

Speech by the Honourable Etienne Sinatambou,
Minister of Information Technology &
Telecommunications on the occasion of the Scan-ICT
Workshop

Mr Makane Faye, Representative of the United Nations Economic
Commission for Africa

Mr Bundhoo, Director of the Central Statistics Office

Distinguished guests and delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to address you this morning on the occasion of the SCAN-ICT Workshop being organised by the Central Statistics Office and the United Nations Economic Commission For Africa in the context of the SCAN-ICT Phase 2 project.

Information and Communication Technology is today the driving force of the global economy. Many governments, including the Mauritian government, have as one of their key objectives to build a knowledge-based economy, where knowledge, creativity and innovation will play an important role in generating and sustaining economic growth.

Indeed, Mauritius is determined to develop a knowledge, innovation and technology-based economy. Government is fully committed to providing stakeholders with opportunities to develop the sector and to make of ICT a truly fifth pillar of the economy.

To this end the elaboration of e-strategies has become a very important national instrument to ensure the participation everybody in the development of the Information Society. It is recognized that measuring the Information Society, in particular the use and impact of ICTs, is a precondition for formulating and assessing ICT policies and strategies and monitoring the digital divide.

The Information Society can be measured in terms of indicators such as access to ICT infrastructure and the production and the use of information and communication technologies in the various areas of society.

Indicators provide feedback with regard to national policy-making and investment, and also in terms of external participation in projects and investments. Government and policy-makers need to have information as to where the country currently stands vis-à-vis the information society. In this context, indicators provide concrete and factual statements about the current state of development in a given area and are necessary to encourage debate about how policies must be formulated and visions implemented.

At the enterprise level, data on ICT use help companies take business and investment decisions. Appropriate ICT strategies, for instance, can then help them increase their productivity and competitiveness, and participate more fully in national and international supply chains. It is therefore important for governments to support new initiatives to collect ICT data and increase their consistency and comparability.

At the international level, the Geneva Plan of Action prepared during the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), in Geneva in December 2003 requested all countries to develop tools to provide statistical information capable of measuring progress made towards the information societies. In addition, the Plan stipulated that priority be given to establishing coherent and internationally comparable indicator systems, taking into account different levels of development. This clearly indicates the importance of having reliable and comparable indicators for the Information Society.

The lists of core ICT indicators of all organizations involved in ICT indicator-building in all regions of the world was submitted to the WSIS Thematic Meeting on Measuring the Information Society, which was held in Geneva in February 2005, where they were harmonized

and a global set of core indicators measuring the Information Society was presented for adoption. This global list is expected to constitute the basis for an institutional database on ICT statistics.

Furthermore, in order to be able to compare indicators and the development of the Information Society among countries at different levels of development, the ITU recently devised two indices; the Digital Access Index and the Digital Opportunity Index. These indices were presented at the WSIS Thematic Meeting on Measuring the Information Society in Geneva in February 2005.

The Digital Access Index (DAI) measures the overall ability of individuals in a country to access and use new ICTs. The DAI is built around four fundamental indicators that impact a country's ability to access ICTs: infrastructure, affordability, knowledge and quality and usage of ICTs. The DAI provides a transparent and globally measurable way of tracking progress towards improving access to ICTs. By grouping the indicators in this way, it allows countries to see where they are relatively strong and weak, which can be useful for policymaking.

The results of the DAI ranks countries into four categories: High access, upper access, middle access and low access. Countries in the high access category therefore have relatively high access to ICT infrastructure and ICT usage is also quite high. Countries in the upper access section usually have an imbalance in a specific indicator. For example, some countries in this group may have a high level of infrastructure availability but score low in affordability. Countries in the middle access section are characterised by shortage of infrastructure. Economies in the low access section are the poorest countries with relatively high access prices. In most of these nations, an hour a day of Internet access exceeds the average daily income. The DAI for Mauritius stood at 0.59 in June 2005 compared to 0.5 in 2003 and this puts Mauritius in the upper access section.

The Digital Opportunity Index (DOI) measures the extent of the digital divide and measures the ICT infrastructure capabilities of countries in infrastructure development, access to ICT, affordability and coverage of ICT and quality. This index is still being developed at the level of ITU and a preliminary finding was discussed at the WSIS in Tunis in

November 2005. Once finalised, it will be an important element for measuring the digital divide.

In order to converge towards an information-based economy, we need to ensure that our people are well geared to form part of the information society and that our businesses are given the right tools and guidance to effectively grow and prosper. Comprehensive programmes have been set up to ensure that the ICT culture integrates the lives of each and every segment of our society. No effort is being spared to ensure that ICT is within reach of all segments of our population – from students to teachers, unemployed persons, the working population and the community at large. Providing greater accessibility to ICT is, in fact, one of the main objectives of Government and ICT indicators are, in this respect, of utmost importance.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to reiterate that Government is according high priority to the development of the ICT sector to transform the country into a Cyber Island. The ICT sector is not only expected to evolve as the fifth pillar of growth but will also revamp traditional sectors. By cutting across all sectors, information technology will enhance productivity and quality, and improve competitiveness. Thus, the ICT sector will enable Mauritius to plug fully into the net economy and help this part of the world to be a full participant in the digital economy.

Before ending I wish to commend and thank the Central Statistics Office for organising this workshop and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa for this audable initiative. With these few words, I have the pleasure to declare this Workshop open and wish all the participants fruitful deliberations.

Thank you for your attention.