

**RODRIGUES GOVERNMENT
EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION**

BUDGET PROPOSALS 2018

A RODRIGUAN PEOPLE'S BUDGET

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Thomas Sankara



FEBRUARY 2018

Introduction

A Rodriguan people's Budget

“IL faut choisir entre le champagne pour quelques-uns et l'eau potable pour tous “ Thomas SANKARA

The Rodrigues Government Employees Association (R.G.E.A) is submitting its proposals after having taken into account measures that have been taken into consideration following the proposals we made for the last budget and also what has been implemented and their impact on the sustainable development of the island.

The Rodriguan Budget is the most important policy document the Regional Government produces and for us it is much more than an accounting exercise.

Every line in the budget should be about the Rodriguan people and the type of society we want to live in.

The 2018 Budget orientation should show what the Regional Government value, what they prioritize and what goals they set for our country.

The key to unlocking a positive new vision for the Rodriguan people is to rethink the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Budget orientation, shifting it back to being people centred and make it work for the Rodriguan people.

We want budget decisions that put the Rodriguan people first, strengthen our society and build a broad and shared prosperity.

We want a budget that prioritises the real needs of the Rodriguan people rather than political imperatives.

We want to believe in a brighter future, where the Regional Government reconnect itself to its people and values.

The Rodrigues Government Employees Association view the forthcoming budget as an opportunity for the Regional Government to make a change, one that adopt new strategies that will enable us to redress the main problems affecting the economy and the society at large whilst restoring long awaited hope amongst the population.

Adequate financial resources and appropriate economic policies.

After some fifteen years of Autonomy, considering the socio-economic situation prevailing on the Island and after a careful thought and study of the results of previous budgets , we can easily conclude that the budget allocations has been inadequate. It is also a fact that the budget orientation including the economic model adopted during the past years was inappropriate and ineffective to reverse the trend of unemployment, economic migration and poverty in view of creating a more prosperous society.

We believe that it is high time for the Regional Government to take a fundamentally different approach to the 2018-2019 Budget as the Central Government has a constitutional duty to allocate budgets and human resources fairly to the Regional Government.

We urge the Regional Government to give due consideration to Sections 46 of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act as reproduce hereunder when dealing with the Rodrigues Regional Assembly forthcoming budget.

Extract Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act

46. Criteria to be considered for allocation of financial resources to Rodrigues

In considering the draft estimates approved by the Regional Assembly, Cabinet shall give due consideration to the financial and development needs of Rodrigues in the context of Mauritius and shall, for a fair allocation of financial resources to Rodrigues, take into account -

- (a) the physical separation of Rodrigues from the Island of Mauritius;*
- (b) Rodrigues' distinct history and identity;*
- (c) Rodrigues' isolation from the principal national growth centres;*
- (d) the absence of the multiplier effect from expenditures and investments (private and public) made in the Island of Mauritius;*
- (e) the restricted opportunities for employment and career fulfilment in Rodrigues;*

- (f) *the impracticability of participation by residents of Rodrigues in the major educational, cultural and sporting facilities located in the Island of Mauritius;*
- (g) *the lack of sustained development in Rodrigues ;*
- (h) *the amount of grant which could have been payable to it, had it been a Municipal or District Council;*
- (i) *the special needs of Rodrigues in terms of accelerated development; and*
- (j) *the state of public finance and of the economy of Mauritius in general.*

Re-arming the public services to make the autonomy work in the interest of the people we serve.

What the point of having been granted Autonomy if the executive arm needed to make it work, to enhance and improve the quality of life of the Rodriguan people is withheld?

After a long sustained struggle for more control over our own affairs, autonomy arrived in 2002 through a constitutional amendment.

The Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act was supposed to give far reaching devolution to Port-Mathurin from the rigidities of Port-Louis. After some fifteen(15)years of Autonomy the Central Government has not been able to give the Rodrigues Regional Assembly a proper structured and well-staffed civil service in line with its constitutional power to make the autonomy work in the interest of the Rodriguan people.

We strongly believe that restoring and improving the public services by providing the financial basis, appropriate structure as well as necessary human resources is one of the key solution to the socio economic problem the island is facing and will be also fundamental in the building of a culture of service that respond effectively to the need of the Rodriguan people and at the same time set the basis for an equitable, prosperous, democratic and sustainable Rodriguan society.

Filling of vacancies on the RRA Establishment

The Rodrigues Regional Assembly public services that exist today in most cases are kept afloat by a skeleton of overworked and undervalued staff.

Following the Central Government policy adopted since 2005 to curtail public expenditure through non-funding of vacant offices, the human resource of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly has been drastically reduced. This policy has downsized the work force of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly by nearly 40%.

Rodrigues is still at the embryonic stage of development and the nurturing Rodrigues Regional Assembly after some fifteen years of existence needs to be strengthened to sustain its growth. The Executive Arm of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly need to be empowered for the realization of the Autonomy of the Island.

The Central Government has in an attempt to do away with the policy adopted in 2005 with the view of addressing the problem of unemployment and empowering the different ministries of the Island of Mauritius with the necessary manpower to fully achieve their prescribe responsibilities, has in the Budget 2017-2018 makes provision for the filling of some 7000 vacancies in the civil service for the Island of Mauritius.

Such Budget policy should have been extended to the Rodrigues Regional Assembly as the Island of Rodrigues has suffered the most from the policy of curtailing public expenditure.

We are making a formal appeal to the Chief Commissioner to take appropriate measures so that adequate funds are made available in the budget for the filling of all vacancies on the RRA Establishment as it is the case for the civil service in Mauritius if we really want the Autonomy to succeed.

Implementation of the Consultant Report

The Rodrigues Regional Assembly and the Executive Council requires structures corresponding to their constitutional powers and the Rodriguan citizen requires appropriate structures that will deliver the goods and at the same time respecting his human and constitutional rights. Rodrigues has no capitalist structure and it is evident that the Rodrigues Regional Assembly has to initiate things, in comparison to Mauritius where the state is an economic facilitator for the private sector whereas then Rodrigues Regional Assembly civil service is a

social facilitator for the Rodriguan society, if this difference is not clearly understood the Rodriguan society is doomed to suffer from unemployment and underdevelopment.

It is in this particular context that the Regional Government has launch a request for proposals in line with the selection of a consultant for the review of the organizational structure of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly, for a strong public service with appropriate structure and adequate manpower to give the autonomy of Rodrigues its true meaning.

As this issue is long overdue and as matter of urgency, we are requesting that due considerations be given to this issue and that appropriate funding be earmarked in the forthcoming budget for the implementation of its recommendations.

Production of renewable energy as a new economic sector

There is an urgent need for a rapid transition into renewable energy production in Rodrigues both for economic and ecological imperatives. We are proposing that funds be made available in the next budget for the setting up of a **Rodrigues Sustainable Energy Commission** to develop a renewable energy master plan for Rodrigues and to assess the total PV and wind energy potential amongst others and also the setting up of **Rodrigues Sustainable Energy Development Fund** to give incentives and fund projects in line with the transition to a sustainable energy future for the Island of Rodrigues. These proposals if considered will lead to the creation of a new economic sector with the potential of creating lots of ecological sustainable employment.

Incentive to cooperatives in Rodrigues

After decades of failure from the capitalist economic system and their profit chasing companies, which have created substantial inequalities, chronic unemployment and massive economic migration, time is ripe for a shift;

More than a business tool the RGEA firmly believes that cooperatives can signal the dawn of a new economic model for Rodrigues. Cooperatives can represent exceptional opportunities as an answer to the chronic unemployment that severs on the Island.

New initiatives like the setting up of Renewable Energy Cooperatives for the production of renewable energy and food production cooperatives can be new innovative ways into employment, food security and wellbeing.

In line with the above we are proposing the setting up of a **Cooperative Fund** to give incentive to the cooperatives movement in Rodrigues and to participate in the funding of innovative and sustainable cooperative initiatives.

Cost of living.

It is not a secret for anybody that the living conditions of the Rodriguan population has witnessed a deep deterioration during the past years, an alarming percentage of the population is living below poverty line, unemployment rate is around 30% and this has resulted in massive economic migration of Rodriguans to Mauritius in search of employment. Price of basic essential commodities is substantially higher than those prevailing in Mauritius.

It is crystal clear that citizens of Rodrigues have to sustain a higher cost of living and additional hardship in comparison to their Mauritian counterparts. For example a civil servant in Mauritius who has sustained the constant rise in the prices of commodities since 2013 has been duly compensated in the 2016 PRB report. This is not the case for the civil servant in Rodrigues. The civil servant living in Rodrigues can buy fewer commodities with his salary in comparison to the civil servant in Mauritius drawing the same salary.

In line with the above we are proposing that appropriate funds be made available to subsidize all basic essential commodities imported from Mauritius.

Unemployment and job creation

It is important for the Central Government to recognize that the economic policies imposed on us during the past years has never work and it is high time to depart from the past inappropriate neo-liberal economic policies geared towards Rodrigues which has resulted in massive unemployment , alarming poverty rate and massive economic migration of Rodriguans to Mauritius to seek jobs .The Central Government should allocate appropriate funds and the Regional Government should take appropriate measures to address the social and economic crisis Rodrigues is actually facing. We must attack mass unemployment head-on. Through this budget the Government must create the conditions necessary for our young people to earn their living in a decent way here in Rodrigues. Let's budget in ways that encourage our young people and people in long term unemployment to develop new skills and abilities to create their own employment here in Rodrigues. We need them in the tourism sector, in agriculture, fishing, and the building of houses, roads, and our social infrastructure and in new economic sector as the production of renewable energy amongst others.

CONCLUSION

The above proposals though not exhaustive will help in designing a just budget that promotes social, economic and environmental rights of the Rodriguan people. The funding of critical posts in the public sector, especially in education, health and social development would address the service delivery crisis and generate needed employment. We need to make a rapid move to renewable energy.

In addition, we need to expand cooperatives and responding adequately to the plight of the unemployed. We need to secure our water resources. We need to build and renovate houses and public buildings, making them energy and resource efficient. This is the kind of budget measures and policy signals that the Rodriguan people deserve.

It would be fatal for the Government to overlook the urgency of the moment for fear of upsetting the traditional way of doing things. It is clear that the situation we are living now is not the one we Rodriguans dreams of. It's high time to make a change in the right direction.

RGEA

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