Mauritius – Recovering from Covid

Mauritius’ best strategy for economic recovery post-pandemic includes both temporary support to firms and house-holds and comprehensive reforms to address pre-existing structural challenges, says the World Bank’s latest economic analysis for the country. The Mauritius Country Economic Memorandum, Through the Eye of a Perfect Storm – Coming Back Stronger from the Covid-19 Crisis, says the crisis presents policy makers with an opportunity to confront longstanding challenges.

The report highlights four main pillars for a strong recovery:

- A new industrial policy approach that focuses state support on innovation and technology transfer, while addressing cross-cutting issues in skills development, competition, natural resource management, and public private partnerships to promote productive private sector investment.
- Reversing the ongoing decline in competitiveness by leveraging foreign direct investment and new preferential trade opportunities to upgrade exports, while focusing Covid-19 support measures on managing the fallout from the pandemic in the meantime.
- Maintaining Mauritius’ inclusive development path will require renewed and more comprehensive efforts to promote labour market participation, especially for low educated women and youth, and more attention to early childhood and second chance education. Moving resources from the overly generous basic pension system to more targeted and effective anti-poverty programmes would help cope with the increased social needs and reduced fiscal space.
- Further strengthening of the public sector, in terms of policy coherence in complex, multi-sector reforms, and implementation capacity. Close collaboration with the private sector is also key. (worldbank.org 26/5)

Unemployment: Statistics Mauritius on May 19th indicated that the unemployment figures increased by 12,500 from 39,700 in 2019 to 52,200 in 2020 resulting in an unemployment rate of 9.2%. The figure was made up 10,700 males and 1,800 females. In its latest economic bulletin on Labour Force, Employment and Unemployment for the year 2020, it said that from 2019 to 2020, the male unemployment rate increased from 4.4% to 7.8% and female unemployment rate rose from 10.2% to 11.1%. Furthermore, it said the unemployment rate in 2020 was highest in the lowest age group (16 to 24 years) with a rate of 26.1% (23.2% for male and 29.6% for female) and decreased progressively with increasing age. (PANA 19/5)

According to the report’s authors, a number of reforms could be considered by the authorities to bridge the economic gender gap and facilitate the inclusion of women, starting with legal reforms to facilitate women’s access to employment, assets, and other productive resources. In addition, child marriage must be progressively eliminated, and women must be granted the same land and employment rights as men. The report concludes that society as a whole will benefit from new reforms that protect women and allow them to contribute fully to their country’s economic development. (worldbank.org 1/6)

Biodiversity Strategy: The government “will reject any project with a very strong environmental impact”, the country’s minister of environment and sustainable development, Mariem Bekaye has said. In a speech to mark World Environment Day on June 5th, Bekaye said work would be done to put an end to all activities that pollute and destroy ecosystems and “impede the sustainable development of our country”.

According to Bekaye, the government will in 2021 a “new national strategy for the protection and restoration of biodiversity” until the year 2030. She said the government had already embarked on a programme that includes reducing deforestation from about 46,000 hectares to 3,000 hectares annually. The government also initiated a study to determine appropriate sites for solid waste in compliance with required health and environmental standards, and a draft law on solid waste management is being prepared, she added.

The minister noted that the government had decided to ban the use of cyanide and mercury in conventional drilling and exploration techniques used in some industries. (BBC Monitoring 5/6)

Teachers’ Strike: Teachers in primary and secondary education began a strike on May 31st across the country asking for better pay and work conditions, domestic media outlets have highlighted. A sit-in on June 2nd was staged outside the presidential palace in capital Nouakchott to coincide with a government meeting. The protesters raised banners calling for an increase in their basic salary and threatened to extend their strike if their grievances were not met.

Mauritanian teachers strike often complaining of low salaries which, they say, cannot meet even their most basic living costs. In 2020, they staged a nationwide strike also to demand better pay and improved working conditions. (BBC Monitoring 2/6)

Narcotics Crackdown: Mauritanian authorities have continued their clampdown on the national and regional drugs trade, announcing the burning of 228 kg of Indian-origin marijuana. Sahara Media said investigations were ongoing to track down drug cartels. It added that Mauritania has recently reported an increase in murders, with narcotics believed to have played a role.

Smuggling networks are active in the Sahel region, where governments have said they are a source of funding for armed groups.

Mauritania’s armed forces regularly patrol the porous southern border, where the natural border of the Senegal river in the south separates the two nations, and where smugglers operate. (BBC Monitoring 6/6)

NIGERIA

Northwest Humanitarian Crisis

The authorities are struggling to respond in a region that has already recorded the highest poverty rate in the country.

Rising violence in northwest Zamfara state is stoking a humanitarian crisis. Doctors Without Borders (Médecins sans Frontières, MSF) said on June 3rd. The region has struggled with decades-long communal clashes over resources but more recently some groups have become more violent, looting, stealing and kidnapping for ransom, and people are fleeing to areas where aid groups are struggling to respond.

In a statement, MSF said it had already treated 10,300 children in Zamfara between January and April for severe acute malnutrition, measles, malaria and other conditions. “This is 54% higher than in the same period of 2020,” said an MSF doctor, Godwin Emudanohwo. “People here need food, safe water and vaccinations now,” said Emudanohwo. “Families tell us they won’t be able to farm for the new season, which means a new cycle of hunger.”

The authorities are struggling to respond in a region that has already recorded the highest poverty rate in Nigeria, the International Crisis Group (ICG) think tank said in a report. “As of 2019, all seven states in the zone had poverty levels above the national average. . . . Millions lack access to basic health care and clean water, and immunisation coverage is far below national goals,” it said.

“ ‘What is happening here is a humanitarian emergency that needs urgent attention and a fast and proper response,’ said Froukje Pelsma, MSF head of mission in Nigeria. (© AFP 3/6 2021)

Kaduna Workers Strike

Workers in volatile Kaduna State downed tools on May 17th to protest the sacking of 7,000 civil servants by the state government, the Vanguard website.