

Address of Hon (Mrs.) Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun, GCSK

Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science & Technology

Opening Ceremony of Huawei's

'Seeds for the Future Sky' Program

Monday 12th October 2020

Hennessy Park Hotel

Protocol

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very good morning to You All!

I remember having had the same opportunity to address the participants of the ***Seeds for the Future Program 2019*** which was held in June 2019 at the University of Mauritius on the occasion of the ICT Competition Award Ceremony.

A selected group of young undergraduates had the opportunity, then, to participate in this Program.

Today, I am indeed honored again to be part of the global flagship CSR program of Huawei, Seeds ***for the future*** which is a laudable initiative and a great example of collaboration of global players in the ICT Industry in the fostering of local ICT talents, the enhancement of knowledge transfer, as well as the promotion of a better understanding and interest in ICT sector.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The most unexpected and unprecedeted event of our lifetime that has globally hit humanity has demonstrated the truth of an African proverb that says that, when you lift one end of the stick, you also lift the other end.

Yes, the Covid 19 pandemic has hit us all where it hurts the most—but it has also demonstrated the resilience of humanity as a whole.

Indeed, the whole world has never before experienced the sharp shutdown of the type we are living through today. No one is spared from the effects of COVID 19. We are all faced with innumerable unprecedeted challenges posed by this pandemic. It is practically impossible, at this difficult moment, to say with any degree of certainty just how long it will take to end. One thing is clear, though - permanent and complete wiping out of this plague is not imminent!

The education sector which is one of the most essential services to humanity has equally been greatly affected by this pandemic. Globally, more than 1.5 billion students from pre-primary through to university-level, have had to stop attending schools and universities. This has resulted in the interruption of classroom-based learning for indefinite periods of time in a number of countries.

But education systems the world over never took the buffeting lying down.

As soon as Mauritius was forced to lockdown for the safety of its Citizens and to prevent any imported cases from spreading among our population, my Ministry came up with a whole package of innovative and makeshift interventions with a strong dependability upon ICT to ensure continuity of learning at all levels. We immediately shifted to online and remote learning with the use of the Information and Telecommunication technologies such as the Internet, Wi-Fi networks as well as educational resources available on online repositories. Indeed, a number of curriculum-linked resources for teaching and learning were made available through free access to the websites of world class education institutions such as Cambridge and Oxford Universities. Lessons were broadcasted on

four TV Learning Channels, and teachers carried out online classes using tools such as Google Classroom, Microsoft Team, Zoom and Skype.

Mauritius is among one of the few countries to have reopened their schools and universities. Nevertheless, like any other country, we are fully aware of the danger and risk of any future resurgence and hence the need to select innovative remote teaching modalities that blend face-to-face teaching to ensure that all our learners do not suffer from future school closures, if such a situation does arise.

My Ministry has thus embarked on the process of building our resilience so that we are prepared to adapt to existing distance learning programs and online platforms. This has become essential for the continued provision of education for all.

But the foundation had already been laid beforehand.

Thus, the implementation of the Early Digital Learning Program in all primary schools has now reached an advanced stage. Students of grades 1 to 4 have access to advanced technology learning – with the use of tablets and ancillary ICT equipment and digital interactive contents which facilitate learning and teaching.

Also, we have already equipped all State owned and Grant Aided primary schools with Internet facilities. We are in the process of implementing a similar project in all secondary schools across the Island. The Islands of Rodrigues and Agalega are also taken on board in all our projects.

Ladies and Gentlemen, We have learnt from previous disaster and pandemic cases how these can have long term, even lifelong effects on humanity.

One must acknowledge the importance of advanced ICT and the need for appropriate skills and resources that are required to mitigate the challenges posed by pandemics and natural disasters which impact on the lives of people anywhere in the world.

Times are tough! We must build up our capacity for resilience for the promise of a better tomorrow. If the future of our kids and youths' productivity is curtailed, the loss to our productive capacity tomorrow will be far worse than what we are experiencing today.

We have therefore to intervene in an unprecedented fashion to support the continued growth and learning of our kids and youths.

Although we have implemented a number of measures, in the context of our "**ICT enabled Education Policy**" - like a number of countries throughout the world, we are required to further build the skills of our youth and our workers not only to ensure our preparedness in the field of education but in the broader sphere of economic activities.

Hence the need to build the skills of our precious human capital in the most demanded field today – the ICT sector.

In this context, programs such as today's Huawei's ***Seeds for the Future Programme*** have become more and more important.

I would like to congratulate the nominated students for this program.

Unfortunately, due to COVID 19, you will not be able to experience this program in the usual locations. But fortunately, though, ICT and virtual reality will make it possible for you to participate in the Program. I note that this is a 5-day online program, including the ICT related 6.5 hours of compulsory courses, live streamed sessions and free access to additional resources for self-learning about Chinese culture. The proposed program thus encapsulates the study of cutting-edge technologies such as 5G, AI, cloud computing aims at equipping the participants with ICT knowledge and which is crucial for your future career advancements.

As you are our next generation to carry the responsibility of enhancing ICT use in all the spheres of the economy, I am very positive that this program, will bring the opportunity for you and will definitely open new avenues.

It is starting as a *seed* - like the Baobab tree, we can expect it to grow into a huge Tree of Knowledge and Skills, not only for each one of you here who are having this opportunity but also for our future generations.

As per this Program's motto:

Let's sow the seeds of hope together!

Once again, Thank You Huawei for giving such an opportunity to our undergraduates.

And thank you, Excellency, for facilitating the process.

We look forward to further collaboration.

Thank You