

THE ICT SECTOR IN MAURITIUS AN OVERVIEW OF THE COUNTLESS TECHNOLOGY-RELATED CHALLENGES FACED ACROSS DIFFERENT SECTORS IN THE MAURITIAN ECONOMY



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LAST YEAR has been a vibrant year for the Technology industry worldwide despite the challenging times imposed on us by the Covid pandemic. Locally, we witnessed some interesting ICT projects and initiatives at both public and private sector levels which are expected to drive a growth of around 6% this year.

Although the pandemic has hampered the focus on Industry 5.0, it has however forced players in the manufacturing industry to adopt the fundamentals of Industry 4.0. Digital processes, Robotics, IoT, Artificial Intelligence and Automation are no longer farfetched concepts, but they are prerequisites for any effective and forward-looking organization.

Over and above Trading businesses, e-platforms have become

the norm in several key sectors such as Education, Retail and Distribution, Healthcare as well as for government services. This trend is only expected to grow rapidly over the coming months and years.

Already a major pillar of the economy, the ICT industry in Mauritius is becoming of utmost importance for all sectors and hence as the most important enable to drive socioeconomic growth and sustainable development. The undeniable and fast adoption of the latest emerging technologies is a must to enhance Mauritius's role in global supply chain and for building more competitiveness and value in our products and services to the international market.

Adoption of emerging technologies such as Artificial intel-

ligence (AI), Big Data, Internet of things (IoT) and Robotics are more than ever pressing items on our agenda which needs to be tackled if we wish to bridge the gaps in our quest for a Smart and Digital Island.

Despite recent policy decisions and legislations promulgated by the government, along with extensive sensitization programs by industry associations and experts in the domain, we must admit there are still a significant adoption level required for Mauritius to reach its next phase of digital transformation. Bolder decisions are required to embark on more fundamental transformational projects in sectors like Healthcare, Agriculture, Education and Finance, amongst others.

Mauritius has emerged and wants to be the leader in Africa in ICT. The government has set out an ambitious blueprint with emphasis on digital government, ICT infrastructure, innovation, talent management and Cyber Security to support this vision. At the same time, the technology industry is faced with a tricky balancing act: continue to drive innovative solutions while grappling with the side effects of those solutions in the global economy. Economies, jobs, and personal lives are becoming more digital, more connected, and more automated.

The fourth Industrial revolution and the looming Industry 5.0 will disrupt even further the value chain of businesses. More than ever, customers are at the heart of any corporate and digital strategy. In order to meet and exceed customer expectations, busi-

nesses are bound to innovate constantly, and design business models based on emerging technologies to which there are more and more acquaintances.

On one hand, when large firms decide to embrace technology, they have the funds and resources to implement that technology on a large scale. Small businesses rarely have that advantage. However, there is somewhere that entrepreneurs do have an opportunity. Unlike others, an entrepreneur must go through significantly fewer steps to test out and incur lesser costs to adopt the newer technologies. Because they are nimble, they can jump on the innovation bandwagon rapidly and develop new solutions from scratch. The accessibility and lower cost of adoption coupled with the agility of entrepreneurs allow the emergence of many start-ups especially in the finance and retail sectors with employment opportunities.

We should all reckon that the need to reinvent ourselves dates back much earlier than the current pandemic context. We were already lagging on the adoption of digitalisation and emerging technologies since years in different spheres of the economy ranging from Healthcare, Manufacturing, Finance, amongst others.

Apart from the measures announced, the government needs to come with more concrete game changing projects which will act as a catalyst to more profound changes in the structure of our economy. Technology can re-define the way we look at Healthcare, Agriculture, Energy and Financial Services, to name a few...

The main challenges are human resources, regional and international integration, and the need for innovative projects. Demand for innovative solutions is expected to



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exceed our capacity to deliver in terms of quality and time. Mauritius, being a small Island, is limited in terms of its human resources capabilities to respond to need for fast innovative solutions for diverse sectors.

Tertiary institutions have shown a strong will to collaborate and address the skills mismatch for the ICT industry, alike the government's effort with the establishment of a Digital Academy in collaboration with local operators.

Moreover, there is a palpable opportunity to develop Mauritius in a strategic platform for Innovation, or rather as a MegaLab for R&D for Global Tech companies. This will not only allow the best of breed technologies and experts into the country, but it will also help Mauritius workforce to benefit from concrete and practical technology transfer which will allow the country to explore other growth avenues in the sectors. By creating a powerhouse for talents in the Technology services sector, Mauritius can ambition to become a significant player and export of services for the rest of Africa and the world.

HEADING TO AN IMMERSIVE ECONOMY

The concept of the new immersive economy will not even be a choice but rather an obvious consideration for us all, either as individuals or economic operators. Our ways of consuming or operating were already changing with the advent of emerging technologies, but with the Metaverse this will only further accentuate. This new digital concept will affect areas such as health, education, and retail.

The application of the Metaverse and the immersive technologies that are associated with it, will allow us to remain competitive and in line with the trends that we will know in terms of global consumption.

Previous mobile technologies connected people, but 5G will also connect machines in a larger way and thus create a positive impact on the value chain of companies for the ultimate good of customers. Moreover, with the arrival of autonomous vehicles, 5G will have an impact on the entire supply chain of different industries.

However, 5G will also intensify threats to cybersecurity and data privacy. The convergence of the factors mentioned

will lead to a multiplication of private networks or massive connections of objects that will generate new threats that we should mitigate and control. Cybersecurity & Data Protection have also become a priority due to the need for accessing critical data efficiently and securely, at any time and from anywhere.

Increase exposure of various cyberthreats (more than 80% of companies have been targeted at least once by a cyberattack), regulatory pressure reinforcement (such as the General Data Protection Regulations) are many reasons for organisations to improve the control of the security of their information systems. Since these IT threats continue to evolve and become more advanced and persistent, attackers are using sophisticated ways to avoid being detected and breach security defences. There is a growing reliance on next gen Security Operation Centers (SOC) to provide a central place for detecting, diagnosing, and remediating a high malware and cyberattacks volume.

Protecting regional customers from the latest advanced threats using a combination of comprehensive threat intelligence, big data analytics and advanced security automation tools can allow Mauritius to position itself as a centre of excellence for SOC services for Africa and outside the continent by leveraging on an advanced state-of-the-art technology infrastructure, tools and high calibre resources.

Mauritius's evolving economy should be seen as a competitive and thriving services platform harnessing opportunities around a cashless society, Agritech, Medtech and other related services. Driven by talents, skills, expertise, technology, and a new breed of Mauritian technopreneurs, this will pave the way for Mauritius to transit into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy and unleash its export potential.