

**RODRIGUES GOVERNMENT
EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION
BUDGET 2020 PROPOSALS**

FOR

A RODRIGUAN PEOPLE'S BUDGET

IN THIS TIME OF CRISIS

“We must produce more without relying upon foreign aid and the import of Food because it is natural that he who feeds you also imposes his will.”

Thomas Sankara



APRIL 2020

Introduction

For a Rodriguan people's Budget in this time of crisis

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We are currently living a historical moment which has the potential to engender a sense of reawakening and assertiveness among the population.

The Rodrigues Government Employees Association (R.G.E.A) is submitting its proposals after having taken into account the challenges posed by the pandemic to our society as a whole.

During the lockdown, we have witnessed the weaknesses in many sectors of our society in terms of health care, the supply of food and the difficulties faced by unemployed and those working in the informal sectors to cater for their basic needs.

Most importantly, we have also witnessed the lack of power and authority of the Regional Government, elected by the majority of the population, to decide and implement measures to protect us from this deadly virus. We have in mind the well wishes of the Regional Government that the Plaine Corail Airport be closed forthwith for commercial flights. But, in the end, we had to wait for the Prime Minister, who was not elected by the Rodriguans, to decide on whether the airport should be closed or not because, ultimately, he is the one who has the power to decide for us.

We trust that this pandemic wakes us up and can be a catalyst for the complete decolonisation of our island.

In this time of crisis, the 2020 budget should be much more than an accounting exercise; the orientation of the budget should aim at unlocking a positive new vision for the Rodriguan people and leaves the impression that the Regional Government has understood the lessons behind the COVID-19 pandemic .

This crisis brings along the opportunity for us to liberate ourselves from ideological chains, to envision a different society and, through the forthcoming budget, to give the Rodriguan people the opportunity to strengthen our society and build a broad and shared prosperity for all.

In this unprecedented historical moment, where many fear for the future, we want to believe in a brighter future where we see the crisis as an opportunity to budget in such a way that addresses the weaknesses of our health system, to devise a food politics concerned as much with food provision as food production and addresses the epidemic of unemployment particularly among the youth and to fast track the process of true autonomy amongst others.

Adequate financial resources and appropriate economic policies

The failure of the austerity budgets allocated to us during the past years is now clearly visible; the weaknesses of our health services, our dependence on imports for food and other basic necessities, the rise in unemployment and migration of our youth are among the major signs that Rodrigues has been extremely underfunded for the past years. To use the words of the late Martin Luther King, the Central Government has, for the past years, been giving the Rodriguan people a bad check, which frequently comes back marked "insufficient funds".

Budgeting during this economic and medical crisis might be a challenging moment for the Regional Government to correct the injustice of the past by requesting the allocation of adequate financial resources from the Central Government to address the weaknesses raised above and give us the opportunity to become more autonomous and self-reliant, less dependent on foreign imports, to reverse the trend of unemployment, economic migration and poverty and to address the weaknesses of our health services among others.

Considering the anaemic economic growth of the strict budgets we inherited during the past years, we cannot use the pandemic as an excuse to demand more austerity from the Rodriguan people. We, therefore, urge the Government to be cautious and guard against using the budget to introduce austerity measures that will favour private capital at the expense of the majority of our citizens. It is also very important that sufficient liberty and power be given to the Regional Government to design an appropriate economic model and adopt specific budget orientation in line with the spirit of the Rodriguan autonomy and the socio-economic realities of the Island so that the Regional Government be in a position to steadily improve certain constitutionally enshrined rights that are key to the Rodriguan people's ability to lead a dignified life.

We believe that it is high time for the Regional Government to take a fundamentally different approach to the 2020 budget. The fact that the Central Government has a constitutional duty to allocate financial resources fairly to the Rodrigues Regional Assembly, it is also the appropriate time that due consideration be given to section 46 of the R.R.A Act when dealing with the forthcoming budget. In short, the Central Government has to provide us with a cheque that can be cashed in order to make the autonomy of Rodrigues a reality.

Food security and food sovereignty as a priority

“We should never import anything that we can grow here. We grow best and healthiest, disease free products on this planet. Give our farmers a fair go.”-TERRY

The pandemic has forced all of us to see the danger and our vulnerability towards our reliance on imports for basic commodities and the feeling of food insecurity is palpable among the population. It is clear that if the crisis worsens in countries from which our basic foods come, they will be reluctant to ship away their products as same may get scarce.

The crisis is revealing our unpreparedness to face such a challenge. This budget and its orientation will be decisive in whether we will be more dependent on foreign imports or more autonomous and self-sufficient in terms of food production and supply for the Rodriguan population.

We need a substantial budget with appropriate measures that will help us put an end to our dependence on foreign imports to feed our people.

Rodriguans have a rich knowledge of food production and fishing. Rodriguans need to have autonomy over the production of their food. All we need to make this possible is political will, adequate budget and appropriate policy to provide our local farmers with necessary conditions to produce food while focusing on the massive production of healthy food for the whole population based on agro ecology.

The Regional Government, through the forthcoming budget, should come forward with a food politics concerned as much with food provision and food production where food is considered as a fundamental human right. We need a budget that will encourage farmers (including family farming) and cooperatives with a view to achieve food sovereignty.

If we really want to achieve food sovereignty, the forthcoming budget should contain appropriate measures such as:

- The proper supply of water for irrigation (building and maintenance of dams);
- The provision of a form of insurance to guarantee a livelihood in case of catastrophe such as cyclone, drought and pandemic;
- Setting up of local industry for the production of animal feed using local resources;
- Building up storage and agro-industries for the preservation and transformation of food produced;
- Ensuring the mass production of seedlings locally;
- Encouraging through appropriate incentive programs the setting up of local fishing industry capable of engaging in off lagoon fishing in a sustainable way for the provision of fish products;
- Encourage the massive production of maize, potato, manioc, meat, fish, milk, vegetables and fruits among others.

All these measures if adopted and implemented thoroughly can make us becoming more autonomous and self- sufficient and in the long run put a stop to our dependence on imports for these basic commodities.

Mitigating the impact of the pandemic on our Tourism Industry

Our tourism industry is facing tough times due to the pandemic. COVID 19 has impacted our local tourism industry like no other events before; with the suspension of tourism activities, the benefits that this sector contribute to our local economy are under threat.

Since the crisis is worldwide and considering the fact that there is uncertainty on how the crisis will unfold, little can be done locally to boost up the industry apart from being patient and stand ready for the reliance.

In the meantime, jobs are at immediate risk and if no urgent measures are taken by the Government to support the industry coupled with innovative initiatives by the industry such as targeting local residents with attractive packages to ensure the survival of the industry with no loss of employment until its take off.

The Regional Government should see to it that wider recovery plans and actions initiated by the Central Government to support the tourism industry in the Republic be made applicable to our local tourism industry.

Arming our public services to make it work in the best interest of the people we serve

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it clear for everyone that, without a strong public service with the necessary resources, it is be very difficult to deal with such a crisis. The essential services forming part of the public services are at the forefront to face the deadly virus. The Rodrigues Regional Assembly needs a proper structured and well-staffed civil service in line with its constitutional power to make the autonomy work in the best interest of the Rodriguan people.

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

The recommendations of the consultant hired by the Rodrigues Regional Assembly to review its organizational structure for a strong public service with adequate manpower to give the autonomy of Rodrigues its true meaning should be implemented without any further delay. Appropriate funding should, thus, be earmarked in the forthcoming budget for the implementation of its recommendations.

Strengthening our health services

Health care is a human right. The COVID-19 crisis is revealing our unpreparedness if ever the virus reaches our shore and the vulnerability of our health care system is clearly visible; improving our health care services should be a top priority right now.

The Government has under-invested in our health services in the past years resulting in a weak public health infrastructure. Our health system is in deep crisis; the health sector is understaffed, we do not have enough beds and appropriate medical equipment to deal with such pandemic if ever we have to face same. We need significant health services that can react promptly and effectively to such pandemic.

Our health system should be in a position to promote the welfare of the entire population, ensure its security and protects it from the spread of infectious diseases and ensure access to safe and quality care to all.

The forthcoming budget should prioritise the health services by equipping our hospitals and health centres with the minimum necessary conditions to implement a working strategy capable to confront adequately such a disease and other unforeseen incidents.

Production of renewable energy as a new economic sector

In this time of pandemic and ecological crisis, we cannot continue to depend on the importation of costly petroleum products to produce the energy we need. 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 sufficient funds be provided in the forthcoming 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 other sources and also the setting up of a **Rodrigues Sustainable Energy Development Fund** to implement incentive programs and fund projects in line with the transition to a sustainable energy future for the Rodrigues. If these proposals are considered, this will lead to the creation of a new economic sector with the potential of boosting ecological sustainable employment and reduce our dependence on import of petroleum products.

Cooperatives as a new economic model

After decades of failure from the capitalist economic model, imposed upon us, which has shown its incapacity to address the chronic unemployment and massive economic migration among others, time is ripe for a shift.

More than a business tool, the R.G.E.A 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 actual chronic unemployment rate 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 alternative ways into employment, food security and wellbeing of our people.

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

CONCLUSION

In this time of crisis, the above proposals, though not exhaustive, will help in designing a fair budget capable to set the basis on top of which our people can build their lives.

Despite of the crisis, we, in the R.G.E.A, continue to believe in a sustainable Rodriguan society free of poverty, unemployment, environmental degradation, oppression and exploitation, a society where people govern by participatory democracy are respected and free to realize their fullest potential, productivity and creativity.

Let us budget in ways that encourage our young 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 sectors as the production of renewable energy and food amongst others.

We need a budget that has the potential to promote the 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.

We need to expand cooperatives and respond adequately to the plight of the unemployed. We need to secure our water resources. We need to build dams and local industries to store, preserve and transform our food production.

This is the kind of budgetary measures that Rodriguans need in this time of crisis.

It would be fatal for the Government to overlook the urgency of the moment for fear of upsetting the traditional way of doing things. Unless there is a radical change of direction in ways things are usually done, what we are seeing today is merely a bare foretaste of what is yet to come.

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