the government side also did not vote for the Bill, with the result that the government did not secure the three-quarters majority it needed to amend the Constitution. The Prime Minister felt that he had no choice but to refer the matter to the people since it was a commitment taken in the electoral manifesto. A General Election was called within a month. A temporary measure was taken to compensate the children who took AL at the CPE as the examination was being held a few days before the elections. We lost the election badly, partly on this issue and partly on other issues. As for myself, I had intimated to the Prime Minister two years prior to the General Election that for personal reasons I wanted to take a break from active politics and therefore I did not contest the election.

The new government which took office in December 1995 had promised to solve the language problem immediately after the election, but although in power with an absolute majority it has not yet found a solution. It has simply endorsed the temporary compensatory measure that we took. In the meantime the language pressure group is contesting the court judgement on the AL issue at the Privy Council, and the reserved seats in confessional schools issue, in court in Mauritius. The problem is still pending.

Though we can draw many lessons from this situation, I must frankly admit the complex nature of the political judgment. With hindsight, Government should have submitted the two reports to Parliament to debate and appropriately legislate. This could have ensured simultaneous implementation of the two reports.
Lessons to be drawn

I must also say that in the context of the Master Plan exercise, language policy was raised as an issue in the working group for the preparation of the Master Plan. After consultation with government, it was felt that the issue was so politically sensitive that to dwell on it in depth would delay the preparation of the plan and lead to conflict instead of consensus. We therefore decided to limit ourselves to undertaking a study on the teaching of languages in primary schools.

1.2 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, especially in major building projects.

1.3 It was also noted that it is difficult to change attitudes. Long-established practices and institutions were so deeply entrenched in the Mauritian 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. Changing attitudes is a long-term process. In the case of technical and vocational education, we had to improve the perception of people and remove the stigma attached to these subjects.

2. Private tuition: a complex issue

2.1 In the same context, one issue which deserves special consideration is private tuition. This phenomenon has existed in Mauritius since more than a century. In fact as far back as 1911, authorities in the Royal Colleges were deeply concerned about private tuition. The then acting Rector, W.A. Russel, had acknowledged “I quite admit the evil, but I am unable to suggest a satisfactory remedy”.
As Minister of Education I was determined to address the issue. In fact, in the White Paper on Education in 1984, government expressed its determination to find a solution to this problem:

“Government is concerned at the abuse of private tuition, especially in the primary schools”.

Private tuition does not have an autonomous existence. There are many causes for it but the most important one is that it is dependent on the type of society we are living in. Historically in Mauritius we have a competitive society. Access to good secondary schools is based on rank at the Certificate of Primary Examination. We have a shortage of good-standard secondary schools and since parents prefer to send their children to the best schools, they encourage them to take tuition to obtain good results. In the light of the White Paper, government commissioned the University to carry out a comprehensive study on this complex issue. The report drew attention to the fact that private tuition is accepted by about 70 per cent of parents and that any solution to the problem had to take into account the diverse interests involved. The University study raises certain issues relevant to policy but makes no specific recommendations. It also clearly stems from the study that private tuition is such a multi-dimensional problem that its solution will not be found within the confines of one ministry alone.

Private tuition is a live political issue in Mauritius. The matter is raised in Parliament and in the press regularly. In my determination to find a solution to this problem I presented a motion to Parliament in 1988. The debate was lively and interesting but no concrete solutions were proposed to deal with the problem.

Lessons to be drawn

Government has taken a number of measures to limit the abuses of private tuition and to minimize the harm that tuition might cause. Measures taken include:

- private tuition is prohibited for children in standards I-III;
- the syllabi of primary school and the CPE examinations have been revised and continuous assessment has been introduced;
- subject teaching has been introduced at Standard IV in all primary schools;
- the number of hours of private tuition has been limited; and
- parents are being sensitized on the abuses of excessive private tuition.

Since access to good secondary schools was one of the main causes of private tuition at primary level, the Master Plan had proposed as a long-term solution the upgrading of existing private secondary schools and the building of a sufficient number of good state secondary schools in different regions of the country. In fact a number of measures have been taken to upgrade private secondary schools and six new state secondary schools have been built on a regional basis.

Many experts have commented on this problem but no concrete solutions have been proposed. I must, however, admit that so far the problem is still there and it would be interesting to see what new measures my successor would take to deal with this complex issue.

3. Nation building in a plural society

3.1 Another experience which is worth mentioning is the need to consider all the religious, traditional and cultural values and beliefs that prevail in a 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.

3.2 The problem of exclusion 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. The Scheme aims at improving the quality of education in low-performing schools by positive discrimination. The Scheme has given encouraging results so far but this being a very complex issue, we still need to build up our expertise and professional support to eliminate the problem.

3.3 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 co-ordination 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 available. The revision of the Certificate of Primary Examinations (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.
Lessons to be drawn

(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, students and others – should understand what is intended, why and what is expected of them.

(g) People are generally very reluctant to change existing structures, although they agree that there is a need for change. The example of private tuition is illustrative of this resistance to change established practices.

(h) The success of the Master Plan depended also on the seriousness with which we prepared all the documents. The papers were prepared to a well-defined format, with transparency and integrity, and they show the exact situation. In fact, our international partners have highlighted the high quality and standard we maintained all along, from the Master Plan document itself to the documents submitted to donors, the papers prepared for mid-term review. It was also important to make the documents available in good time to enable all participants to bring their effective contribution in the various consultations.

3.4 Another important consideration is that education policies do not always show immediate results. It is only after a number of years that positive effects can be perceived. The inability to show immediate results makes the task unrewarding for drafters of the plan and the political stakeholders, as people cannot appreciate the policies in their right perspectives, 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.
3.5 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 the support of all the local stakeholders and illustrating wide national consensus; it has placed education within the wider social and political context. We succeeded in creating the grand alliance spirit which Jomtien wanted us to achieve and, more importantly, created the feeling of ownership by local and international stakeholders while ensuring that the plan is a Mauritian plan. Another distinguishing feature of this plan is that, unlike other plans for education which have had to be shelved due to lack of means, we succeeded in mobilizing all the financial resources needed to enable its smooth implementation. The new Minister of Education must consider himself fortunate that he inherited a Ministry with a Master Plan which has received both local and international acclaim and which has all the resources needed up to the year 2000 for its realization. Few Ministers of Education in the developing world have such an enviable situation.

(b) The plan provides a framework for action over the short, medium and long term. It ensures continuity and coherence in education policy even after a change of government. In fact in 1990 it was my clear intention to produce a plan which will serve Mauritius and meet challenges to the Year 2000 and beyond. Having served as Minister for eight years, I was fully conscious of the need to have a long-term vision for educational reforms and, at the same time, ensure the availability of resources to bring about the necessary changes. I was genuinely committed to initiating fundamental changes in the education system in my country as I was convinced that this was the surest way for the country to maintain its economic progress. It is interesting to note the following observations following the change of government in December
1995: (i) The newly elected government had no other choice than to continue with the implementation of the plan for various reasons. The plan, in the words of the Director-General of UNESCO, represents the "commitment of the Government of Mauritius to educational development, implying a human-centred development of the people, by the people, for the people". It is interesting to note that the two main political parties in the actual government participated in the preparation exercise. In fact the Labour Party, the main partner in the present coalition government, was in government with my party, the MSM, in 1990 when we started the planning exercise, whereas the other party in the government, the MMM, was a partner in our government from 1990 to 1994, the period when we completed the plan and started its implementation. The present Minister of Education was actively involved, as rector of a private secondary school, in the preparation and implementation at his school level and, also, at the national level, by his participation in national forums and workshops to which he was regularly invited.

(ii) Most of the measures proposed by the new government in its political manifesto are already spelt out in the Master Plan. Thus major programmes for training of teachers, construction of schools, review of curriculum, expanding the tertiary sector, and promoting science, among others, are being implemented without any change. This has ensured continuity and coherence in the sector. The new Minister has also his own vision and own perceptions on many issues. These do not, in all cases, concur with the recommendations of the plan. New proposals that fall outside the Master Plan or require modification of the plan's recommendations have not been readily accepted by the main actors in the education sector. For example, the decision of the new Minister to abolish subject-teaching in primary schools was contested in court by the parent/teacher association of a school. The PTA won its case. The creation of Secondary school management services, the National Open
Learning Agency and the incorporation of the Mauritius Institute of Education with the University of Mauritius, without prior consultations, have raised serious protests from those concerned. Although the new government may not agree to implement each and every recommendation of the plan (the plan was never meant to be a rigid document or to be considered like the Bible – there is provision for annual periodic review in the light of changes taking place in the education sector or in society at large), it is clear that the presence of the plan provides guidelines for action as it has laid down the long-term overall national objectives which comply with the World Charter on Education for All and to which all political parties in Mauritius subscribed. There is also the fact that the plan is being financed by several donors whose criteria for assistance are determined in advance and cannot be changed abruptly in the process. The plan is therefore unavoidable and offers a stabilizing effect following a change of minister or of government.

(c) For the first time, several international organizations have collaborated with the government in the preparation of the plan and have offered very great assistance without any restrictive pre-conditions. In fact, in the agreed minutes of negotiations with the World Bank on the Mauritius Education Sector Development Project, 1993, it is stated:

“There are no conditions of effectiveness, the loan is expected to become effective soon after signature of the Loan Agreement”. 26

In 1995, my colleague, the Minister of Finance, and myself successfully negotiated a further loan of US$16 million to finance tertiary education development – an area where the Bank does not lend easily these days –

Lessons to be drawn

without any conditionality attached. A World Bank spokesman stated that “It is something of an exception”. Expectations of the Bank are that the attainment of the Project objectives will make Mauritius “a financial and technological hub in the Indian Ocean”.

(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 of, and has been used as a model by, international organizations. I was personally invited to share the Mauritian experience at the International Consultative Forum on Education For All held at UNESCO in December 1991.

In his opening address to the Forum the Administrator of UNDP, referring to the Master Plan, stated:

“As you know, Mauritius will be the subject of a special presentation in this meeting. It can serve as an example for other countries because of the quality of its master plan, the clear co-ordination among the Ministries of Finance, Education and Planning, and because of the recent pledging conference, organized by the government, UNDP and UNESCO, that generated close to US$50 million for education for all Mauritians”.27

Jacques Hallak, Director, IIEP, addressing the Mid-Term Review Meeting in 1995, stated “… je l’ai dit tout à l’heure, ce que de nombreux pays en développement du monde entier, notamment en Amérique Centrale, au Moyen Orient et en Asia, et je peux vous dire depuis deux ans, toute l’Afrique observe avec sérieux et grand intérêt et même enthousiasme l’expérience Mauricienne …”.

According to the UNDP Human Development Index (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 ‘Virtuous Circle’ in which worker productivity has risen and triggered increase in real wages, which in turn attracted more investment in human capital. Establishing strong links between growth and human development offers a high pay of”.

The Association for the Development of African Education (ADAE) has sponsored the publication of a case study by Percy Selwyn, National Co-ordinator of the Master Plan Preparation Committee, on the process of education policy formation in Mauritius as part of a series of six case studies on policy formation in Africa. I must here pay tribute to Percy Selwyn, who dedicated himself to the exercise and made a remarkable contribution.

Thus, the plan served not only Mauritius but has been used as a model by other countries. We have the satisfaction of having made a modest contribution to the development of education in the developing world.
Conclusion

1. Personal experience

1.1 The preparation of the plan and the implementation process was not an easy task, but it was a period of constant learning for me. It was exciting and time consuming as much of my time had to be spent in committees, consultations and follow-up. Delegation of some of these responsibilities could have eased the burden, but I considered that personal involvement would illustrate the government’s seriousness of purpose and enlist the support of our partners.

1.2 In my capacity as Minister, the leadership role fell to myself. This facilitated the preparation of the plan as I could act as the link between the Ministry and the Cabinet; give directions to heads of organizations, call for papers, and ask for evaluation and progress reports. I had the possibility of decentralizing activities in order to reduce the effect of cumbersome bureaucratic procedures and ensure speedy action.

1.3 The fact that when we started the preparation of the Master Plan I had been in office as Minister of Education for about eight years had its advantages and drawbacks. I was aware of the shortcomings of the system and of the interests of the partners involved. I was personally acquainted with most of the key people in the sector and could discuss with them openly. Having been involved in politics for a number of years, I was able to maintain contacts with parents, students, interest groups and NGOs and to understand their aspirations and demands.
1.4 But my leadership role in the Master Plan preparation and implementation had its drawbacks. Since I was also a member of a political party, political opponents personalized the exercise and tried to discredit the plan. The merits of the plan were often overlooked, although international organizations publicly expressed their appreciation of our efforts. Political debates on highly sensitive issues, such as language teaching and secularism in education, increased the complexity of these issues, making rational and dispassionate solutions impossible.

1.5 The exercise is a test, a challenge for policy-makers, with much satisfaction and many 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, with the ability to ask for clarifications from more knowledgeable people. The exercise demands a great degree of resilience and patience. Every effort should be made to motivate the participation of others, to reinforce their self-confidence and to create mutual respect and trust.

1.6 Despite difficulties, the Master Plan exercise was a fruitful exercise, full of positive teachings. Frustrations have been outweighed by the satisfaction of having successfully brought together all the partners in the education sector in the interest of the nation. We said in the White Paper on Education in 1994: “Let us always remember that in education, we are dealing with the future prosperity and even the survival of our nation. The future lives of our children should unite us rather than divide us”.

1.7 The long-term education strategy also provides satisfaction because it serves as a basis for action to my successor. It is being used as a reference by other countries. But one of the most important causes of satisfaction is the commitment shown by all the partners in education. Without the participation of all those involved in education – the teachers, parents, students, education authorities, heads of schools, private educational institutions, NGOs,
the members of the government, among many others, we could not have produced the Master Plan for Education. Their dedication and sense of responsibility deserves our deep-hearted appreciation. I am thankful to them for their support and their active interest in education. They showed a genuine concern for the welfare of children and for the future progress of our country. It gave each one the opportunity to bring his or her humble share to the task of nation building and to the advancement of our country.

1.8 I must also express my admiration at the exemplary support and co-operation we received from those donors. I would have wished that some more donors would have associated with us. The main reason given for not participating was that Mauritius was no longer eligible for assistance because of its high per capita income. I understand this argument but I feel that it amounts to a tax on success. The present approach of donors which contrasts sharply with that under the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the 1980s is one of dialogue and partnership. This is illustrated by the Association for the Development of African Education (DAE) Forum initiative. The DAE is an organization which groups together African Ministers of Education and all donors to African Education. I had the opportunity to serve as Chairman of the DAE Caucus of African Ministers of Education and as member of the Steering Committee for four years. DAE has greatly contributed to the new and healthy relationship of partners in development.

1.9 In conclusion, I am grateful to the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) for commissioning this publication, thereby giving me the opportunity again to share the experiences of the Master Plan with members of the international community. In this context, I am personally thankful to Jacques Hallak, the Director of the Institute, for this laudable initiative, and to Bikas Sanyal, Senior Adviser, IIEP, for his valuable collaboration.
### Appendix I
Basic country data 1991 and latest year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Land area</td>
<td>1,870 km²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>1,084,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNP per capita</td>
<td>US$2,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real growth rate</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual average growth rate</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP at market prices</td>
<td>US$2,697</td>
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<tr>
<td>Population density</td>
<td>525 km²</td>
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<tr>
<td>Population growth rate</td>
<td>1.11%</td>
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**Population distribution**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>56%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infant mortality rate</td>
<td>18.6/1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crude birth rate</td>
<td>20.7/1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crude death rate</td>
<td>6.6/1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life expectancy at birth</td>
<td>66 years (male)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>73 years (female)</td>
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### Net school enrolment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1983</th>
<th>1995</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-primary</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult literacy rate</td>
<td></td>
<td>85%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Examinations Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1983</th>
<th>1995</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CPE</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Certificate</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher School Certificate</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Budgets

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rs517 million</td>
<td>Rs2.064 billion</td>
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