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Introduction

A Rodriguan People's Budget

The Rodrigues Government Employees Association (R.G.E.A) is submitting the following proposals after having taken into consideration the budget allocation for the past years and their impact on the sustainable development of the island. We have also listened to the needs and demands being expressed by Workers and Rodriguans the length and breadth of Rodrigues. After careful consideration, we have decided to prepare our memorandum for a people's budget that will respond to their cry. We believe that it will be far more productive that the forthcoming budget be developed according to needs, rather than according to how we have budgeted in the past and to ensure that we are planning and budgeting in ways that will reduce poverty, promote employment, reverse the migration trends and create a more prosperous Rodriguan society.

The Regional Government cannot continue to be led by the traditional economic policy geared towards Rodrigues by the Central Government; a policy that has not only failed during the past years but will continue to harm us. It's time for a change and it will not come from adopting the same old approach, the same dictated economic policies designed in line with the socio-economic reality of the island of Mauritius and imposed on us. If business as usual isn't compatible with the sustainable development of the island of Rodrigues then we have no choice than to take another more fitting path.

We, in the R.G.E.A strongly 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. Up until then, we will never stop campaigning for it.



We view the forthcoming budget as an opportunity for the “Alliance Lepep” 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.

We are submitting this memorandum which is in no way a shopping list but proposals though not exhaustive, but if taken into consideration may help in making a change in the interest of the Rodriguan people.

Adequate financial resources and appropriate economic policies

Sections 46 of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act reproduce hereunder give inkling to peculiar considerations that should be taken into account when dealing with the Rodrigues Regional Assembly 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.*

Taking into account the above and considering the socio-economic situation prevailing on the Island, we need to admit that the past budgets have not been able to reverse the trend of unemployment, economic migration and poverty and create a more prosperous society as it should. To use the words of the late Martin Luther King, the Central Government for the past years has been giving the Rodriguan people a bad cheque, a cheque which frequently comes back marked "insufficient funds". After careful thought and study of the results of previous ten budgets, we can easily conclude that the budget allocations has been inadequate and that provisions of the above section has not received due consideration and that the budget orientation including the economic model adopted during the past years has been inappropriate and ineffective.

We believe that it is high time to take a fundamentally different approach to the 2016 budget. The Central Government have a constitutional duty to allocate budgets and human resources fairly to the Regional Government by giving due consideration to section 46 of the R.R.A Act as reproduced above and by giving sufficient liberty to the Regional Government to design appropriate economic model 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 live. In short, the Central Government have to



deliver a cheque that can be cashed in order to make the autonomy of Rodrigues a reality.

Restructuration of the Public Service in Rodrigues

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

The Rodrigues Regional Assembly and the Executive Council requires structures corresponding to their constitutional power.

It is for this particular reason that the unions, the management and the Regional Government is still fighting for an independent consultant to work out appropriate recommendations for a strong Rodriguan public service with appropriate structure and adequate manpower to give the autonomy of Rodrigues its true meaning.

Apart from making some strong recommendations going in that direction, **Mr Dev Manraj** in its errors, omissions and anomalies report 2013 makes the following appropriate remark, we quote; *"Although Section 26 of the Act provides for a lot of delegation of responsibilities to the Local Administration, the real administrative autonomy has never materialised because of certain legal impediments."*

In the same spirit, the same EOAC report 2013 under the heading; **pertinent issues**, the basis of the terms of reference for the independent consultant has already been worked out as set down below;



Main Terms of reference

- (i) To receive representations from Trade Unions and Public Officers of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly (RRA) regarding the restructuring of the various divisions of the RRA and merging of grades;
- (ii) To examine such representations and propose a new organisation structure for the different divisions of the RRA that would enable the Regional Assembly to discharge its functions under the RRA Act more efficiently and effectively, taking into account section 28 and 32 of the RRA Act and the specificities of Rodrigues.
- (iii) To empower the Rodrigues Regional Assembly with the necessary manpower to fully achieve its prescribed responsibility and to determine the minimal establishment in respect of each grade/cadre/class to be recommended in the new grading structures for functional purposes.
- (iv) To design appropriate and necessary structures to allow the Rodrigues civil service to operate in a regular manner and in conformity with provisions of the RRA Act, the constitution and relevant laws, enactments, regulations and documents.

As a matter of urgency, we are requesting that due considerations be given to this issue and that appropriate funding be earmarked for the appointment of a consultant firm at the earliest to do this important job which is crucial for the future of the Rodriguan society.

In line with the declared policy of the Central Government for the filling of vacancies in the civil service of Mauritius, we are also requesting appropriate financial resources for the filling of vacancies on the RRA Establishment.



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 and 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, debt ridden generations, 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 Rodriguans need.

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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