

MONITORING AND EVALUATING THE ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT IN MAURITIUS: SETTING UP MECHANISMS.

Economic Partnership Agreement in Mauritius is important and a way forward towards achieving the goals and targets set by the government. Notwithstanding the interim nature of the Agreement, good monitoring and Evaluations need to be put in place to monitor and evaluate any achievements accruing from the initiative. This cannot be the sole responsibility of government alone as all other economic operators, civil society and the entire business community can contribute towards the attainment of this noble objective initialled between the Government and the European Union in a bid to booster trade between ACP countries. Proposal have already been set to put a monitoring and Evaluation mechanism at regional levels but concrete measures have not yet been set to implement such a laudable programme. While waiting on the regional body and/or mechanism to see the day of light, member countries of the ACP who initialled the Agreement could begin to the exercise by setting up local monitoring and evaluation committees or organs that would measure gains or loss from the Agreement. Like all projections, important intercontinental initiatives of this magnitude need proper checks and balances by parties to such agreements to measure the implementation and impact of the Agreement to their economies and standard of live. To further buttress the point, Mauritius which is fairing very well in International trade and general economic salvation programmes needs to begin to count its successes in order to know its failures and to correct them in due time to meet up the purpose for which the government endorsed the EPA to achieve for its people. Monitoring is only good for accountable purposes but a guide to good policy formulation and proper policy implementation to continue in the path of economic growth and general regional and international trade participation.

Economic Stakeholders are not peripheral actors in this bid to evaluate interim gains accruing from the endorsement of the EPA. Their support in the process contributes to general awareness. It would also be interesting to note that, they are main vehicles to government policy to business community that are precursors to any such Agreement that governments engage their people. It is said government do not trade but corporations do. While proper control mechanisms would inform government of any deviations,derogation,difficulties and problems encountered in the discharge of their activities, it would guide to consider the option to either or not initial a Full EPA in the future as per the wishes of the European Union, main initiators of the intercontinental Plan.

From the beginning of discussions to initial such a huge Agreement certain important considerations were not taken on board satisfactorily to address major concerns of developing countries. These concerns keep surfacing in all circles of discussions among stakeholders in these countries. Development related issues are primordial if any further negotiations to keep going the trade bond are to last. Mauritius would need to quantify its gains in terms of what the countries can achieve from the EPA. Governments and other stakeholders-main vehicles of trade need to measure the impact to make sure the agreement stand the purpose for which is was signed. In doing this, development concern need to be updated, revalorised to answer to the exigencies of various countries. To consider the case of Mauritius-diversifying its production base in sensitive areas would be a sure way to measure their gains from the agreement-sugar, tourism, textile and clothing and food processing among others that need to be developed to meet up international competition challenges from regional and other competitors. To address food security needs, increase the per capita income of its population

to better their living stand. There are lots of reasons to support the thesis on monitoring and evaluating the Economic Partnership Agreement which properly address would guide countries to know how they can negotiate their ways out of poverty and into the multilateral trading system and all other trading arrangements that they may get into. Development being of cardinal importance cannot be underlooked as previous strides to bail most developing economies out of poverty have not yielded desired fruits from various one-solution-fit all approach adopted by some donor communities. Trade can be and has been identified to be the only way through which this concern can be addressed. To address this concern various mechanisms need to be put in place to monitor and evaluate how the implementation of terms of the agreement supports their concerns.

WHAT IS MONITORING AND HOW CAN IT BE ACHIEVED BY MAURITIUS?

A number of reasons account for why Mauritius should set up a monitoring and Evaluation mechanism to monitor and evaluate its achievements by the endorsement of the interim EPA it initialled with the EU. In trying to assess areas of focus to be monitored, they may differ from country to country for various geopolitical reasons and economic bases and sensitive product list-if these products will survive further negotiations in different trading arenas. Taking a look at the standard set by the regional EU framework of EPA for monitoring and Evaluation, differences are bound to set hardship on some countries like Mauritius that are small economies with certain products and industries that need special protection. To set regional or international standards for this purpose would mean exposing vulnerable economies into stiff competition that would result in devastating economic hardship to the economic bases of these countries. eg the sugar industry and textile industry to Mauritius. To attempt to explain away what is monitoring and evaluation; it is good to break it further in the following ways for government and stakeholders to explore ways and means through which better results could impact on the lives of their people. The following can be considered;

Mauritius being one of the highly rated developing economy in developing Africa would need to address concerns about clearly identifying sectors, programme and what they want to achieve from the EPA, which are the sectors that would benefit, how and who are those directly or indirectly concern with the implementation of the terms of the EPA in those sectors. Stakeholders are very useful and can contribute enormously towards the achievement of these objectives. Involving private sectors, civil societies and educating them on real issues of the EPA negotiations and how they can get going is important.

Setting clear and agreed objectives, monitoring targets and milestones. This will enable the concerned check what is going on, take actions to correct certain lapses and control excesses from parties involve in trade. It would also enable the business community to know the practicalities of the agreement and how they can use same to benefit the country at large.

Set up mix commissions to carry forward the monitoring and evaluation of the Implementation of the EPA at country level. Mauritius is already better armed in this area. Its private sector and other economic institutions need to be empowered to ensure substantial progress of the EPA alongside government negotiators.

Monitoring and evaluation progress towards results, and resources consumed, with the use of appropriate indicators. This means that extra resources should be made available for this exercise which will bring our inadequacies and also take measures to correct same. Reliance

should only be placed on the regional or international Monitoring and evaluation committee that is envisaged in the EPA.

Identifying and managing assumptions/risks, while bearing in mind expected results and the necessary resources. In all agreements, what matters is not the endorsement of the agreement but how the same can be implemented, in which process there is incidental risk which if not foreseen can derogate the very purpose for which such agreements were entered into. Measuring risk is a good step towards checking derogations and a way to measure extent of success or results targeted. In compliance to these measures and in respecting to the terms of the agreements questions like, are our targets met or are we in the same position in which we got to the agreement? These and many more are important for Mauritius to answer as we set to achieve greater results from initialling an interim EPA even though options are open to further negotiations for better and pro-development issues to the country. Other options are available to harness any achievement that the country may set to gain from entering the Economic Partnership Agreement with the EU, to wit;

Using quantifiable indicators and qualitative narratives to measure progress,
Increasing knowledge by learning lessons and integrating them into decisions,
Changing objectives as a consequence of learned lessons.
Reporting on results achieved and the resources involved.

An important question to ask is; why is the EPA not negotiated at regional levels? The answer is obvious-mainly because various countries dispose of various economic specificities that might have hampered the success of the negotiations and due to the heterogeneous and varied product list and development needs of each country. It is in this regard that monitoring and evaluating mechanisms would be better adopted by various countries to assess their special and specific needs. Measuring the success of the EPA by a regional committee or commission may not assess the extent of development achieved by some countries owing to their varied but important development concerns.

Because most trade and development Agreements contain capacity building elements paves the way the agreement is carried out which is as important as the end results. What is achieved and how it is achieved is often part and parcel of the same capacity building process; therefore, when undertaken monitoring we should try to use the process to build capacity. Building capacity is equally as important as the economic gains that accrue from Trading with the EU under the terms of the EPA. It is very positive in the case of Mauritius that already has a well structured private sector to maximise the implementation of the EPA by involving a large audience in the nitty-gritty and complexities of the EPA. It would not be proper to wait until a final EPA is signed for such mechanisms to be put into place as it may become cumbersome to some stakeholders to catch up with why and how the Partnership works.

MAINSTREAMING THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT.

Generally, the idea of sustainability is being made practical through the use of mainstreaming EPA results: mainstreaming is the ultimate test of trade agreement and its sustainability. Most trade agreements and partnerships have clear intentions of influencing other stakeholders to adopt and incorporate some or all of what is contained in the agreement or partnership; this is what is meant by mainstreaming-following up what has been agreed upon by both parties. Whatever countries adopt as mechanisms to monitor and evaluate individual gains from the EPA should be made known to all, so that it could be a spur to those who have difficulties to

catch up and/or set up similar bodies to control their trading operations within the framework of the agreement. Despite the fact that Mauritius may be properly informed about International Trade operations, problems of implementation may not have been developed to handle checks and balances, successes and failures. To better maximise benefits, all these measures need to be considered within the framework of the current negotiations, taking note of their development concern, how and timeframes they want to achieve certain development goals.

Methods of carrying out these processes may vary but the hallmark is simple and clear, given that all stakeholders should be involved in data collection and analyses of key elements of importance to the country that they want to measure and consequently take steps to redress.

We cannot at this stage measure the advantages of the EPA without taking time to know how to measure its successes. The best we can achieve at this stage would be to start with frantic efforts to buttress the resources spent so far to get to this level in order to know how to contain desired results that we want to achieve from the Agreement. It cannot be gainsaid that much still needs to be done to get to completion and finalisation of negotiation for a Full EPA, cost and other constraints notwithstanding; the determination and collaboration should be diversified with serious attachment to targeted results that the entire country wants to achieve through the agreement.

MAIN ECONOMIC STAKEHOLDERS IN MAURITIUS

Mauritius has a very structured private sector with strong economic operators and guilds that coordinate economic activities. These bodies work in collaboration and coordination of the international Trade Division that negotiates international trade and other economic agreements touching on the economic life of the country. Some of the institutions concerned in international trade and cooperation include amongst others;

1. International Trade Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation
2. Mauritius Revenue Authority.
3. Ministry of Agro Industry and Fisheries
4. Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry
5. Mauritius Chamber of Agriculture
6. Ministry of Finance and Economic Development.
7. Ministry of Industry, SMEs Commerce, Cooperatives.
8. Board of Investment
9. Custom department
10. Standard Bureau and other private sector stakeholders and civil society organisations protecting and enforcing consumer rights.

The above list may not be exhaustive, the attempt is to show how economic related departments of state and private sectors collaborate in decisions that have an economic bearing on the lives of the Mauritians in the wake of globalisation and general trade liberalisation through various shades of agreement be they, EPA, FTA, PTA and other regional initiatives that the country may be party to. The bases of this thinking system may not only apply to Mauritius but to other ACP countries involve in the EPA Negotiations. Not to shower praises to the government and other stakeholders, early stages of EPA engagements show some involvement which if sustained may be beneficial to the entire country, considering also its role and contribution within other regional frameworks-SADC and COMESA.

While this is a summary of what can be done to achieve greater results from the EPA, the key elements that may not escape our reflections should encompass all sectors of national political, economic and social life in the country. The thinking here shall be further elaborated and greater details outlined as every effort is currently being deployed to set a national commission that would Monitor and evaluate the effects of the Economic Partnership Agreement before the D-Day.

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