

**Speech of Hon Minister of Education and Human
Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research
Eco – Schools Indian Ocean Award Ceremony (Mauritius)
And launch of Teacher’s Guide by EU
Thursday 30 November 2017**

Distinguished Guests

**Heads of Schools, Educators, P.T.A Presidents and Dear
Students.**

I am very much pleased to be amongst you this morning for an Award Ceremony that recognizes and celebrates the achievements of the Eco-Schools program in Mauritius. This is also a wonderful occasion for us to witness the launching of a Teacher’s guide by the European Union. The concerns related to the environment and climate are very soundly captured by the term “Eco-Schools” , a word that equally encompasses Education for Sustainable Development. And we all know that the concept of sustainable development has itself become our contemporary leitmotiv which has to be translated into action to attain the Sustainable Development Goals.

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear students,

The Eco-Schools programme is fully in line with the SDGs and it allows schools to coordinate and build upon their many existing environmental projects. By organizing their activities and initiatives into several environmental themes within an action plan, schools are able to ensure continuity and ongoing improvement on ESD projects,.

This, no doubt, has tangible benefits inside the four walls of these schools and even in the wider community.

I believe that what is most fascinating about the Eco School concept is that basically, it is student led. Of course, teachers and others are also involved, but it is the empowerment of the learner that is of central concern here. Now how powerfully this impacts upon the personality development of our learners, I leave that to your appreciation.

None of us, however, can deny the significance for students to learn to evaluate problems, assess the risks involved, and develop solutions that are contextually highly relevant to their schools and communities. In addition, by adopting the participatory and collegial approach, it is the entire make up of knowledge, habits, behaviour that goes through a sea change.

I need hardly stress that this form of empowerment will have rich dividends for our students.

It is today common knowledge that the reforms being currently implemented in our education and training system are centered on the transformation of the learner into one who can rise up to face current and unforeseen challenges, one who can adapt to a constantly evolving world but also one who can be creative and innovative enough to initiate changes.

Well, this is where I find a lot of positives in this Programme, Ladies and gentlemen..

One of these positives is the application of the Eco-Schools Seven Step methodology where, among other things, there is the production of an Eco-Code, a statement representing the school's commitment to the environment, to sustainable development.

Another positive resides in the establishment of the school-community nexus.

Indeed, you may not all have realized it – but the work that you have been doing through your active and collective involvement in the Eco-Schools Project will have served the purpose of anchoring of the school within the community.

For too long, schools had been seen as operating in a world, in a microcosm of their own. Students had concerns particular to themselves; teachers were more accountable to the school proper than to the community at large. As for parents, their presence in school was only perfunctory: they came to school simply because their child was there.

Today, we want our students to develop a social conscience as much as we want the community to provide the right models for our youngsters. After all, solutions to social issues are best reached collaboratively when school-goers work together actively with and involve the community.

This can be a precursor to establishing similar strong ties between and among schools—not simply locally but also internationally.

Thus, I am pleased to note that, as part of the global programme of the Foundation for Environmental Education, our schools can access an international network of support for Eco-Schools in 62 other countries worldwide, and join almost fifty thousand schools working to achieve the international standards of excellence in the field of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).

Bravo to those who conceptualized the programme for equally encouraging a partnership between the Indian Ocean Islands. I am pleased that this is reflected by the presence amongst us this afternoon of representatives from Seychelles and Rodrigues. Here I would wish to

highlight the vital role of the Indian Ocean Commission which has implemented the project in the neighboring countries with success.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This afternoon 22 Bronze Awards and 25 Silver Awards will be handed over to primary and secondary schools from over the island. And I am pleased to announce that nine schools will be 'rewarded for their efforts and hard work by receiving the Green Flag.

Congratulations to each one of you who have journeyed together towards this wonderful result

The Green Flags will proudly be waving...on the premises of these schools and the Eco-School Committee will have to ensure that conditions are sustained throughout the next two years.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me end by extending my appreciation to the European Union which has funded the Eco-School Programme and also to the US Embassy for its contribution.

I also commend the initiative of the European Union to come up with a teacher's guide on Education for Sustainable Development which will be launched this afternoon itself.

There could probably be no more perfect a platform for the launch of this guide !

I am sure that the school community will benefit from its contents which will enhance the knowledge about all issues related to the attainment of the SDGs

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear students, I wish you all the very best in your endeavours, present and future. Do keep up the good work.

I thank you all for your kind attention.