

# Mauritius Case Study: Local Ownership of the MDGs

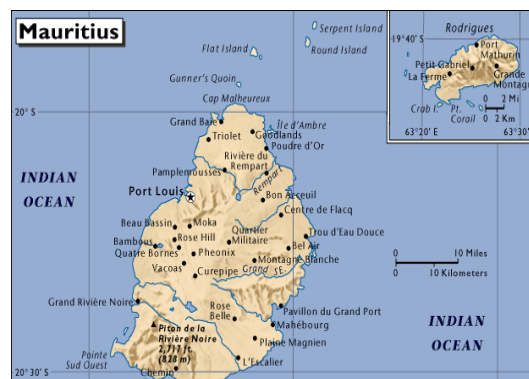
Summary of a UNDP Case Study prepared by the Bureau for Resources and Strategic Partnerships/MDGs Unit in conjunction with the Regional Bureaux and Country Offices; as one in a series of good practices.

## *The Country's Development Context*

Mauritius is an archipelago more than 1,000 miles off the coast of East Africa with an outstanding performance among African countries with its high economy and impressive human development indicators. The income of the average Mauritian more than tripled in the last 40 years; real GDP grew at an average of almost 6% per year. Mauritius ranks in the top half of the 42 Small Island Developing States, as measured by GDP per capita and provides free and compulsory primary education and universal health care.

This impressive development is the result of the government's sustained emphasis on social welfare, health and education; however, it has introduced new concerns. The successful transition from a low wage labour-intensive economy to a high-tech capital-intensive one has contributed to an increase in income inequality and the growth of pockets of poverty. There is a greater need for social services and as a small island, Mauritius remains environmentally vulnerable. Economic growth has slowed in recent years and government is concerned with maintaining growth and positive social trajectories.

Rodrigues island embodies many of these concerns. Rodrigues lies 500 kilometres east of the main island Mauritius, far from the national growth centres. The second most populated island in the country, Rodrigues is behind the national average on virtually every economic and human development indicator. The island did develop in the 1990s along with the rest of the country. While Mauritius' relative development index increased by about 20% between 1990 and 2000, Rodrigues' index leapt forward by nearly 73%. The gap, however remained significant; moreover, development planning on Rodrigues had been slow, and the island's economy continued to rely on fishing and agriculture. Concern grew that Rodrigues was being left behind



The socio-economic profile of Rodrigues also sets it apart. Nearly half of Mauritius' 1.2 million population lives in urban areas, whereas virtually all Rodrigues population is essentially rural. Furthermore, the incidence of poverty is well above the national average mainly due to Rodrigues' flagging economy, which is dependent on subsistence agriculture, livestock and lagoon fishing, and the relatively low educational attainment of the population. In terms of education, most of the children enrol in primary school but nearly two out of five drop out before completing grade six. Rodrigues' isolation from Mauritius and its distinct development needs did, however, catalyze a bid for independence in the 1990s, which was ultimately unsuccessful.

The dynamics began to shift when a new national government came to power in 2000, who became interested in doing something for the island and after a short process, Rodrigues gained political autonomy in 2002. The National Assembly devolved the power to initiate legislation on a wide range of internal affairs, while keeping national security, health, and education in the national portfolio. A new political power provided the island with greater latitude to chart its own development course: a new regional assembly was formed and two representatives to the national assembly also elected; and an Island Chief Executive was appointed for the day to day governing of Rodrigues.

#### *Preparing a Baseline: the National MDG Report*

After receiving the global UN MDG guidelines in late 2001, the UN Country Team agreed that an initial report would be a good way to raise awareness, thus the government was approached. Although willing to pursue an MDG report, the government expressed concern that it would not reflect social achievements or actions taken since it has to come to power. In answer to this, a sub-section for each goal was suggested, which would include a review on relevant policies instituted since 2002. This assurance, along with the government's inclination toward investing in human development, enabled the government to move forward with a national MDG report. As a result government assembled an Inter-Ministerial MDG Committee in 2002 to guide the preparation of the report.

The UN Country Team advised both the government and committee on interpretations of the MDG guidelines and provided financial support, as well as an external consultant to draft the report. The report evolved through a series of meetings that triangulated the input of the Committee, the UN Country Team, and the consultant. A consultative process was also advocated to review the findings of the report and to devise a system for tracking progress. The report preparation process made clear that the country had already met some of the MDGs, including hunger, education, maternal health and child mortality. Since the country had already achieved universal primary education, the focus was shifted to increasing completion of secondary education. In this manner it began to tailor the MDGs to Mauritius' needs, simultaneously increasing the relevance of the MDGs to its middle-income economy context and building national ownership.

#### *Outreach for National Action on the MDGs*

Few leaders and citizens in Mauritius knew about the MDGs, in 2002. As in other middle-income countries, once they did learn about them, not all perceived the MDGs as terribly relevant to a country as prosperous and supportive of social welfare policies as Mauritius. Yet, the government was aware of the impact that pockets of poverty and

inequality can have on the country's social cohesion; thus a four-phased strategy was devised to make stakeholders more aware of the relevance of the MDGs, to disseminate and to explain the MDG report and to enlist the population to act in support of the MDGs.

The first phase was the official launch of the report in October 2002, in the presence of people from all different sectors of society; the report was well received by attendees and generated positive media coverage. It set the stage for a countrywide sensitisation on the MDGs. The second phase shortly after included forums with youth and civil society; this began the real work of public outreach and securing popular commitment to the MDGs soliciting ideas on how to mobilise support for the MDGs, and ways to monitor progress. The forums focused on participant-generated recommendations and next steps, which contributed to greater follow-on action by attendees. The third phase of the strategy sought to bring MDG-consciousness into Mauritian homes and leadership circles through multi-media campaigns targeted to specific audiences; more traditional media outreach was also used, including posters, banners, and brochures.

#### *Toward Local Ownership of the MDGs: the Rodrigues MDG Report*

The fourth phase of the MDG campaign targeted Rodrigues Island. It sought to generate the same kind of grassroots commitment to action anticipated from the outreach in Mauritius, but to involve all stakeholders earlier in the process. Two workshops were envisioned, one for policymakers and another for the civil society. The Rodrigues Regional Assembly, however, wanted to hear what civil society had to say and suggested that the two workshops be combined; thus a single "Parliamentarian and Civil Society Forum on the MDGs" took place. This forum initiated substantial movement toward local ownership of the MDGs. Participants decided within the space of that one day that the island needed its own MDG: the consensus was that an MDG report could serve as a reference point for development policy planning and as a baseline for the measurement of future progress.

Pre-existing conditions enabled the forum to move beyond discussion to action quickly: very high level of social cohesion that stems part in part from its cultural homogeneity, the relatively new autonomy that created both political opening and powerful motivation and finally, the citizens for Rodrigues shared a concern for the slow pace of human development on their island. A production of a sub-national MDG report was not anticipated, however the UN Country Team was supportive given the enthusiasm among stakeholders and the potential for such a report to stimulate further action against poverty. The Chief Commissioner of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly coordinated the report process. This close involvement of parliamentarians was unusual compared to other report process globally and promised to facilitate transformation of findings into action. The five-month preparation process was the single greatest factor in building local ownership of the MDGs on Rodrigues. Participation was key; a series of consultations to share report drafts with the island's population and civil society organizations, and to solicit reaction. Their input was highly valued and resulted in genuine interaction, which further strengthened the alliance to reach the MDGs.

One outcome of consultations was the adaptation of the MDGs to Rodrigues, namely the measurement of poverty in Goal 1, a focus on completion of primary education for Goal 2, and the shift of Goal 6 to include non-communicable diseases, a serious issue that authorities needed to tackle. The Rodrigues Sub-National Report on the MDGs,

issued in 2003, reviews four topics for each MDG: Rodrigues's status and trends related to the goal's achievement; adequacy of existing MDG indicators; policies and strategies that could potentially support the goal; and plans for the future and challenges. The report gives depth and dimension to the common understanding of development challenges in Rodrigues. It also considers the expected impact of national plans as well as recent budget allocations by the Rodrigues Regional Assembly. In this way, it recognizes the relevance of national policies while clearly reflecting the island's new autonomy.

The early consultation with stakeholders made the report process in many ways more successful than the national process, which first consulted civil society after the report was launched. The resulting widespread public support for the MDGs enabled Rodriguan authorities to undertake a highly participatory development planning process.

#### *From Ownership to Action on the MDGs: Rodrigues Development Planning*

Stakeholders in Rodrigues had come to believe in the relevance of the MDGs for the island and wanted to use the report findings to prepare a plan centred on achieving the MDGs. At the same time the authorities in Rodrigues began planning for a more integrated development strategy for the island; thus the Rodrigues MDG Report became a strategic planning tool for initial articulation of development plans. Transforming the findings of the report into actionable items has required several steps. A project to prepare a detailed Sustainable Integrated Plan was started in 2003.

First, the authorities of Rodrigues formed a Steering Committee and four Working Groups, to lead the preparation. The members range from grassroots community members to village council leaders to technical specialists. The structure of the Steering Committee facilitates the cross-sectoral and inter-governmental cooperation. Second, the adapted MDGs form the backbone of this emerging plan; which concentrates on four areas: productive sectors (corresponding to efforts to eradicate poverty), social issues, education and training, and infrastructure. Third the approach is to include clear links with national plans, to strengthen its national endorsement; to help sustaining the momentum generated during the Rodrigues MDG forum, and provide a logical framework for development activities. Additionally, the plan's link to international frameworks through the MDGs may in the future, help to raise additional funds needed for implementation. Fourth, the plan will feature in the Rodrigues Regional Assembly's budget proposal. This will be then included in the national budget demonstrating the local commitment to the actions and increasing the likelihood that the plan will alleviate poverty. The pledge may also help to attract donor support. Fifth and finally, the Steering Committee has recognized that the plan must prioritize building the capacity of Rodriguan Government and civil society organizations as an essential step toward effective implementation of other parts of this and subsequent development programmes.

#### *Lessons Learned*

**The MDGs can provide a lens through which middle-income countries can re-examine their human development successes, assess new concerns and identify areas for targeted development.** Preparation of a national MDG report helped Mauritius to better understand better some adverse effects of its positive economic transformation and growth, including increased income inequality and pockets of

poverty. It also called attention to the fact that Rodrigues Island lagged far behind the national averages, despite growth and development in progress in Rodrigues.

**Adaptation of the MDGs to national and local contexts is an essential step to making the MDGs relevant to middle as well as low income countries and to building local ownership.** At the national level, Mauritius adjusted upward Goals 1,2,3 and 5 as it had already met the global definitions. At the sub-national level, Rodrigues Island further adapted the goals to local priorities, which strengthened buy in and commitment to MDG-centred policy planning.

**Social cohesion can facilitate ownership of and action toward the MDGs.** Linking local initiatives –and leaders- to international action on the MDGs can be a powerful lever to create commitment and action. Where social cohesion is weaker, the MDGs can provide a platform on which to initiate discussion and build cohesion. Almost everyone agrees about feeding the hungry, for example. The tightly knit community in Rodrigues quickly rallied around the ideals and outcomes of the MDGs. Even there, the MDGs served as a powerful catalyst to focus the community on action.

**Linking local initiatives –and leaders- to international action on the MDGs can be a powerful lever to create commitment and action.** The Chief Commissioner of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly credits his participation in a 14-country Southern African MDG forum with fully convincing him to prioritize action on the MDGs. Those discussions convinced him that the world was taking the MDGs seriously, and that Rodrigues could be linked directly to a regional and global movement.

**Early engagement of civil society in MDG processes can increase the ultimate acceptance of report findings and effectiveness of development plans.** The *Rodrigues MDG Report* preparation process was in many ways more successful than the national process because non-governmental stakeholders were consulted from the beginning, not just when the report was released. The resulting widespread public support for the MDGs enabled Rodriguan authorities to undertake a highly participatory development planning process. Although implementation of the island's development plan has not yet begun, local ownership for the plan runs deep and is likely to improve its eventual impact.

**MDG reports and local development plans can enable local and national authorities to develop a common agenda, and strengthen bonds between the centre and the periphery.** The process of preparing a sub-national MDG report and development plan helped Rodrigues Island to articulate its own needs and policy priorities while linking up with national and international frameworks.

**When MDG reports are prepared prior to development plans, they can become important inputs to planning processes.** Rodrigues' first development plan will be aligned with locally-adapted MDGs as a direct result of the prior completion of the sub-national *Rodrigues MDG Report*