

**University of Mauritius –
Innovation Week
Opening Ceremony – Monday 18 October 2021**

**Hon Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius
Colleague Ministers
Chancellor and Pro-Chancellor of the University of Mauritius
Senior Chief Executive of my Ministry
Academics
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen**

Good Morning

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to be here today for the Opening Ceremony of the second edition of the University of Mauritius Innovation Week. We feel privileged and honoured of course that the Prime Minister should have made time to mark the occasion with his presence.

Thank you, Hon Prime Minister, for having accepted to be with us for this ceremony.

I understand that, this year, the Innovation Week has been organised around the theme: *Sustainable Innovation in the Making*.

It helps to remind ourselves that Mauritius has been ranked 1st in Africa and 52nd worldwide on the Global Innovation Index this year. In this context, I feel that the choice of the theme is more than timely and appropriate given that we want to sustain the momentum as far as innovation is concerned. Indeed, if this is our goal, we do not have any other choice than to make Innovation seem..... *normal!*

Allow me to explain what I mean by making innovation seem normal.

Innovation should no longer be a feature made distinct from our normal, run-of-the-mill business; it should not be isolated from normal practice or even treated as a special practice that should remain confined in and specific to a separate department. Rather it should be an integral part of the normal day- to- day operation and the running thread through all that we do. It is only with this spirit that we can inculcate a solid innovation culture.

Indeed, now, more than ever, in this pandemic-dominated era, innovation will be the solution to various problems faced in practically all spheres of life.

Ladies and Gentlemen

One outcome of the 1st edition of the Innovation week held last year was a strong advocacy for innovation to be fostered and made operational at a three-pronged level: the Macro, the Meso and the Micro. The idea was to drive a **systemic** innovation at all levels.

Now, I fully concur with the recommendation to have policies, institutions, structures, guidelines and incentives for the promotion of innovative practices. However, I would also like to highlight that innovation is something quite unique, a leap from an individual's creative mind: besides devising policies and setting up structures, important as these are, we should at the same time reflect on how to increase creativity and instil an innovation culture in our workforce—and, that too at the individual level!

If we are right in this kind of thinking, the question remains as to how to get our people to think creatively, to create new opportunities, to find new solutions to old problems and to challenge the status quo?

As importantly to me, we need to decide what type of education system will trigger creative curiosity in our learners, the kind of creative tendency that will enable them to propel the country to the next level of its development; the kind of creative upsurge that will enable them as persons to shine and to be head-hunted on the global market place.

I therefore, consider the human aspect to be the determining factor for creative ideas to emerge and be translated into actions.

But obviously, also, there are other factors, too, that can contribute to innovation and its sustainability.

Obviously enough, we need to consider if the organizational/ institutional ethos, its climate, are conducive enough to facilitate the emergence of innovation. Thus, one of the questions Universities need to ask themselves how the environment is conducive to a cross fertilization of ideas; whether an effective use is being made of the capabilities of the different persons involved - in short, whether, their creative capability is being recognized?

This is the spirit-lifting that an institution should help create. For as someone said, '*new ideas need a soft place to land*'.

On the other hand, innovation also starts with the development of a high degree of *openness*. It begins with the idea that we wear no blinkers, that are not biased and that we do not allow our prejudices to thwart and block an acceptance of new ideas.

Indeed, at the end of the day, sustaining innovation resides in creating the conditions for an extension—an extension from an improvement of one’s life to an improvement of the community to which we belong. What ultimately matters is the determination to ensure that the innovative ideas are shared and help towards making society—both local and global—a better place to live in.

Hon Prime Minister, Colleague Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It goes without saying that our education institutions have a crucial role to play for the advancement of Science, Technology and Innovation—these being important drivers of economic growth and human development. An innovative economy, Ladies and Gentlemen occurs through the creation of knowledge and when supported by an educated and skilled workforce. In this scenario, it is incumbent upon universities to produce a workforce empowered to participate in an innovation-led economy.

And that, as we know will be instrumental in avoiding the middle-income trap that has sadly befallen some developing countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as an Educationist I know the importance of the hidden curriculum. Teaching the content is one thing, but inculcating the right attitude, values and beliefs is a completely different thing.

Innovating and creating an entrepreneurial culture cannot be taught in the traditional jug-mug fashion: these are not content-based knowledge.

That’s why I believe there is a need today to adopt a pedagogy that fosters among learners a bent of mind that places a premium on creative thinking, problem solving and flexibility, among others. Innovative teaching and practices should be the foundation on which the next generation of innovators should firmly stand. While schools are the nursery that provide an innovation-ready mind-set universities need to be the place where opportunities are provided for the blooming of the creative potential in its diverse manifestations.

Ladies and Gentlemen, a recent report of the Higher Education Commission highlights that, there were 79 research projects funded across various disciplines. 30 of these had been completed and some of them have recorded tangible benefits that have proved to be impactful leading to the creation of new products useful for the community at large.

It is thus crucial that research projects focus on and address critical challenges and problems faced by the country. This will be fulfilling the responsibility of universities to not only create knowledge and disseminate it but also to apply it so as to find creative solutions to real problems and hence enhance lifestyles.

Innovation must therefore sustain efforts that lead to the creation of new futures.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

During this week, Academics and others will showcase their research to both public and private sector representatives. The occasion is also sound for the University of Mauritius to celebrate innovative successes and recognise successful innovators.

This is very sound: for it is now a credo that, if we really want to unleash our creative potential, we should be operating in a system where alliances with others - academics, researchers and stakeholders of the industry - are the norm.

I believe that the week-long presentations and discussions will lead to actionable plans that support and instil innovation and creativity at all levels in Mauritius.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me conclude by expressing my appreciation to the organising committee and the contribution of the University of Mauritius for sustaining the innovation momentum. As we stand poised to zoom and dart towards a post-Covid 19 recovery, it is definitely innovative ideas and innovative ventures that will be instrumental in enabling the country to move higher up and get in the Global Innovation Index.

I wish you fruitful deliberations and discussions.

Thank you all for your kind attention.