

Address by Hon (Mrs) L.D. DOOKUN LUCHOOMUN
Minister of Education & Human Resources, Tertiary Education
and Scientific Research

Meeting with ICT Support Officers
Thursday 7th January 2016

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning

I am glad to be here today to meet with you all, ICT Support Officers. I am especially pleased because I see you as one of the most important stakeholders of the Primary Education system, engaged as you will be in facilitating the day – to – day interaction of our school children with the world of ICT.

At the very outset, allow me to wish you and, through you, your families, the very best for this New Year 2016.

This is also a year that, with your support, will be a watershed, a defining year for the Education system.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you are all well aware, last year, we laid the foundations on which we want to construct the edifice of the Nine Years of Continuous Basic Education. This year we embark on the implementation phase and I am very pleased that, as part of the entire process, we are now introducing ICT as a taught subject in our primary schools.

The purpose is quite clear. We want **all** our children, no matter what their background, no matter what their socio-economic status, to have a working familiarity with the world of ICT.

I would like you to see this introduction of teaching of ICT from a two –fold perspective.

In the first place, you will have to see this from the **scholastic perspective**.

Research has shown that the use of ICT in the classroom has a number of benefits. It encourages pupils to develop their analytical skills as well as some writing skills like spelling, grammar, punctuation, editing and re-drafting.

It is also important to remember that independent learning becomes a reality through the creation of projects and portfolios while pupils' self- confidence and self-esteem are boosted.

I must equally mention that ICT develops the ability for learners to work in teams. In fact, collaborative learning itself has been seen as one of the succinct ways of reducing social disparities between pupils. Schools then become, in a genuinely effective manner, the social levellers we want them to be.

Ladies and gentlemen, these above are the traits and characteristics we want to see our children develop from an early age.

Hence, the Introduction of the Non-Core subjects, including ICT, the Arts, Health and PE, Civic and Values Education and Communication Skills all form part of our offer in grooming pupils and students who are responsible, resilient and fit to continue to grow and function efficiently and responsibly in an increasingly digitized environment.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I stated earlier that the introduction of the teaching of ICT must be seen from a two –fold perspective.

Let me come to the second one now.

The Rt Hon Prime Minister, during his Message to the Nation on the occasion of New Year's Day 2016, emphasized that Mauritius is set to grow as a knowledge-oriented nation through ICT.

This evolution of the country in ICT isn't just a statement: it is a reality backed by figures.

Statistics Mauritius has pointed out that the ICT Development Index (IDI) of the country, which ranges from 0 (lowest ICT development) to 10 (highest ICT development), improved from 5.34 to 5.67.

According to the International Telecommunication Union, Mauritius ranks 70th, the highest in Africa, on the ICT Development Index (IDI) list, while Denmark, with an IDI of 8.86, ranks first. The penetration of the mobile technology in our households is also growing, with 130 mobile phones for every 100 inhabitants.

These figures shape the contours of Mauritius as a digitally expanding nation. ICT has become the means of building a smart economy, of providing jobs and positioning Mauritius as a leader in Africa and a hub of innovation. The prerequisite is therefore our ability to sustain the development of the much-needed human capital.

You will thus appreciate, dear ICT Support Officers, that you are a strong contributor in building this smart economy of the future in line with Government's vision.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me inform you that my Ministry is already working with the PRB to ensure that the post of ICT Support Officer is strengthened such that you can fulfil a dual obligation—that of teaching the rudiments of ICT and also supporting schools in their ever growing needs relating to the transactional usage of technology.

Thus, while ICT will be taught as a subject, it will also continue to be used in the classroom through digital interactive screen/projectors. Our objective is to deliver a modern education to our pupils and this will also depend upon the creation of complementary methods of teaching ICT to all children in a well structured environment.

As key players in this new ecosystem, I know I can rely upon you in assisting the technology deployment in schools. Rest assured that my Ministry and the MIE will continue to provide training for you on the technical and pedagogical aspects of this effective delivery of education to our children.

I must drive home the fact that the introduction of ICT as a non-core subject in Primary schools is not merely about dishing out technology. Rather, we have to ensure that content providers, the infrastructure for delivery and assessment, smarter classrooms, trained teachers, Head Teachers and the entire ICT support system all methodically contribute to the success and growth of an integrated approach to learning in Education.

Dear ICT Support Officers,

As ICT gains momentum in our schools, I must also point out that this groundswell of interest unfortunately comes with built-in risks.

Our children are now more and more likely to be exposed to digital predation. I therefore expect you, as responsible persons, to sensitize your pupils on the various aspects of vulnerability that may result from their increased exposure to the Internet, be that through smart TVs, smartphones or their PCs. As parents and, more so, as teachers, we have a duty to care for them, provide for their educational development and guard them against harmful and negative influences in the digital world.

Already, as you know, the cyberspace is being used as a means to indoctrinate and initiate some youths into a world of terror. I would encourage you to help us protect our youths against cyber predators, and join hands in creating awareness on the safe use of internet facilities and services among our children.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me therefore conclude on this note.

Mauritius is ideally situated today to build a smart economy and to construct a better future for our children. Education places us all under the obligation to transform learning environments and thus shape that future right as from now. And I have the pleasure to announce that today we are launching digital versions of textbooks online for the primary sector. And I would like here to underline the wonderful job carried out by the MIE to make this possible. So now let us make our education system become the signboard indicating the destinations we want our children to reach.

Thank you, all of you, for your continued efforts and support in both the teaching of ICT as a subject and the sustained deployment of technology in Education in 2016.

I thank you for your kind attention.