

# MID or myth?

Khalil Elahee, MA (Cantab), PhD

Faculty of Engineering

The University of Mauritius

## Abstract

This paper is a summary of the Maurice Ile Durable (MID) experience to date. It critically analyses the achievements, the shortcomings as well as the opportunities ahead. The key challenges are highlighted and evidence-based proposals are made in order to ensure the progress of MID. The ethos and values underpinning MID are also analysed. Although this paper would not have been possible without the collaboration of a number of collaborators and stakeholders, its publication does not engage the responsibility of anyone, or any organisation, but the author himself.

## Introduction

The phrase MID was coined for the first time in late 2007. In fact, in December 2007, when the *Manifeste pour une ile durable* (Atchia et al, 2007) was being drafted, the authors purposely left out any specific reference to the acronym 'MID'. The term was known to them, having been employed by Joel de Rosnay shortly earlier in one of his verbal addresses.

It was clear that 'MID' could become a real catchphrase and could be used at all levels to refer to a unique, grand endeavour. By focusing in the *Manifeste* on 'ile durable', instead of 'MID', its authors meant that the definition of the latter should not be the monopoly of a few. Nevertheless, the *Manifeste* made it a point to mention Joel de Rosnay's vision. The latter reviewed the draft before it was circulated and published widely in the media.

It might be asked what was really different or peculiar about the *Manifeste*? A careful scrutiny of the document reveals the following characteristics:

- Reference is made to the long term future of Mauritius based on the common 'engagement' of public, para-public and private sectors as well as NGOs.
- Fighting poverty and climate-change are highlighted as foremost challenges, both locally and globally.
- The *Manifeste* is a citizens' appeal for a holistic development programme integrating economic, social and environmental dimensions.
- The *Manifeste* relates to 'development' in a large variety of fields from transport to tourism through textiles, all intrinsically linked together in a sustainable manner.
- For the energy sector, a set of clear targets is specified for the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Independence in 2028, that is, in 20 years.
- The *Manifeste* calls for 3 priorities:

- I. A national consultation on the model of the *Grenelle* adapted to the Mauritian context.
- II. A holistic and coherent action-plan referred to as ‘Multi-Annual Transformation Strategy’.
- III. A World Ecological Forum, as it was named by Joel de Rosnay, in view of promoting Mauritius as an example for the planet, particularly for small island developing states.

## **Commitment**

Early in 2008, Joel de Rosnay was made Special Adviser to the Prime Minister. MID was born and was now a national concern. The increasing oil prices on the world market could only strengthen the Government’s commitment to the project. And MID became highly energy-focused. Many would disagree with such a bias, but the following facts should be considered.

- Energy is the ultimate raw-material, necessary for any product, service or process (Gouldsblom, 1992). It has no substitute. And provided with energy, any other input can be substituted by an alternative. Thus, Energy Management is not an end in itself, but can be a vehicle to achieve sustainability in areas ranging from data-centres to hotels.
- Energy is not just about natural resources, but also about Engineering, Economic, Environmental and Ethical interactions in human society. All these dimensions are treated holistically, towards achieving sustainability, when the Energy aspect of any activity is properly addressed.
- Although MID cannot be reduced to an energy issue, high energy prices and concern on climate change can give momentum to the MID project. This is a two-face strategy with the some adverse results that will be witnessed later.

However, the record-breaking oil prices of mid-2008 did more than enough to allow the MID project to take off. The Budget in June 2008 was a key milestone (MoF, 2008). The MID Fund was set up with a budget of Rs 1.3 billion and placed under the then-Ministry of Public Utilities. The terms of reference of the MID Fund were mostly related to what should have been the energy-related priorities of the latter Ministry, that is, energy efficiency and renewables. To a large extent, the MID Fund, particularly with its composition, was, in fact, a replacement of the National Energy Fund (MPU, 2008).

The most successful measures under the MID Fund were the subsidy of Rs 10 000 for solar-water heaters and the distribution of 1 million Compact Fluorescent Lamps (CFL) at reduced prices. The summer-time pilot project, forced into the initial list of MID activities, was to be a non-starter.

After the 2008 Budget, the Ministry of Public Utilities was re-styled into a Ministry of Renewable Energy and Public Utilities. More significantly, the new Ministry responsible for the MID project was now put under the responsibility of the person of the Deputy Prime Minister. This was not unlike what has been happening in other countries, including France, where sustainability has been the concern of senior-most members of Government. This,

again, showed the commitment of the Prime Minister to MID. As his adviser, Joel de Rosnay also introduced, at that stage, the concept of Small Independent Power Producers (SIPPs) (de Rosnay, 2008). It is interesting to remark that the MID project aimed, right from the start, at no less than 65% power generation from renewables by 2028 (MPU, 2008). At the same time, however, the Government's Outline Energy Policy referred to a corresponding share of only 43%, brought down to 35% in 2009 ( MPU, 2007; MREPU, 2009)

### **But what is MID?**

In October 2008, a collaboration between the University of Mauritius and the Université de Technologie de Compiègne in France was initiated by Joel de Rosnay. As a result, under the supervision of staff from both institutions, students graduating in "Gestion Systémique" undertook a number of studies on MID. The work, funded by the MID Fund and the French Embassy, was completed in January 2009. Among the key outcomes were a definition of the MID concept from the external perspective of a young educated French elite, as well as a thorough comparison between MID and 'Reunion, Ile Verte' (Six , 2009).

In the same context, a Research Group was initiated at the University of Mauritius to undertake studies related to MID. With the support of the MID Fund, it completed the First Phase of its investigation in May 2009. The objectives of Phase I of the MID research project were the following:

- i. Framing a definition of the MID concept
- ii. Identification of appropriate methods and technologies
- iii. Identification of major stakeholders for MID
- iv. Establishing criteria and indicators for monitoring

More than 30 academic staff from all Faculties of the University of Mauritius worked in a multi-disciplinary manner to produce 7 preliminary reports addressing the following Themes:

- Concept Definition,
- Institutional Framework,
- Participative Democracy,
- Sustainable Energy,
- Ecotourism,
- Transport and Land Use,
- Health and Environment,
- Sustainable Agriculture,
- Culture,
- Standards, Indicators and Dashboard.

Figure 1 shows how MID was conceptually defined. Instead of the three symmetric circles normally found in descriptions of Sustainable Development, here it is clearly emphasized that politics and economy are at the service of society and its environment. MID relates fundamentally to many other fields, not just energy. For implementation purposes, the concept assumes the shape of a holistic programme based on standards, indicators, targets and a time-line within an agreed 'tableau-de-bord' or dash-board to monitor its progress.

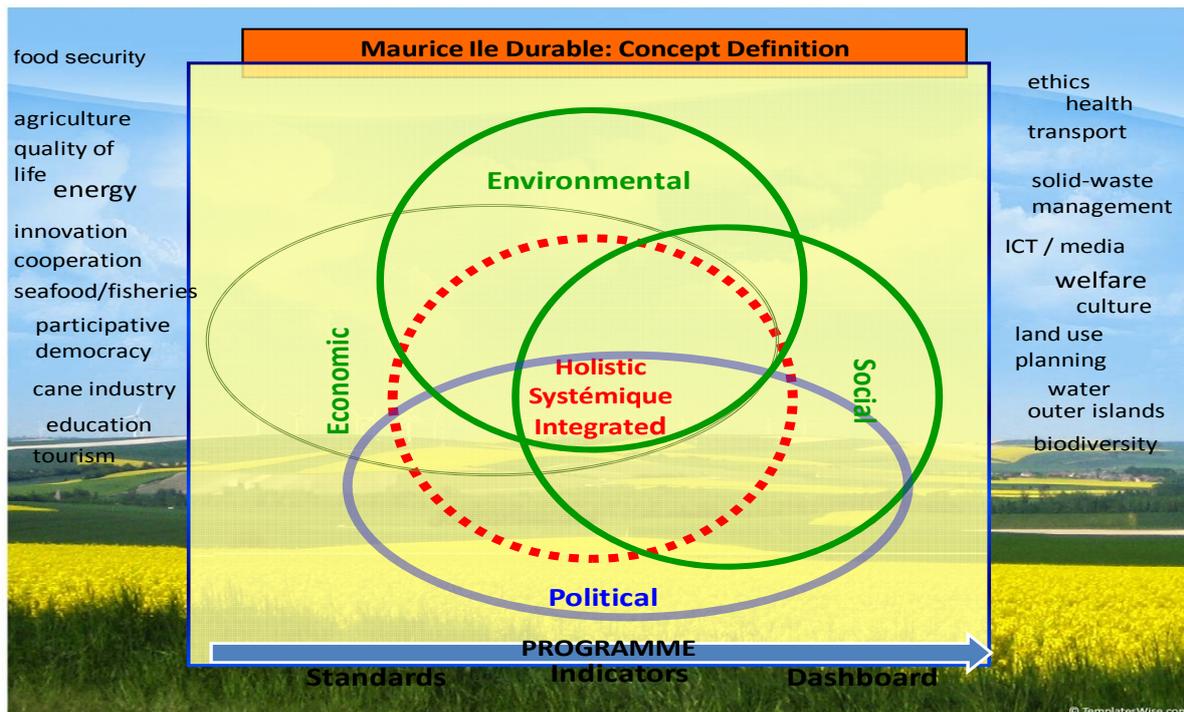


Figure 1. MID Concept

For the first time ever, a methodology was defined towards turning the MID vision into reality. Without being comprehensive and prescriptive, the findings of Phase I pointed to the sequence of events below in view of ensuring a systemic or holistic approach.

- a) Calling of a national consultation forum on MID
- b) Finalising the shared vision, mission, priorities and action plan
- c) Setting up of the relevant institutional framework within a loi-cadre.
- d) Continuous monitoring, feedback and communication on the MID progress.

Also, the Phase I studies emphasized the following needs:

- Responding to immediate areas of concern e.g with respect to energy, waste, transport, new buildings and cane industry in order to ensure that MID compliance is not overlooked.
- Responding to the needs of the population, particularly vulnerable groups as a condition for participative democracy.
- Sustaining MID in its initial stage through education, training, sensitization and communication campaigns.
- Combating consumerism and debt through the promotion of sustainable living.
- Introduction of standards, indicators and dashboard for MID as part of the MID action plan.

An Analysis and Synthesis Report critically assessed the state of Phase I Research. While acknowledging that Phase II studies would be essential in order to consolidate, refine and complement initial findings, it brought an insight into the concept definition and into the way

ahead. The research revealed three levels of understanding of MID and identified its two pillars as given in BOX I (UoM, 2009).

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## BOX I

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‘At a first level of understanding accessible to all, we propose that MID stands for ‘**Myself for Mauritius**’, ‘**Immediate Action**’ and ‘**Deciding for the long-term**’ (in French, *Moi-meme pour Maurice, Immédiatement Agir, Decision durable*). Such a definition covers the holistic nature of the MID Concept whilst being easy to understand by all. Moreover, it focuses on the need of local and daily action starting with the individual himself or herself. It englobes the essence of our nation-building spirit, for the sake of Mauritius with a long-term consideration...

At a second level of understanding, MID itself can be reckoned as a **criterion for judging our actions**. We should ask ourselves before every deed, every initiative and every project whether it is compatible with MID. Hence, the idea of MID-compliance, that is, sustainability, should be at the core of our decision-making process.

At a third level of understanding, MID should be defined explicitly in terms of:

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A Shared Vision based on participative democracy.

A Set of Priority Orientations, Projects, Targets and Expected Outcomes within a Time-frame, ie a coherent and consensual **action plan**.

Reference to agreed-upon standards and indicators within a dashboard signalling the level of progress towards turning the MID vision into reality.

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As a result of a national consultation involving all stakeholders, two pillars of MID should emerge:

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I. A *loi-cadre* defining the orientations of MID, its programmes, its mechanisms, conditions, targets, timeframe and monitoring.

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II. A **MID-compliant Business Framework** reducing our current economic, social and environmental vulnerability and creating added-value out of our local and regional renewable resources, including marine assets.

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## Evolution

With the help of Cybion, France, Joel de Rosnay introduced a website on the MID project, including a Web 2.0 interactive internet forum (<http://www/maurice-ile-durable.com>). It was launched by the Prime Minister in March 2009. The site hosted more than 100 original contributions and promoted a high level on dialogue. It was useful to the UoM MID Group in defining the MID concept through a participative approach and in gauging attitudes towards MID.

Since this period coincided with the debate in the country on the Waste-to-Energy or Incineration project, the website was, itself, a few times at the centre of much discussion. In fact, it proved to be a genuine citizens’ forum, although the views against the latter project were expressed more often than those in favour. Unfortunately, the site was later hacked and has not been restored since then.

In March 2009, the Government organised a MID Week which included a Seminar at the University of Mauritius. Sensitization on the MID issue reached a climax through a series of activities widely covered by the mass media. About the same time, Joel de Rosnay's comments on the Waste-to-Energy/Incineration project raised much interest in the press and beyond.

The UNDP was approached by the Government towards supporting the MID project. A team was recruited to this effect and, later, a Facilitator was also appointed in the person of Dr Francois Odendaal with the task of conducting national consultations with the aim of defining a MID policy. The latter process was expected to end in June 2010. The National Consultations were piloted by a dedicated Organizing Committee set up by the MID Fund Committee as the latter was already overloaded with proposals to consider under an initial MID strategic plan (MPU, 2008; MID, 2009)

In September 2009, a National Steering Committee was set up at the level of the Prime Minister's Office in view of coordinating MID activities and giving a fair chance to non-energy projects under MID. Mr Osman Mahomed, Adviser to the Prime Minister, was appointed as Chairman of the Steering Committee which included representatives from parastatal bodies, University of Mauritius as well as funding agencies like UNDP and Agence Francaise de Developpement ( AFD).

The latter has been a foremost supporter of MID through the provision of a credit facility of not less than Rs 1 billion available to Government as well as to other stakeholders through commercial banks, for example. Significant technical assistance opportunities also exist through the AFD.

In the aftermath of the May 2010 elections, the Prime Minister set up a new Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, moving the MID responsibility away from the former Ministry of Renewable Energy and Public Utilities. This exercise is believed to be crucial in view of facilitating the implementation of MID.

## **Recommendations**

The National Consultation process towards the definition of a MID policy was an excellent initiative. But it is vital that time is not wasted in prolonging the consultation unduly. It has been serving, often, more like a sensitization campaign than like a policy-definition exercise. To leap-frog the process and move towards the definition of an Action Plan with all stakeholders, as what happened with the *Grenelle* in France, is what is most urgent today.

It is quite clear that the institutional framework for MID will have to be simplified and harmonized. It is in this spirit that the setting up of a Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (or MID), instead of the usual Ministry of Environment and National Development Unit, is a welcomed evolution.

The immediate outcome should be better coordination, particularly if the roles of the Steering Committee and of the MID Fund are both revised. With the finalisation of the MID policy and the drawing up of the Action Plan, the new Ministry will have the sole responsibility for its coherent and holistic implementation. This re-organisation is also necessary to ensure that the MID project is not dominated by the issue of Energy. That does not mean that, conversely, Energy policies have always been centred around MID. In fact, paradoxically, the contrary appears to have been the case. A separate Ministry on MID, particularly linked

with Environment, should have the ability to impose sustainability as a criterion in all decisions, including Energy policies.

Not much has been said of MID and the private sector. The latter's interest is indeed evident, but it must go beyond the sheer 'greening' of activities towards short-term marketing interests. Believing that a green economy is possible is not enough; actions that will reap benefits in the long term must follow. With all the risks that such endeavours may imply. The private sector will also gain the trust of Government, and of civil society, by embracing sustainability not just as an economic necessity but also as a socio-ecological condition. MID rests on financial profitability, social equity and environmental protection being reconciled, not being pitted against each other. According to Fussler, the guru of eco-innovation, "Sustainable Development is imperative, possible, and value creating. Someone will make it happen. The choice is yours." (Fussler, 1996)

The Cane Democratization Fund (CDF) can be an example of such win-win opportunity for MID projects in the light of the Agreement reached between the Prime Minister and the sugar-producers in 2007. There is a need of going beyond short-term petty self-interests and consider the common long-term future of the country, including its people and nature. And a holistic approach is critical. In the latter example, this signifies that when the Light Rail Alternative Mode of Transport proposal is being looked into again, the potential of producing clean energy through CDF initiatives should not be overlooked.

### **A myth?**

There is a myth related by Mark Twain that God created Mauritius first, then Paradise. Paradise is a copy of Mauritius. The Ferney Forest is today part of the 1% of what remains of our Paradise lost. A visit to that gem of nature just saved from the jaws of so-called 'development' is a soul-searching experience.

But no one can go there without a means of transport. And had there not been the controversial project of a road in Ferney, few would have known about the place probably. Or is it ecologists whom one should thank, for being there to oppose the initial project in time? How can also one not pay tribute to the Prime Minister for saving the Ferney Forest? And if the latter stands as a sign of creation, how incomparable indeed must the beauty of its Creator?

Nature is sacred and should not be abused out of respect for its Creator. We should live in harmony with it and take from it only what is necessary. We have the responsibility to preserve the sustainable equilibrium inherent in our environment. To corrupt such a balance is not only wrong or a sin, but nothing less than an act of self-destruction.

The Ferney Forest, like nature everywhere, teaches us humility. We need to live in this world, not just make a living. And we have to live with people who are often different from us. Frequently, we are destined to struggle against all odds. Success is not in our hands, but we have the duty to put in all our efforts. With hardship, there comes ease...

The above recommendations form part of our human endeavour to strive for good and to stop the corruption of the earth. Success will not come out of our ideas or even out of our actions, but from our sincerity, our effort and our attitude. And if it does not come, it does not matter as long as we have believed and really done our best. As Gandhi put it, quoting Mukhtanand, 'I shall think myself blessed only when I see Him in every one of my daily acts'. Did the

Mahatma also not claim that there is enough on earth for everyone, but not for everyone's greed? (Gandhi, 1927).

The future of the planet rests on ' people of all faiths needing to radically alter their whole approach to life on the basis of spiritual teachings', according to Prince Charles in a keynote speech made recently at Oxford ( Daily Mail, 2010).

Although it may be towards Eastern philosophy that the West will have to turn in order to try saving the world, an amazing fact is that some of the foundation of modern environmentalism was probably laid in no other place than Mauritius in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Islands, including Mauritius, being isolated and small, demonstrated the processes of ecological change brought about by colonisation. Pierre Poivre and others were the pioneers of modern environmentalism in the policies and measures they introduced to respond to environmental degradation (Grove, 1995a).

These forefathers of what today is the MID movement attempted in the colonial days to save forests, fauna, fish stocks, lagoons as well as the water reserves of Mauritius. Surely, they had the memory of the dodo fresh in their minds. In many cases, they were simultaneously fighting against slavery, poverty, corruption and abuse of power giving already to their struggle a holistic scope. Grove, 1995b identified a strong reference to spiritual Indian, Chinese and Zoroastrian teachings in the origins of modern environmentalism in Mauritius. It is well known, also, that so many of the inhabitants of the island at the time, originating from Africa, India and China, had such life-styles that were in harmony with nature. Their religions and their cultures stood against its abuse. But they had no power...

## **Conclusion**

If we have power today, can we accept the violation of Mother Nature? Which model of development will we adopt? Is progress just a matter of having more cars, more buildings, larger television sets, more fast-foods, bigger shopping centres?

Indeed, there are hurdles in the implementation of MID. However, above-all, there is a need to educate, one and all, on what it implies as shared vision, collective effort and personal commitment. Evidence-based studies are necessary, but the essence of success lies in the motivation of the people to take ownership of MID.

As a plural society where East meets West, Mauritius benefits from a rich and diversified cultural, religious and spiritual heritage. That can be a deep source of inspiration in terms of ethos and values for the future of MID, far from the greed of the so-called 'developed' civilization.

It can be said that we have achieved no mean feat so far. But there is hope that something more wonderful, sustainable, waits for us down the lane. Faith is what is required from us. A staunch belief, not a flinching interest rising sporadically with oil prices, events like the Copenhagen Conference or catastrophes like the BP spill. Let us not be deceived by our means, and let us be guided by our vision in the hereafter. We will not be perfect, we must remain humble but we must strive, together, for a better new world.

Everything around us is a sign, and all that is created will perish. We have to look for what is beyond the created. To seek for what is really ever-lasting...'durable'!

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