



Mauritius Research and Innovation Council

**Speech for Hon. Deepak Balgobin, Minister of Information Technology,
Communication and Innovation**

Award Ceremony for Building Blue Resilience through Innovation

Venue: Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee Tower (Landscape Mauritius).

Date: Monday, 22nd February 2021

Time: 10:00 hours

Ms Sandrine Valère, Permanent Secretary of my Ministry

Dr Kaviraj Sukon, Chairperson of the MRIC

Professor Theesan Bahorun, Executive Director, MRIC

Staff of my Ministry,

Members of the Special Independent Panel,

Representatives of Ministries, Institutions and other organisations,

Project Leaders and their team members,

Members of the Press,

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning.

I am highly honoured to be amongst you today for this award ceremony for 'Building Blue Resilience through Innovation', which culminates the application process for the Special Call for Proposals by the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council.

2020 was a year full of challenges. First, the whole world, including the Republic of Mauritius, had, and still has, to deal with uncertainties due to COVID19.

While the country was still recovering from its immediate impact, on 25th July 2020, unfortunately the MV Wakashio ran aground on a reef off Pointe d'Esny, South-East of Mauritius leading to an ecological and environmental challenge.

Thereafter, unfortunately oil got spilled into the lagoons and coastal areas. This required rapid collaborative and innovative efforts from all fronts, especially in view of the fact that Mauritius is a small and ecologically vulnerable island-state, with heavy dependence on its blue economy.

To face this situation, amongst the immediate and direct measures taken by the relevant local authorities, the MRIC, which operates under the aegis of my Ministry, earmarked Rs 25 million to encourage NGOs, enterprises, private organisations, public and private institutions, academia and research institutions to come up with innovative ideas to remedy the situation.

The objective was to support innovative projects to complement and accelerate the national response to the challenges posed by the oil spill, to contribute to remedial and recovery efforts and sustain research and development in the marine area.

To this effect, in August 2020 the MRIC launched the Special Call for Proposals with a deadline for the submission of proposals on the 25th September 2020.

As a result of this Special Call, the MRIC received a total of 56 applications. 55 percent of the proposals were submitted by companies, 23 percent from NGOs and 21 percent from research and academic institutions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today I am pleased to announce that following evaluation of the proposals, the MRIC has approved the funding of 18 projects subject to certain conditions such as review of the budget, collaboration requests with established institutions and relevant clearances being obtained.

Importantly, reflecting the engagement of the private sector, their contribution towards the funding of the projects will be of Rs 15.9 Million while the MRIC's input will be of Rs 26.1 Million.

This, again shows the commitment of this Government, under the prime ministership of the Honourable Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, to work in collaboration with the private sector for an ever-better quality of life of our people.

The approved projects cover a broad range of areas such as:

- oil spill tracking,
- development of ecosystem health and indicators,
- restoring coastal, marine, and wetland resources,
- restoring coral reefs and sea-grass beds,
- identification of the best remediation techniques to deal with oil spillage in the sea,
- ecosystem and community structure,
- societal impact and building community resilience,
- enhancing beaches and shorelines,
- assessing and addressing the human health impact of oil spill,
- oil spill waste management and understanding ecological impacts.

As I mentioned earlier, the preservation of our marine and coastal ecology is of prime importance, even in the absence of any oil spill. The investment in research and innovation in this direction is in line with the Government's vision to bring about sustainable and inclusive development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We will have the opportunity to listen to short presentations by some of the project teams and later you will be able to interact with all those who have been awarded funding.

I wish to thank each one of you who have come forward and placed your efforts in helping the authorities to face this crisis. Thank you for your ideas, your time, your innovation and your dedication towards our country.

This event underlies a new philosophy and a new strategic approach of the MRIC to reach out and interact with a wide range of stakeholders, aiming to bridge the existing gaps and create a seamless environment between applied research, development and

innovation at a national level, an approach that is in complete harmony with my Ministry's vision.

Research and innovation are on-going processes. Every country should always be in an 'innovative mode' to accelerate its social and economic development, especially when all nations around the world are confronted with a slow and fragile economic recovery at the moment.

If we want to become highly competitive in the innovation era, we have to keep promoting an influential innovation eco-system.

It is my Ministry's and the MRIC's endeavour to design, develop and implement relevant strategies and initiatives to cater for all sections of the society, as we believe innovation cannot be restricted. I would like to take this opportunity to request each one of you to keep thinking "out of the box" and come forward with innovative solutions at national level. Innovation has to be the bed-rock for our new normal.

As said by Antoine de Saint Exupéry, I quote: "*A pile of rocks ceases to be a rock pile when somebody contemplates it with the idea of a cathedral in mind.*"

Let me congratulate once again all the participants and all those involved in the Building Blue Resilience through Innovation initiative and look forward to celebrating the success of the outcomes of these projects.

I thank you for your attention.