15. DIGITALISATION AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE READINESS

15.1   In an era defined by rapid technological advancement and digital disruption, Mauritius has emerged as a forward-looking, innovation-driven nation. Government is committed to accelerate the country's digital transformation towards becoming a smart, inclusive and future ready nation through a series of measures namely: setting up of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Innovation Start-Up Programme to be spearheaded by the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation (MITCI); the establishment of a dedicated AI Unit to accelerate this digital transformation; and provision of incentives to stimulate private sector investment in digital technologies and AI.

15.2   Moreover, in line with Government Programme 2025-2029, the MITCI launched the ''*Blueprint for Mauritius: A Bridge to the Future - Digital Transformation 2025-2029''*, which provides a strategic, people-centric and actionable roadmap. Structured around four strategic pillars and five enablers, the Blueprint sets out a comprehensive vision to modernise infrastructure, strengthen digital governance, and integrate technologies such as AI across all sectors of the economy and Public Service. It lays emphasis on sustainability, cybersecurity, and ethical AI, with the aim to position Mauritius as a leader in digital transformation, while supporting economic growth, social inclusion, and the ability to cope with environmental challenges. In these perspectives, the MITCI has set up an Artificial Intelligence Unit, which will be responsible for the implementation of the strategy covering various aspects in connection with AI.

15.3   The Blueprint equally provides for the creation of a National Digital Transformation Steering Committee to oversee and guide implementation of the various initiatives enunciated therein. Furthermore, to ensure the successful implementation of the Blueprint and to provide a clear, accountable and responsive oversight of digital transformation at all levels of government, the MITCI has established three key committees: the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Digital Transformation; the National Digital Transformation Steering Committee; and Ministry-level Project Steering Committees.

15.4   Throughout its past Reports, the Bureau has advocated for the need to modernise the Public Sector through various reforms including e-Government and digital transformation. It also stressed on the importance of continuous digital training and upskilling of public officers, to ensure that they are well-equipped to support and manage modern ICT systems effectively.

15.5   In the context of this Report, no major submission from Unions/Federations was made on e-Governance or Digitalisation. However, they expressed their apprehension on the advent of AI and its impact thereof on jobs, in general. Parties concerned were, however, informed that since we are still in an early phase in the application of AI, a proper assessment may not be possible at this stage. The Ministry of Public Service and Administrative Reforms (MPSAR),

on its side, submitted that the slower than expected pace of digital transformation in the Public Sector, as highlighted by the National Audit Office in its 2023/2024 Report, has hindered progress in improving service delivery, reducing costs, and making effective use of limited resources.

15.6   Additionally, the MPSAR considers that there is an urgent need to accelerate digital reforms and align with international best practices. It has in the same vein, proposed for certain initiatives such as the Electronic Document Management System (e-DMS); Electronic Scheme of Scheme (e-SoS); digitalisation of the Performance Management System; setting up of a Digital Government Policy Office; and introduction of a Public Service Facilitation System, as stated in Government Programme 2025-2029, to enhance service delivery, reduce access cost and eliminate unnecessary inconveniences. In parallel, the existing Government Chatbot will be revamped and rolled out in a phased manner in a few Ministries/Departments in a first instance. The revamped Chatbot, namely Digital Interactive Virtual Assistant (DIVA) will introduce future-ready eco-system of AI agents.

15.7   We consider that along with the measures enunciated in the Blueprint, for increased efficiency, electronic and digital processes need to be SMART (simple, moral, accountable, responsive and transparent). Furthermore, with AI becoming the buzzword, there is need to move forward from e-Governance to AI Governance, the moreso AI is reshaping the workplace inasmuch as how we work and communicate, while enhancing decision-making processes, improving efficiency and fostering innovation.

15.8   However, the adoption of AI in everyday life also raises important questions about ethics, privacy, and the future of jobs. Adopting AI should not be the mission, instead it should be a tool to help achieve Government's objectives. The Bureau views that a sustainable approach to AI adoption in the Public Sector should be favoured, based on three key pillars, namely: People, Processes and Technology.

15.9   The foundation to successful AI implementation lies in empowering employees with digital and AI skills, promoting citizen trust and ensuring people remain at the centre of transformation. Further, to ensure that human oversight and decision making remain central to AI implementation as well as ensuring AI outputs are critically assessed and contextualised by human expertise, a ''human-in-the-loop'' approach may be most appropriate. The second pillar, namely development and refinement of processes, involves reviewing existing work processes, integrating digital tools, removing inefficiencies and rethinking action plans to make the Public Service more efficient and citizen-focused. However, for a successful outcome, continuous monitoring and evaluation are essential to ensure that processes stay relevant and aligned with set objectives.

15.10   The final pillar, that is, technology, involves effective data management, choosing the right AI solution and establishing the necessary infrastructure for sustainability. Additionally, since Government handles sensitive citizen information, data protection and implementation of secure technologies are essentially critical to maintain citizen trust. The Blueprint on Digital Transformation 2025-2029 takes a well-balanced approach by integrating People, Processes and Technology. Together, these three pillars can create a robust framework for AI integration in the Public Sector as well as a Government that is easily accessible, inherently trustworthy and caring.

15.11   We are therefore making new recommendations for public sector organisations to harness the full potential of AI to better serve the citizens, while maintaining existing provisions which are still relevant.

Optimal Use of Infrastructural Technologies

15.12   With the evolution of technologies and the introduction of ''hybrid'' working arrangements, the provision of appropriate ICT equipment, tools and facilities has become essential. In that respect, the Bureau had recommended, among others, for the provision of necessary ICT equipment to ensure smooth service delivery. In view of its relevance, we are maintaining the recommendation.

Recommendation 1

15.13   **We recommend that Management of Ministries/Departments/ Organisations, in collaboration with the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation should:**

      (i)   **provide the necessary updated ICT equipment/upgraded systems and applications to their staff, based on organisational needs and feasibility, to enable a smooth running of activities;**

      (ii)   **ensure an optimum and judicious use of the abovementioned equipment/facilities; and**

      (iii)   **continue to provide ICT equipment, along with access to the internet, to employees operating at lower levels, wherever there is need, based on operational requirements.**

Fostering AI Initiatives

Recommendation 2

15.14   **We recommend that the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation should, in its framework for the integration of AI in the Public Sector, consider the advisability of including people, processes and technology as key pillars with a view to providing a solid foundation upon which AI Governance can be built.**

15.15   **We also recommend that:**

(i)   **AI initiatives should be strategically aligned with an organisation's mission, goals and objectives to drive performance, foster innovation and increase efficiency and effectiveness;**

(ii)   **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) should be developed and used to assess the success and impact of AI initiatives;**

(iii)   **Ministries and Departments, in consultation with the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation, be encouraged to apply for funding under the "Public Sector AI Programmes" so that they can leverage digital technological and AI tools to improve processes, achieve efficiency gains and enhance service delivery; and**

(iv)   **the Ministry of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation in collaboration with relevant authorities should address fundamental data management issues including data quality, collection, storage, compliance and security, so as to ensure a successful, efficient and effective implementation of AI initiatives/technologies.**

Capacity Building

15.16   We consider that investment in the necessary infrastructure to support AI technologies should not only include the physical/hardware and software but also the training and development of the MITCI's technical staff to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge needed to work effectively with AI-related technologies, among others.

15.17   In the last Report, we recommended for the MITCI along with the MPSAR to carry out a Human Resource Planning (HRP) exercise to detect and address where relevant, any issue regarding staff size and skills upliftment. We have been apprised that such exercise has not been conducted as at date. In such circumstance and taking into account the broad measures announced by Government in the wake of new technologies, including AI, we hold that HRP is a must. We are, therefore, reiterating its conduct.

Recommendation 3

15.18   **We recommend that the Ministry of Information, Technology, Communication and Innovation in collaboration with:**

(i)   **the Ministry of Public Service and Administrative Reforms, should carry out a Human Resource Planning exercise to identify and address issues of shortage of technical staff and develop a comprehensive human resource development plan to address any skills upliftment with regard to this category of staff, for more efficiency to prevail; and**

(ii)   relevant institutions should:

(a)   make the necessary arrangements for the continual training of its technical staff so that they are properly equipped with the relevant knowledge and skills to cope with emerging technologies, including AI; and

(b)   identify and arrange for the proper training of public sector employees to ensure a smooth transition towards AI.

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