



RODRIGUES REGIONAL ASSEMBLY CHIEF COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

Memorandum to the newly elected
Government of Mauritius

Port Mathurin, May 2010.



INTRODUCTION

This memorandum is being submitted to the newly elected national government in Mauritius by the Chief Commissioner's Office on behalf of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly (RRA). The purpose of this document is to present to the new national executive in Mauritius the context and scope of certain public issues in Rodrigues and to make proposals for consideration. Rodrigues has an autonomous status within the Republic of Mauritius since 2002. It is necessary to adopt a new positive approach towards Rodrigues as well as the other outer islands if geographical integration and the concept of an archipelago state is to be promoted. It is natural and normal that more focus is on Mauritius, being the main and largest island, but it is essential to ensure that the rest of the territory is not neglected, is listened to and is integrated in the national development processes. It is also essential, in the case of Rodrigues to promote, respect and further the decentralisation of government process which has been undertaken since 2002.

1. Budgetary Approach and Needs

Context:

Since 2002 the Rodrigues Regional Assembly is responsible for presenting and adopting a regional budget proposal for matters for which it is responsible in Rodrigues. The budget proposals are introduced in the Regional Assembly each year before the 30th September and when approved are transmitted to the Minister for Rodrigues before the 15th of October (in the new PBB setup). This budget has its recurrent part and its capital part. Cabinet thereafter gives its approval of the budget. Normally the quantum of financial resources allocated to Rodrigues is notified well in advance by the Ministry of Finance to the Chief Commissioner. Section 46 of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act 2001 (RRA Act 2001) provides that Cabinet shall give due consideration to a series of criteria to ensure a fair allocation of budgetary resources to Rodrigues. These are very important legal provisos which should not be overseen.

Since 2005, the capital budgetary allocation to Rodrigues has been reduced or kept the same whereas the costs of public administration and capital projects have increased.

RRA - REALISED BUDGET			
YEAR	CAPITAL (Rs M)	RECURRENT (Rs M)	TOTAL (Rs M)
2002-2003	267	524	791
2003-2004	427	755	1182
2004-2005	421	822	1243
2005-2006	358	882	1240
2006-2007	274	862	1136
2007-2008	393	939	1332
2008-209	326	1,135	1461
July-Dec 2009	179	626	805
2010	327	1183	1510



Proposal:

- That there is an urgent reconsideration of the financial resources allocated to Rodrigues, mainly to enable completion of major projects in the roads, infrastructure and water sectors. A minimum capital budget of Rs 600 million annually should be ensured over the next five years.

2. Airport Development

Context:

The first airport runway in Rodrigues was constructed in 1978 to cater for Twin Otter flights. In 2002, the runway was extended to 1,280m long to cater for ATR Flights. In the absence of a longer runway, the tourism sector is not developing as expected and on the other hand, Air Mauritius has over the past few years had to increase its air tickets fare from some Rs 3,600 to Rs 8,000 presently. The high cost per seat is also having a direct negative impact in movements between Rodrigues Island and Mauritius with reduced mobility of citizens from both Rodrigues and Mauritius, contrary to the spirit of continuity of territory of the Republic of Mauritius.

The Sir Gaetan Duval airport development project ranks among one of the priority projects of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly (RRA). The cost of the new proposed runway is expected to be around Rs 1.4 Billion. In fact, the airport bottleneck is considered as one of the main factors constraining the economic development of Rodrigues island. A longer runway is expected to:

- (i) Enable the landing of larger planes, thereby a decrease in the costs of air tickets;
- (ii) Promote regional flights in Rodrigues;
- (iii) Attract more tourists to Rodrigues; and
- (iv) Encourage many of the prospective promoters to invest in their hotel development projects.

With the support of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Empowerment and the World Bank, the RRA has in February 2010 asked for Expression of Interests from Consultants for conducting a feasibility study for the new runway.

Proposal:

- The RRA requests the Central Government to support the financing of the new runway project.
- That Government continues to support the local tourism industry through the air ticket promotional package already introduced and which has produced significant results in terms of tourism arrivals.



3. Development of the Port at Port Mathurin and Fishing Port at Oyster Bay

Context :

The existing quay at Port Mathurin is only 130 m long with a water depth of only 7.6 m ACD. The quay was constructed in 1977 and was not designed to handle containers. In 1993, Government commissioned Sir Alexander Gibb & Partners to carry out the Port Master Plan of Port Mathurin. One of the recommendations of the Master Plan was to construct a new quay of about 170 m long perpendicular to the existing quay. A new updated Port Master Plan has been prepared by the Mauritius Ports Authority (MPA) and some of its recommendations are being implemented for example, desilting works at Port Mathurin – Pointe Monier and the proposed dredging and widening of the channel from Pointe Monier to Oyster Bay to facilitate the movement of boats and also provide safe berthing facilities for fishing boats.

The Port Master Plan proposes new quay which will have a length of 170 m and a water depth of 9 m ACD and would be able to accommodate vessels of up to 13,000 DWT. The development will enable Port Mathurin to have two quays instead of one and can therefore cater for the traffic up to year 2030 and above and also develop tourism avenues such as cruise vessels. The estimated cost of the new quay is Rs 250 m which will include additional equipment such as tugs and cargo handling gears to ensure safe berthing of vessels and handling of goods.

Proposal:

- The RRA requests the Central Government to go ahead with the Port Master Plan and the construction of the new quay and new berthing facilities, all estimated at some Rs 250 Million.

4. Water reforms

Context:

Water supply deficiency is a long outstanding problem in Rodrigues. Since 2006, the Regional Executive has embarked into reforms in the sector which ultimately will lead to a revised institutional framework for water management. A Rodrigues Water Company has been set up by the RRA to take over the whole water network in Rodrigues. At the same time, the Regional Executive has given much attention to the revision of the physical aspects of the issue; we have invested much in new water infrastructure but the bulk of what is needed is still lacking. In the reforms we are supported by several international partners such as the UNDP, the DCP-EU and the AFD. The issue is to move from an archaic government labour managed water network to one which is responsive to the challenging needs of the population at large in terms of efficient water supply.



Proposal:

- That Central Government support the reform initiatives in financial, technical and legal terms and facilitates the access to international assistance that is being proposed in the sector.
- That Government supports the following projects: desalination plants, construction of dams and reservoirs such as Pistaches Dam and new water distribution networks.

5. RRA Act Consolidation and continued application – Reinforcement of Autonomy

Context:

A draft amendment bill was submitted by Mr. R. AHNEE in March 2005 to the Ministry of Rodrigues for vetting by the State Law Office and its eventual introduction into the National Assembly but same has not been adopted yet.

Since the coming into force of the RRA Act 2001, the institutions of the autonomy of Rodrigues have been tested in practice. Many other changes have also been brought in other laws and have an impact on the RRA Act 2001.

There a number of practical amendments that needs to be brought to the RRA Act. There also other proposals for amendments that will facilitate the internal working of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly.

The Rodrigues Regional Assembly should for example be allowed to have its own governmental agencies such as in the water sector. These will facilitate the delivery of certain essential services to the population in Rodrigues.

Proposal:

- To empower the Rodrigues Regional Assembly to set up Agencies with statutory powers and under the control of the Executive Council
- To provide for consultation between the Public Service Commission, the Prime Minister and the Chief Commissioner before appointment of Departmental Heads (Administrative Heads of Commissions of the RRA)

6. Communications – Fibre Optic Cable to enhance ICT development

Context:

One of the major restrictions to the development of the ICT sector in Rodrigues is connectivity. Rodrigues is remotely located by nature but this remoteness can be eliminated through rapid communication and connectivity. Internet in Rodrigues was done through dial-up until 2006 when ADSL 128Kb was provided in some areas.

Internet & bandwidth connection to Rodrigues is actually done through satellite. Present satellite capacity connectivity to Rodrigues by Emtel and Mauritius Telecom is only around 10 Mbps combined, providing internet and bandwidth of only 100Kbs in Rodrigues and in only some 20% of the island. Higher capacity and speed is not possible on satellite given its high costs, thus the need for connection through Fibre Optic Cable. The possibility of



connecting Rodrigues to Mauritius through Fibre Optic Cable within the LION project of Mauritius Telecom has been proposed but same was not retained by Mauritius Telecom. The RRA is also working with the Ministry of Information Technology and the Indian Ocean Commission on the SEGANET Indian Ocean inter-island connection project, however, Rodrigues is part of only the second phase of this project and its implementation would not materialize before the year 2020 and above.

The Ministry of Information Technology and the RRA in an exercise carried out last year has estimated the cost of connecting Rodrigues Island to Mauritius via a Fibre Optic Cable to be around Rs 420 Million (US\$ 13 million). The project will not only connect people of Rodrigues to Mauritius and to the global world in this information age but also attract investments to Rodrigues in the field of ICT, call centres, business process outsourcing, disaster recovery centres, etc which would be a major area for employment creation for the island.

Proposal:

- The RRA requests the Central Government to support and implement the project of connecting Rodrigues Island to Mauritius via a Fibre Optic Cable which will cost to the tune of Rs 420 Million (US\$ 13 million).

7. Local Television

Context:

In 2009, digital television was introduced in Rodrigues at the initiative of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly with the support of Central Government. Formerly only MBC1 was being retransmitted in the island from satellite signals received from Mauritius.

The population of Rodrigues is generally satisfied with the television programmes being retransmitted in Rodrigues. There is, however, a wish that there is more Rodriguan content during specific time frames of the day or the week. With the setting up of the RRA, regional government activities and achievements are not enough shown and put into light. Moreover, specific issues pertaining to societal aspects in Rodrigues are not enough treated. People in Rodrigues have the impression that they are watching a sort of foreign television which is not enough related to them in content.

When the MBC does present Rodrigues related news/programmes on the television it is some times weeks after the event and there is not enough focus on important issues and aspects.

In 2007 the RRA, after consultation with the MBC, financed the acquisition of equipment to enable the production of television programmes in Rodrigues which were meant for retransmission in Rodrigues. The equipment was installed in Rodrigues but was shortly returned to Mauritius and the MBC refunded the cost to the RRA.

Proposal:

- That the MBC and the RRA develops a partnership for the creation of audiovisual production capacities locally in Rodrigues. This shall lead to the local production of television programmes such as regular local news bulletin and other thematic programmes for diffusion by the MBC television in Rodrigues.



- This shall ultimately lead to the creation of a local television channel for Rodrigues managed by the MBC and the RRA.

8. Social Development

The poverty situation in Rodrigues can be deducted from the estimates of the CSO presented below:-

A summary result for the Island of Rodrigues, HBS 2006/07

	2006/07
Estimated total number of households	10,000
Poverty line - 'half median monthly household income per adult equivalent'	Rs 2,716
Estimated number of households living below poverty line	1,790
Proportion of households living below poverty line	17.9 %

Source: CSO, Ministry of Finance and Economic Empowerment

The following programmes are ongoing:-

- (a) The social safety net of the Commission for Social Security which provides Social Security benefits to the vulnerable groups;
- (b) The Trust fund for the Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups is providing support to the ultra poor by providing them with basic amenities and low cost housing and micro credit;
- (c) The Empowerment Foundation has set an office in Rodrigues and is supporting projects. The intervention include training of artisans, micro credit for the promotion of IGAs among fishermen and the unemployed, work attachment programme for the unemployed ;
- (d) The poverty alleviation programme funded under the Decentralised Programme (DCP); and
- (e) The special programme of the NGOs and a multitude of charitable institutions

Though the relative poverty rates been high in Rodrigues over the past years we observe that the situation might have degraded recently particularly in view of the following measures: (a) The reduction in the Bad Weather Allowance (BWA) payable to lagoon fishermen; (b) the number of unemployed has increased with new entrants in the labour market; (c) many infrastructure projects such as road construction has been completed; and (d) the termination of the training of the unemployed programme which has aggravated the poverty situation



Consequently, many persons are being compelled to migrate to the main island in search of employment leaving behind a breakdown of the family system. The above can be verified by the increase in the number of persons who are now eligible for UHR and Social aid.

Proposal:

- The need for increased budgetary consideration has been stressed above. Government should review its assistance through the Empowerment Programme and the Trust Fund for Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups in Rodrigues to ensure a more efficient delivery of outputs towards the most vulnerable groups in a coordinated approach.

9. Price of subsidised Rice and Flour

Context:

Since many years prior to 2006, rice and flour (two basic essential commodities) were sold in Rodrigues at the same prices as in Mauritius. As from 3 July 2006, the subsidy provided to the State Trading Corporation (STC) to cover freight charges and the different costs involved in shipment/handling/unloading of rice and flour from Mauritius to Rodrigues have been abolished by Central Government as a result of which, the prices of rice and flour are higher in Rodrigues than in Mauritius. This has also resulted in the price of bread to increase and be higher in Rodrigues. The relevant prices are as follows:

	Price per ½ kg – Prior to 3 rd July 2006	Price Per ½ Kg - Since 3 rd July 2006		
	(Rodrigues & Mauritius)	Rodrigues	Mauritius	Difference
Rice (Ration Rice)	Rs 3.50	Rs 6.05	Rs 5.40	Rs 0.65
Flour (Whole Wheat Flour)	Rs 3.50	Rs 6.10	Rs 5.30	Rs 0.80

Proposal:

- The RRA requests that the price of these two above basic essential commodities be at par with Mauritius. The estimated cost of subsidizing the above to be sold at the same price in Rodrigues as in Mauritius is estimated to be around Rs 6 Million.

10. Tendering procedures

Context:

With the coming into force of the new Public Procurement Act, many changes have been brought to the tendering procedures to be followed by governmental institutions like the RRA. Some institutions, even District Councils, may evaluate and award contracts by



themselves according to established criteria and there is no need to go through the approval of the Central Procurement Office (CPO) for projects up to a maximum cost of Rs 50 million. This threshold for the RRA is only Rs 15 million, leading to many delays in awards of contracts and project implementation.

Proposal:

- That the threshold for projects not requiring CPO approval be raised to Rs 50 million for the Rodrigues Regional Assembly.

11. Duty Free Island and Fiscal concessions

Context:

Up to 2005, Rodrigues enjoyed the status of a duty free zone. When Mauritius also became a duty free island in 2005, this adversely affected the tourism sector. Though Rodrigues is still a duty free island today, the comparative advantage vis-à-vis Mauritius has been lost.

As enumerated in Section 46 of the RRA Act, Rodrigues needs special attention to enable it to create accelerated development especially in light of the delay accumulated over the past few years by Rodrigues in terms of development. Considering Rodrigues' isolation from the principal national growth centres, the absence of the multiplier effect of expenditures and investments and the restricted opportunities for employment, there is need for special fiscal concessions for Rodrigues Island in order to attract investments, from Mauritius and through Foreign Direct Investments, and create employment. The fiscal concessions for Rodrigues should be in addition to those already provided in Mauritius by the Board of Investment so that investors are attracted to invest and do business via Rodrigues. Fiscal measures for Rodrigues may include duty free extension for products imported from Mauritius, Rodrigues as a freeport zone for products imported from abroad and processed/exported to Mauritius etc.

Proposal:

- That Government comes forward with additional fiscal measures for Rodrigues within a special concession package to attract investments from Mauritius and through Foreign Direct Investments to Rodrigues to enable accelerated development of the island and employment creation.

12. Staffing issues at the RRA

Context:

The Rodrigues Administration was originally staffed to undertake duties of a local authority, however, with the advent of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly and the autonomous status enjoyed in various sectors, the existing organization structure of the RRA is no more able to deliver with the increased responsibilities and to meet RRA's objectives effectively in accordance with the laws and regulations. In several sections, offices are manned by one person and several other persons are being paid adhoc allowances for performing higher



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duties given the required posts are not created and filled. Many departments are facing difficulties in providing the government services.

There is therefore urgent need for proper staffing of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly in view of its increased responsibilities and importance of RRA to bringing development on the island. There are presently 1,823 vacancies on an establishment of about 4,400 posts. The RRA has not been able to fill many of these vacancies over the last few years due to financial limitations set by the Ministry of Finance. As a result, there is a gradual deterioration in the services provided by government departments not understating the effect on the morale of the public servants. A manpower assessment exercise which was mandated via the Ministry of Civil Service Affairs since long but is still unfinished.

Proposal:

- The RRA requests that urgent attention be given and funds be allocated by the Ministry of Finance for enabling filling of new and vacant posts proposed in the RRA establishment. The filling of some 1,000 posts is urgently required immediately and it is proposed that the Central Government approves same during the budgetary discussions to be held between the RRA and the Ministry of Finance in August 2010.

13. Understanding and Partnership – Rodrigues’ different context and set up

Context:

Mauritius and Rodrigues are two islands in the State. The other islands are Agalega and Saint Brandon. The Republic of Mauritius has claims of sovereignty on the Chagos Archipelago and Tromelin islands. There is need to better understand the context, ethnic and cultural set up of each of these islands, Rodrigues being the second largest in size and population, with a view to promote geo-political unity within the territory of the nation. The Government of “Mauritius” should be understood to be not only and solely the Government of Mauritius only, but the Government of that archipelago state that we constitute.

As a matter of fact, as has already been the case in the past, the State should do everything to promote the well being of its entire people in all our islands. Questions of costs and feasibility should not prevent people to have access to basic services and modern facilities. There is need for positive discrimination towards Rodrigues and Outer Islands. Even though Rodrigues and Outer Islands do not generate fiscal revenue for government funds like mainland Mauritius, it is believed that there is a constitutional duty of care towards those citizens living in these islands and that they should not be left on the roadsides of progress because they do not live in the mainland.

Since 2006 we are working for twinning with many international regional entities without success. We have not had the necessary green light from the relevant authorities.

Proposal:

- That Central Government promotes, both nationally and internationally, the concept of an “archipelago state”, Mauritius being the mainland, Rodrigues, Agalega and



Saint Brandon being outer islands. This concerns diplomatic, cooperation and tourism promotion issues.

- That the national figures of the State visit Rodrigues (and Other Outer Islands) regularly and have regular dialogue and discussions with their representatives.
- That persons from Rodrigues be considered for membership of parastatal bodies, government companies and diplomatic representations.
- That avenues for international cooperation between Rodrigues and foreign governmental and non governmental institutions be facilitated

14. Representation at the level of the National Assembly and membership of Cabinet

Context:

The Constitution provides that there shall be two representatives from Rodrigues in the National Assembly. Rodrigues has a higher number of voters than some constituencies in Mauritius. It is felt that there should be parity and that Rodrigues as a constituency, shall have the same number of members of parliament as those constituencies of Mauritius.

With the advent of autonomy, all local powers have been devolved upon the RRA. Formerly all these issues were concentrated in the hands of a Minister for Rodrigues, who in a certain manner, dealt with all matters of public administration in Rodrigues. He had an office in Port Mathurin and administered the whole island and participated in Cabinet meetings.

Now with the autonomy, there is a Chief Commissioner, a Deputy Chief Commissioner and five other Commissioners who share among them the areas of responsibilities of the RRA. The Minister for Rodrigues does not have a direct day to day involvement in the local public affairs of Rodrigues.

Section 39 of the RRA Act 2001 provides that the Prime Minister may invite the Chief Commissioner to a meeting of Cabinet for the latter to apprise Cabinet of decisions taken by the RRA or to represent the interests of Rodrigues. The will of the legislator in 2001 at the time of the passing of the RRA Act was that the voice of Rodrigues should be heard in Cabinet when needed and also that Cabinet may wish to question and discuss with the Chief Commissioner as representative of the RRA on relevant issues.

This participation of the Chief Commissioner would have helped solve many issues and prevent certain unnecessary misunderstandings and conflicts. This participation is also only occasional, when invited by the Prime Minister, and not permanent.

Though not binding according to the law, the provision to invite the Chief Commissioner to participate in a Cabinet meeting has never been used.

As regards the post of Minister for Rodrigues, it is again believed that this should be allocated to an MP from Rodrigues. This shall be very helpful where the provision to invite the Chief Commissioner in Cabinet is not put in practice. Also, even where the Chief Commissioner is invited it is believed that there shall be a permanent voice of Rodrigues in Cabinet to make a follow up on all the issues being treated.

Proposal:

- That Rodrigues be allocated the same number of MPs as the constituencies of Mauritius when electoral reforms are undertaken.



- That the already existing legal provision to invite the Chief Commissioner in Cabinet be put into practice at least once every quarter and whenever issues have an impact on Rodrigues are being dealt with.
- That an elected MP from Rodrigues be appointed Minister for Rodrigues henceforth.

15. Rodrigues as a specific entity for regional sports events

Context:

Rodrigues has always excelled in arts and sports and numerous sportsmen and sportswomen have had excellent performances at the national and international levels. The Rodrigues Regional Assembly is committed to continue its efforts in sports. When Rodrigues' sportsmen participate in international events such as the Olympics they participate in the national teams of Mauritius. However, at the Regional level, such as at the level of the Indian Ocean Island Games, there is the wish that Rodrigues participates as an island such as Mayotte and Reunion in the CJSOI games, with separate teams in disciplines where that is possible.

Proposal:

- That Rodrigues participates in Regional sports events as an island

16. Health cadre and health modernisation

Context:

Many patients in Rodrigues don't have access to the necessary specialist doctors on a satisfactory basis and there is a lack of modern medical equipment to meet the needs of the population. The RRA has invested through its budget in many health projects including a new maternity ward. There is also the already approved new Specialised Medical Care Unit on which we are working.

We lack doctors and specialists. Some of them at times are not interested to work in Rodrigues. Many patients have to undergo medical transfer in difficult conditions to mainland Mauritius.

Proposals:

- That Central Government, through the Ministry of Health, better assists Rodrigues in the above mentioned health related issues.
- That doctors and other medical staff are recruited on the Rodrigues Establishment with a view to promote the recruitment of newly trained local and Rodrigues based doctors.
- That the possibility of having a "plane ambulance" for the transfer of difficult cases to and from Mauritius from Rodrigues and the Outer Islands.



17. Land Reforms – transferring residential state lands to tenants.

Context:

Mostly all lands in Rodrigues are state lands. Families and individuals are allocated small portions of state lands on lease for residential purposes. They pay a small yearly rental and the lease is for an initial period of 20 years. There are about 7000 residential leases in Rodrigues.

The Regional Executive has proposed that under certain criteria (e.g. elapsed duration of lease, family situation, income etc) that the residential state lands be transferred to the lessee on the same principle as in the case of CHA estates. This will empower people and reduce the burden of administration of these leases for the RRA.

Land is an area of responsibility devolved to the RRA. A Select Committee on State Lands at the Regional Assembly is working on the proposals and its report will be submitted soon.

Proposal:

- That Central Government supports the land reforms proposed and adopts the necessary legal amendments necessary to implement the measure.