

Keynote Address of Hon. Deepak Balgobin, Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation

Workshop on Road to Net Zero Mauritius: Driving Innovation and Sustainability through ESG Disclosure & Performance

University of Technology, Mauritius
30th November 2022

- **Honourable Kavydass Ramano, Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change,**
- **Dr Dinesh Kumar Hurreeram, Director General of UTM,**
- **Professor Ian Thompson, Director, University of Birmingham, UK,**
- **Dr Roshan Boojihawon, Associate Professor, University of Birmingham, UK**
- **Professor Sanjeev Bokhoree, Head - School of Sustainable Development and Tourism, UTM,**
- **Academic and Non-Academic Staff of UTM,**
- **Dear Students,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Good Morning to you all.

It is an honour for me, as a former student of UTM, to deliver a keynote address for this workshop.

The deadly effects of climate change and other environmental challenges call for an urgent need to devise techniques and processes to mitigate and reverse the effects of these dangers.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the years, ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) Standards have come up for business operators to abide by Environmental, Social and Governance criteria with a view to safeguard the environment and manage relationships with employees, suppliers, customers.

All this in complete transparency.

ESG investing is fast becoming a business jargon where companies are being assessed to allow investors to ensure that the companies they fund are environment conscious, good corporate citizens and are led by accountable managers.

This makes ESG investing a potential area of growth that has a positive bearing on society and the environment.

ESG ratings systems have even appeared in recent years to set up the right portfolio for investors to take an informed decision before placing their money in whatever institution.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Earlier this year, I was called to deliver a speech on the “Circular Economy in the ICT sector” organized by the Ministry of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change.

The Circular Economy is a solutions framework that addresses global challenges like climate change, biodiversity loss, waste and pollution.

It involves industrial processes and economic activities that enable resources to be used in such a way as to maintain their effective and efficient use for as long as possible.

It also aims for the elimination of waste through smart design of materials, products, and systems.

During the whole conversion process, there is a smart utilisation of energy to provision the end products or services.

In the end, a Circular Economy calls for the optimization of business processes to make them more effective and efficient, and less energy intensive.

I am convinced that a judicious application of ICT in the Circular Economy holds the potential of accelerating our transition on the pathway to a Net Zero Mauritius.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Technological innovation and sustainability are becoming more and more intertwined in our daily life and for positive developments to happen.

My Ministry is putting much emphasis in the area of innovation with a view to reaping its accompanying environmental and socio-economic benefits.

Indeed, new and innovative technologies can provide a relevant contribution to the reduction of environmental burden and the improvement of social conditions, while fostering economic growth responsibly.

However, education and research are fundamental drivers for the development of “sustainable” technological innovations and they also drive the adoption of these innovations by organizations.

As technology evolves, the electronics industry continues to produce devices to make our lives easier and more convenient, and it is good that it is like that. However, such devices are not built to be repaired.

In addition, due to their easy shopper nature, humans are susceptible to quickly discarding the products they already have, thus leading to e-waste pollution. According to figures published by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in 2020, approximately, 53.6 million metric tons of e-waste are discarded yearly around the world. Yet, only 17.4% is formally collected and recycled. In 2019, the fate of 44.3 million metric tons generated e-waste was unknown – this waste was either not documented, being discarded in landfill, burned or illegally traded and treated in a sub-standard way.

For these reasons, a proper recycling process or a smarter consumer paradigm is required to save our environmental health rather than sending e-waste to a landfill.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Promoting education and research to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and meeting the United Nations 2030 agenda are fundamental for higher education institutions.

In this line, the UTM, through its School of Sustainable Development and Tourism (SSDT), is dedicated to fostering education for sustainable

development, with a focus on exploring real world solutions to environmental, economic and social challenges.

I am told that since its creation in 2008, the SSdT has been a key player at the national level, offering multi-disciplinary courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, including doctoral studies in diverse areas of interest;

- Tourism,
- Applied Social Sciences,
- Counselling,
- Climate Change, Disaster Management, Sustainability, among others.

Just to tell you that education contributes fully in leading us to the Net Zero Mauritius we are heading to.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The economic developments are having a significant bearing on our society due to professional and family life disruption.

It is now time to imagine ways and means to reverse the effects of all climate and environmental challenges for a healthier society.

This workshop comes at an appropriate moment to play all the cards that will enable us strive in this direction.

With these words I wish you fruitful deliberations, and I thank you for your kind attention.