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Educational policies, reforms and the role of teachers unions in Mauritius

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Foreword and background

This report on educational policies, reforms and the role of teachers' unions forms part of a larger study of the educational system and social inequalities in Mauritius. This study provided me with a good knowledge of the education system and the present challenges connected with the recent educational reform. It has been interesting to get to know the teacher's union, the Government Teachers Union (GTU), and all the issues they are concerned with. This report is based on a consultancy work on the status and role of the GTU regarding their conditions of service and influence on educational policies and reforms in the island state of Mauritius. The information for this report was collected during two field trips to the island in 2003.

The purpose of this study is to know more about the status and role of teachers organisations, particularly the GTU in Mauritius regarding various issues related to the educational system, educational reforms, national plans for EFA (Education for All), the teachers' working conditions, and the educational policies of the government.

A number of interviews were made with members of the GTU and other teachers' unions in the Primary Common Front. Several government primary schools in rural and urban areas were visited and teachers interviewed. In addition interviews were made with representatives for the Ministry of Education, Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE) who is responsible for teachers' training, and Mauritius Examination Syndicate (MES) who is responsible for curriculum development and examination. A former Minister of Education was interviewed and I met several teachers, Head Teachers and Deputy Head Teachers in primary schools but also a few in secondary schools. Another important source of information has been the monthly newsletter, Teachers' News, published and distributed by the GTU. Educational statistics and white papers related to primary education and the educational reforms were collected from the Ministry of Education and Central Statistics Office.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study has basically two major concerns; - describe and assess the role of the Teachers Unions, in particular the Government Teachers Union (GTU), regarding their conditions of service and their impact on educational policies and reforms. The report gives an outline of the educational system in Mauritius and its socio-cultural background, before it sets out to discuss the role of the most important trade union (GTU) within the primary education sector. Although Mauritius has achieved commendable success in providing universal access to basic education through very high enrolment rates and gender equality in education at primary and secondary level through its well-established education system, many sources of educational inequalities exist regarding educational inputs, processes and outcomes, and when meeting basic learning needs and assuring minimum level of competencies for all. The performance in learning cannot be properly understood unless taking into account the difficult and complex language situation that exists in Mauritius. It should be noted that for the great majority of the children, the language of learning and teaching was not their mother tongue. This is related to the fact that most children speak Kreol, a lingua franca, which is not a written language, while most teaching and learning is related to two 'foreign languages' such as French and English. There is also a good number of children in rural areas whose mother tongue is Hindi or rather Bhojpuri, an oral dialect of the former, who may be disadvantaged towards the means of instruction in primary schools that would influence learning achievements. One can just imagine what sort of difficulties these children encounter when faced with the challenge of learning two 'foreign' languages as from the age of five when they commence primary school. Another important findings which is far from new knowledge is that socio-economic status of the child's family has a very strong impact on achievement at school. This confirm that parental education level and parents' opinion about education are decisive factors affecting performance of the children at school.

The GTU appear to be an active and democratic organisation with a well-structured organisation with frequent meetings and elections. The representation of lady teachers (only one) in the executive council is poor considering the fact that 48% of the GTU members are lady teachers. Although most teachers are organised in the GTU, the teachers are not united as there are many unions in the educational sector reflecting the socio-linguistic and religious diversity of the population in the island state. The education system itself is not uniform, with both public, semi-private and private schools where not only the curriculum is different so is the medium of instruction. It is still a competitive system and with the institutionalization of private tuition and inequitable conditions one may question to what extent we are dealing with free education in which equal access for all prevails.

The main function of the GTU is to make representations and claims to the Pay Research Bureau (PRB), the body that revise the salaries and conditions of service for civil servants every five years. With such system, the teachers' organisations have limited power and scope for collective bargaining. The unions can make suggestions, submit memorandums and protest against decisions that reduce or worsen their terms of service and by that hope that their 'voice' is taken into account. But they continue to fight to defend the interests of their members to maintain the rights and privileges they are entitled to i.e. vacation leave, influence on transfer exercise, workload, greater sharing between different categories of teachers, promotions and teachers' post-education training etc.

The teachers' organisations seem to be more powerless when it comes to educational changes and policy matters and they are not taken into account when the Ministry of

education propose new reforms. In this case there is no strong tradition of partnership but rather top-down management and hierarchical relations. Despite these structural constraints which also the amendment of the IRA represent, the teachers' unions defend the interests of their members as best they can. There is however a need to develop a stronger consciousness and concern for the qualitative aspects of the education system among teachers, their complex role in education and their professional identity

1.0 MAURITIUS – the country and its history.

The Republic of Mauritius lies in the south-west of the Indian Ocean, situated about 800 km east of Madagascar. It is a small island, equal to the size of Wales, but densely populated with a population of 1,2 million. It comprises the main island of Mauritius, the islands of Rodrigues, Agalega and Saint Brandon in addition to a number of outlying smaller islands. Mauritius is a former volcanic island with no indigenous population. Although the island was discovered first by the Portuguese, it was the Dutch who first set their foot on the island in 1698. They gave the island its name after a Dutch prince, cut down the ebony forests, made the big, flightless bird Dodo extinct and used the relatively hostile island as a port of call on their way to the East Indies. It was abandoned in 1710 and taken over by the French in 1715. They settled the island, developed agriculture and infrastructure, and introduced slaves. It remained a French colony until it was conquered by the British in 1810 because Mauritius had a strategic military position in the Indian Ocean, safeguarding the commercial interest and trade with the far east. Under the British, the sugar plantations expanded rapidly and a large number of Indian indentured labour was introduced to cope with the increasing demand for cheap labour. The successive waves of immigration were to change the demographic and ethnic composition of the population. Mauritius gained its independence in 1968 which also marked the transfer of political power to the most numerous population category, the Indians. Mauritius became a republic in 1992.

Mauritius is a multi-ethnic society due to these historical circumstances that brought successive waves of immigrants from three different continents – Europe, Africa and Asia. Not only is the population divided into many different ethnic communities such as Hindus, Muslims, Chinese, Creoles, Franco-Mauritian (the whites) but the major world religions are also represented. Each religious belief is respected and religious associations receive state subsidies and grants of land for building places of worship. Many of the major religious festivals associated with different ethnic communities are designated as national holidays, which is part of a conscious cultural policy of fair play and their commitment to multi-culturalism.

Until the late 1970's the Mauritian economy was mainly agrarian dominated by sugar production for export. As from the 1980s the economy has not only experienced a rapid growth but becoming more diversified with an increasing importance played by manufacturing and tourism. The manufacturing sector gave many people jobs in textile factories, especially young women, and contributed to very low unemployment rates. Mauritius has become a mid-income country where the per capita GNP went up to US \$ 3,585 in 1998. There has been a continuous growth in the economy due to increased earnings from tourist arrivals (700,000). Recently the country has experienced the closure of many textile factories which has led to increasing unemployment. However, most people have enjoyed a steady increase in living standards the last two decades. Another characteristic of the island is that it has been politically stable, successfully contained ethnic conflict and recognised the right to cultural difference among its many different ethnic communities through a cultural policy of compromise and fair play.

The rising living standard among its population has been accompanied by favourable health indicators. The Crude Death Rate (per thousand) was 6,8 in 1998 and the Infant Mortality Rate (per 1,000 live births) was 19,4. Improvement of health status of the general population is also evident in gain of the Life Expectancy at birth which increased to 66,6 years for male and 74,4 years for female in the period of 1996-98. All health services in public hospitals and health centres are free of charge. There are five regional hospitals, three district hospitals and several private clinics in Mauritius.

Since the 1980s the Mauritian economy has undergone a rapid change towards greater differentiation. The Mauritian economy registered an average annual growth of 5,1 % in the period 1998-2002. The increase is mainly due to the increase in tourism and service sector related to that. Some of the textile factories have closed down and moved their production to less developed countries where the labour power is even cheaper (e.g. Madagascar). The rate of unemployment has risen to 10 % and among them are young people who are holders of secondary education with SC, HSC and even graduates from University who are seeking white collar jobs. The public sector is unable to absorb and offer enough jobs to young, educated people in Mauritius.

The higher standard of living is visible by increased traffic congestion, private consumption and the emergence of big supermarkets outside the major towns. But more important is the improvements in housing standard, both in terms of the construction of more space and also the building materials used for these purposes. The improvements in housing standard and furnishing, which is highly valued, has become possible because several adult members of the household are wage earners, increased purchasing power and the fact that trading firms provide credit facilities. Another visible evidence of economic prosperity is the increase in private vehicles on the roads, minibuses, taxis, private cars and light motorcycles, which has led to traffic jams in the capital and on the main roads in the built-up areas. Even the village roads which used to be quite and represented a safe place where children used to play have become busy.

Ethnic and cultural complexity

In Mauritius, there is no single ethnic group, constituting a majority which is able to maintain itself in political power and forming a government without relying on support from an alliance with others. This multi-ethnic situation made it impossible for one single social group to try to enforce a homogeneity on the entire population, whether linguistic, religious or political. With the change of government in 1982, the population census in 1983 recognized only two categories; Mauritians and non-Mauritians. It was based upon the idea to promote a common national identity and discourage the tendency toward communalism which a classification of ethnic communities in the census would encourage. However, following popular taxonomies the main ethnic communities (*nasyon*) and the estimated proportion of the total population are as follow: the Hindus (41 %), Muslims 17 %, Creoles (26 %), Tamils (7 %), Telugus (3 %), Marathi (2 %), Franco-Mauritian (2 %) and Chinese (2 %). Taking all Hindus together they comprise 52.6 % of the country's population, but the Hindu population is far from any homogeneous category since it is divided into distinct socio-religious groups such as the Bhojpuri-speaking Hindus, the Tamils (*Madrass*), the Telugus and the Marathis (*Bombai*). In the Mauritian context the Hindus constitute an ethno-linguistic group with a shared cultural identity (common origin in north-India and speakers of Bhojpuri, a regional dialect of Hindi), not a religious denomination (followers of Hinduism). This is to distinguish them from the Tamil, Telugu and Marathi, who also follow Hindu religion but claim a separate cultural identity of their own.

More important, the term Hindus has political connotations, since the Bhojpuri speaking Hindus are the most numerous and politically dominant group, largely identified with the ruling party (Labour party (Ptr) or MSM). Due to their massive support of the ruling political alliance at any time the Hindus occupy key positions in the public sector and enjoy certain privileges and benefits as a result of their numerical and electoral strength.

1.1 The Education system

Government recurrent expenditure on education has been close to 15 % of government total recurrent expenditure the last 5-6 years. Approximately 32 % of this expenditure was disbursed to primary education sector (Digest of Educational Statistics 2002).

Education is free from pre-primary to tertiary school. In general, Mauritius enjoys more than 90 % adult Literacy rate. In most countries children are admitted to school at the age of six, but in Mauritius the children start Primary School at the age of five. Mauritius unlike many countries in Europe still lacks a compulsory 9 or 11 years of education for all. Although some 64% pass the CPE (Certificate of Primary Education) examination at 6th standard, not all of them are entering or complete their secondary education. While 14,200 pupils took part in Cambridge School Certificate (SC) examination in 2001, the number that took part in Higher School Certificate (HSC) was only 6,800 of which less than 5,000 succeeded. At each level of examination there is a further drop out and competitive selection of pupils. It suffices to say that although the number who are enrolled in secondary education has increased from 50% to 64% over the last decade, there are relatively few who get the opportunity to complete higher secondary education. One interesting feature is that there is a higher success rate among girls than boys when it comes to secondary education. When it comes to access to education there is no inequality based on gender evident from the enrolment rates. But higher secondary education is still very much a privilege for the relatively rich urban middle class families.

Education in Mauritius is similar to the English system with a minimum of six years of compulsory primary schooling leading to the CPE examination (Certificate of Primary Education). After passing the CPE examination from primary school the pupils are admitted to the secondary schools which lead to Cambridge School Certificate (SC) after five years (Form I-V) and HSC (Higher School Certificate) or GCE 'A' level examinations after additional two years of schooling. With HSC the students are eligible for university studies either in Mauritius or abroad (India, England, France or Australia). Students who possess SC or HSC can also enter the teaching profession or nursing which require two years of training and three years of further studies respectively.

Those students who do not pass CPE exams and have failed twice are offered Vocational training for three years in Secondary schools or private institutions. Education in Mauritius is free and there are very high enrolment rates in primary schools. The gross enrolment rate in primary schools, which relates to the total children attending primary schools to the population aged 6-11 years, has been 103 % the last few years. There are slightly more boys enrolled than girls, but not enough to talk about gender differentiation.

Since 1996 and the consecutive five years the rate of passes at CPE has remained almost the same, at about 65%. Due to the competition and the ranking system at CPE there was a substantial amount of failures which resulted in the fact that 50% were excluded from secondary education some ten years ago. During 2001 some 30,000 pupils took part in the CPE examination, an equal number among the sexes. The number who succeeded was 65% but a comparison based on gender shows a higher success rate among girls (71%) as against boys (60%). However, the pass rate at CPE has remained almost the same since 1996 and the lack of increase in passes may question the official statement that the quality of education has improved.

In 2002 there were 290 primary schools, 277 in the island of Mauritius and 13 in Rodrigues. Out of these 222 are government schools while 51 were run by the Roman

Catholic Education Authority (RCA Schools), two by Hindu Education Authority and 15 were private non-aided schools. Most of the confessional schools are run by Roman Catholic Educational Board (BEC), which receive state subsidies. There are 15 private, fee-paying primary schools who have English or French medium of instruction. Legislation was introduced in 1991 to make primary education compulsory. In 2001 the primary school population consisted of 129,350 (65,655 boys and 63,695 girls) which means that 98% of the Mauritian population of primary school age attend school.

In primary school the following subjects are taught; English, French, Mathematics, Science, History and Geography (formerly EVS), Physical and health education, Citizenship education and arts. The first five subjects are taught for examination purposes at present but it is suggested that all the eight subjects become examinable. In addition the pupils are offered instruction in one Oriental or Asian language (Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Mandarin, Urdu or Arabic) based on the signing of option forms by the child's parents. There has recently been an increase in number of subjects to be taught in upper primary schools and both pupils and teachers experience greater loads of work. As a consequence the school day has been extended by 25 minutes. The school starts at 8.50 a.m. and ends at 3.30 p.m. for all pupils irrespective of which standard they are in. Hours of teaching in the primary schools is high comparable to many developed countries and much higher than Norway for example.

Presently, there are about 5,250 teachers, both General Purpose Teachers and Asian Language teachers. In the primary schools there is almost an equal number of male teachers compared to female teachers who amounted to 53,8 % of all teachers. In addition there are about 1,100 Deputy Head Teachers and Head Teachers. The average age of these teachers is approximately 45 years which may be related to the fact that less new teachers have been recruited and little degree of replacements. Half of all teachers possess at least SC (School Certificate of Education or GCE O-level) and (TCP) Teacher Certificate in Primary Education obtained from the Mauritius Institute of Education, consisting of a two year course and teacher training. The other half possess HSC as minimum educational attainment. Many teachers take further training and obtain ACE (Advanced Certificate of Education) and Diploma in Education from Mauritius Institute of Education. These courses are provided on a part-time basis.

Free secondary education was introduced in 1977. There are at present 58 secondary schools run by the government and the Ministry has built 23 new colleges recently, reflecting that the government give priority to education but also accommodating higher enrolment and implementing the policy of regionalisation. Most secondary schools are private colleges who receive grant-in-aid from the government. As part of the elimination of the ranking of colleges, the state secondary schools considered elite schools have been transformed into upper 6th, that is HSC only. The reform has eliminated the most prestigious colleges (Royal College (boys), Queen Elisabeth College (girls)) from competition among students in Form I – V. The fact that the government is building new State Secondary Schools pose a threat to all the teachers employed in private colleges of which there are many more. There were about 100 private colleges providing secondary education but some of them are closing down with the building of new state secondary schools. These private colleges are privately owned but the teachers are paid by the state and the schools get state subsidies/grants through the PSSA (Private Secondary Schools Authority). In 2003 there were 102,000 pupils enrolled in secondary schools with 52,000 girls and 50,000 boys, mostly in single sex schools while few are mixed.

Education in Mauritius is still a very important means of social mobility as it is in most other countries. And the education system is still very much 'foreign' in the sense based on foreign languages such as English and French and the curriculum and syllabus has not

been subject to some kind of nationalisation or Mauritianised to use such a word. It is an advantage for those who has a certain command of French and English, and have been expoused to these languages, but similarly disadvantaged to those pupils who use mostly Kreol, the daily language of communication. The complex language situation in Mauritius with English as the official language, French as a language more widely used in the media and among the resident white elite, and the teaching of several Asian languages is often held as responsible for the differences in achievement in schools. In practice most of the teaching in primary schools is conducted in Kreol, the lingua franca that most children understand and use daily. But Kreol is not a written language only spoken. Although based on French vocabulary it is a language of its own with a specific grammer. The remaining of the teaching (40%) is done in English and French. English, Maths, History and Geography, Science and Citizenship Education are all subjects in English when it comes to the textbooks, but they are often delivered and explained in Kreol and French. There will be some regional differences in the use of language in schools based on the comprehension and background of the children.

1.2 Providers of education; - public versus private.

The educational sector in Mauritius has for a long time been based on a dual system, that is state governed or state sponsored education versus private schools managed and financed by private bodies. It has partly been a matter of difference in medium of education, financing and management. This dualism or the dichotomy within the educational sector goes way back and can be considered part of their colonial heritage. This dualism in the educational system has also contributed to reproduce social inequalities based on social class and ethnicity.

The majority of primary schools are government schools, while some are state sponsored or subsidised such as the confessional schools, the Roman Catholic ones (RCA schools). In addition there are some 15 private fee-paying primary schools, many of them have recently been established in the urban areas, catering for the demands from an increasing middle-class. They have either English or French as medium of instruction. Whereas the government schools and RCA schools are free, the private schools are based on payment of school fees. The demand for private schools among the middle class has increased due to the competition in the educational field and the dissatisfaction with the performance and results in government schools. The advantage of the private schools is that there is more attention to the individual pupil. The class size is substantially lower (22-25 pupils) than in government schools (with a pupil/teacher ratio of 36-37). The infrastructure is better and more teaching aids are provided. There is subject-teaching conducted by specialised teachers. There is also continuous assessments of the pupil and more concentration on extra-curriculum activities. There are several French schools based on the French educational system. One of them, Lycee Labourdonnais, gets support from the French government. Traditionally these private schools have recruited mainly from the white population in Mauritius, the economic elite of Franco-Mauritians. They have increasingly enrolled students from well-to-do families of other ethnic background such as Indians, Chinese and the Coloured population. One of the private schools recently established is the Ecole de Centre, Pierre Poivre located at Moka. It is both a primary and secondary school with 900 pupils and about 90 teachers, many of them expatriates mainly from France or Reunion. An elite school for the wealthy families who pay a monthly school fee of Rs. 4,000 in addition to a substantial sum of money as a deposit. It is worth mentioning that a labourer in the sugar plantations has a monthly salary of Rs. 4-5000.

The government schools are more exam-oriented towards the final year and CPE exams. The Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) is a national examination held at the end of six years of primary schooling. It is both a test of the level of attainment of every child and

was a selective device for admission to the best secondary schools. In most government primary schools there are overcrowded classes (up to 40 pupils) with mixed ability pupils and no chance of individual attention to the specific needs of the child.

Presently there is a highly controversial issue in Mauritius concerning the self-determination of private (though state-sponsored schools) confessional schools, particularly the secondary schools controlled by the Roman Catholic Church and their educational board. These schools have for a long time practiced a recruitment rule allocating 50 % of the seats/places in the school reserved for children belonging to Christian faith (preferably Catholic) irrespective of their academic qualifications and results. The only prerequisite is that they should pass and not fail in any subjects at the CPE exams.

The problem is that these 'private' schools receive state subsidies based on number of children admitted to the school, while the owners or management of these schools control the recruitment and employment of teachers. Recently the president of Government Hindi Teachers Union contested this and filed a court case against this practice. The supreme court decided that this reservation of seats for students belonging to specific ethnic and/or religious community is anti-constitutional and should therefore be treated as illegal. The Catholic Church and its educational board has made an appeal to Privy Council in Great Britain regarding this matter. It is a very hot political issue not only limited to the educational sector alone. The issue is concerned with equal access to confessional schools. And this union's objective is that there should be equal opportunity in the educational sector, debarred from any discrimination.

The issue of reserved seats for Christians in RCA schools concerns the question of equal access to education and equitable conditions. The GTU adhere to this fundamental principle that children should have equal access to schools whatever ethnic or religious background and support the efforts made by the Government Hindi Teachers Union (GTHU) on this matter. Later on it was known that the GHTU had won the case in Privy Council and BEC can no longer implement their policy of 50% reserved seats for Christians. It remains to be seen what the Roman Catholic Education Authority will do towards revising their practice.

The providers of education, both government and private, are influenced by the hierarchical social structure in the country, the social division of labour and the multi-ethnic composition of the population, which perpetuate this structure. The question of equal access to education and equitable conditions in the educational sector has to take this into account. There is no comprehensive education system and policy as such which is inclusive and all embracing. But the educational sector is divided and education tend to replicate social inequalities. There is no real equal opportunity in the educational system at present and far from equitable conditions. These are important issues which has not been addressed adequately by the teachers' unions. It is argued that the government schools are not meeting the expectations of some parents and that the failure of these schools force parents to look for schools where their children get more involved and develop in a better way that pave the way for private fee-paying primary schools. The tendency towards increased privatisation of schools is however a concern for the teachers' unions. The government is accused of encouraging the establishment of private schools. The GTU wants the government to spend more public funds to upgrade the schools in deprived areas, the socalled special support schools or ZEP-schools. This should not be limited to infrastructure but they should provide certain facilities. The GTU leadership is afraid that further privatisation of primary schools will create two different educational systems and inequitable conditions. It has become a main concern because it may undermine the right to free education. To encourage privatisation of schools is considered to

give way to market forces and a response to increased demand and pressure from the World Bank. The providers of education follow different curriculums, mediums of instruction and recruit pupils from different segments of the population which further creates a division between public-private education and different educational systems. The establishment of more private primary schools shows that education becomes a commodity and a form of business. The gap between the public and private providers of education can be said to increase rather than becoming narrower.

1.3 The competitive nature of education and private tuition

In order to understand the changes in the educational reform and the educational system one has to take into account the competitive nature of education and the system of ranking of pupils and schools that prevailed until recently. The pupils sat for the CPE (Certificate Primary Education) Exams at the end of standard VI. The results decided whether the child would pass or fail, whether it was entitled to further education in secondary schools or became school drop-outs. Moreover, based on the results and ranking, the children were allocated places in secondary schools that were ranked. The first 1,000 pupils got the best schools irrespective of their place of residence in the island. The CPE examination used to rank pupils for access to places in the higher ranked secondary schools and this ranking was subject to public knowledge and announcement. The ranking system and the race to get admission to elite schools created a fierce competition in education and institutionalised private tuition. The competitive educational system with ranking of secondary colleges created a lot of psychological stress among children from 11 years and also among parents. The competition was also aggravated by the shortage of secondary schools. Admission to the best secondary schools was also a prerequisite for having the chance to obtain various scholarships to study abroad.

As from 2002, the CPE exam is only used for grading and certification purposes. One purpose of the educational reform was to abolish the system of ranking. However, this competitive system that prevailed for so long made education result or exam oriented, as a consequence private tuition became a widespread and inevitable part of the competitive CPE examination. Private tuition, directed towards CPE exams, were considered necessary means to achieve the desired goals, notably to pass the exams and get access to the best and most prestigious secondary schools located in the major towns.

Private tuition is conducted after normal school hours, that is in the evening or during weekends. Most teachers offer private tuition for pupils in upper primary, that is from standard 4 to 6, in one or several subjects. For this private tuition the parents have to pay monthly, the rate differs according to where it take place (urban or rural areas) and which school. Private tuition is an important additional income for most teachers. If a teacher conducts extensive private tuition it may amount to the same as his monthly salary. Because of private tuition other people tend to consider teachers as greedy ones with two salaries. The issue of private tuition is a controversial one for the teachers' organisations. In principle they would like to consider it unnecessary and discouraging but in practice it is hard to get rid of, because it is closely related to the competitive nature of education system. This has not yet changed even after the introduction of educational reforms. Private tuition is a tricky thing for the teachers' unions for many reasons. It reproduces educational inequalities to some extent, at the same time children are robbed from their time. The unions cannot say they are against it, the teachers feel they cannot survive without it. Private tuition undermines the public school image in many ways and to what extent can one talk about free education?

1.4 Trade unions and teachers' organisations.

There are many trade unions in Mauritius and many competing unions within the same sector. The educational sector and the teachers in primary schools are no exception from the rule. There are several trade unions organising and representing teachers in primary schools. Apart from the largest and most powerful union, the GTU (Government Teachers Union), there are the GHTU (Government Hindi Teachers Union), GUTU (Government Urdu Teachers Union), DHTU (Deputy Head Teachers Union), HTU (Head Teachers Union), Primary School Inspectors Union and Primary teacher Union in RCA schools. A break-away faction from GTU, the Challenger group which competed and lost the election at the general assembly, has established a new union in 2003, the GPTU (General Purpose Teachers Union). It has been registered but not yet recognized as a trade union for teachers. GTU is opposing a new trade union from getting recognition because they already represent that category of teachers (the General Purpose teachers). Some of the Asian Language (AL) teachers unions have already been recognized. However, all these teachers were formerly in GTU and this union claims that all the improvements made regarding teachers working conditions have been carried out by the GTU. The Government Hindi Teachers Union has 800 members and organizes Hindi language teachers only in primary schools. There is also a separate union for Urdu language teachers. It is not evident why there is a need for separate unions for language teachers other than that they already exist and have been recognized by the authorities. It is claimed that the scheme of service for AL teachers and the promotional structure is different from General Purpose teachers' that is why there is a need for separate unions. The fact that these unions at the same time recruit either Christians (Union for RCA schools), Muslims (Urdu teachers) and Hindus/Indians (Hindi teachers) also underlines the ethnic dimensions in trade unionism and politics in general in Mauritius (Hollup 1993, Simmons 1982). Simmons wrote that the trade unions did not develop any independent political force and strength in Mauritius because they were partly controlled by the political parties and alliances, their leaders were often identified with government or opposition, they were often centralized and unable to mobilize masses on a class basis. This is related to the fact that after independence politics developed very much along communal lines. There is a higher tendency that people regard themselves as belonging to a particular ethnic community in terms of common religious identity rather than developing allegiance based on class solidarity.

The political culture and occupational structure which emerged partly due to communal solidarity and ethnic belonging gave way to certain characteristic features in Mauritius whereby each one tried to get some privilege and favours for and from their own ethnic community. It was thought that everybody else would also do the same and this gave way to the well-known Kreol proverb; ' Sak zako bizin protez so montayn' (litterary translated to Each monkey must protect his mountain). But it refers to the tendency whereby each ethnic community looks after and tries to protect their own interests as against other collectives (Hollup 1993). Both patronage and nepotism forms part of this strategy, and it is generally believed to be more widespread in the public compared to the private sector.

It is claimed that the government encourages many trade unions for teachers in order to divide and rule. Although the union activity and the way teachers have organised themselves may give a picture of fragmentation and little effort to stand united. But there are times and situations where they form a common front as was the case before the presentation of the Pay Research Bureau's report and suggestions in 2003. Sometimes a teacher may hold dual membership in two different unions as well. But there is no such thing as one trade - one union, and there are many factors that can explain the proliferation of unions in the educational sector as well as elsewhere. It is related to the political culture in Mauritius, the

widespread phenomenon of factionalism and leadership rivalries. Establishing new unions is also based on the desire to pave the way for personal interests. The members of the board are allowed to get time off from teaching duties at any time. The members of the executive council are entitled to one day off per week. Time off is a valuable asset because it gives them opportunity to engage in other matters. One trade union leader in a teacher organisation is an egg trader who gets time off to look after his own business. There is also a long history of trade unionism in Mauritius as a stepping stone to a political career. The former president of the republic, Karl Offmann, is a former trade unionist, and the present prime minister, Paul Berenger, was a famous trade unionist in the 1970s, just to mention a few. It is also common that trade unionists work as political agents in their electorate during and before elections, maintaining close relations to political parties and those who are contesting for a seat in parliament.

Trade unions are not united but greatly fragmented not only in the educational sector but other sectors as well such as the sugar industry. This contributes to reduce their ability to influence politics and the development of the country. Although the trade unions would like to be free and independent so that no political party can dictate the terms for them, it is difficult given the nature of political culture and system of shifting alliances in Mauritius.

1.4.1 The Government Teacher Union (GTU)

The Government Teachers Union (GTU) was founded in 1945 and is the largest union for teachers working in primary schools with approximately 4,300 members. These teachers work mainly in government schools distributed all over the island. The GTU is affiliated to a larger confederation of trade unions, the Mauritian Labour Congress (MLC) which again is a member of the ICFTU. The GTU is also affiliated to international organisations such as Education International (EI) and SATO (Southern African Teacher Organisation), within the framework of SADEC cooperation.

The Government Teachers Union (GTU) has an Executive Council, consisting of 15 elected members at the General Assembly, which is being held bi-annually. The daily affairs of the union is looked after by the Bureau comprising the President, the deputy President, the Vice-President, the General Secretary and the Treasurer. Each council member is responsible for a specific region while the President, the General Secretary and Treasurer deal with matters at national level. The annual general meeting is held every year and the election for council members is carried out on a biannual basis, on a one-man one-vote policy. Each school having more than five GTU members has two delegates elected at school level. The primary schools are equally represented with two delegates irrespective of the size of school, number of teachers and GTU members. It is not based on a proportional representation yet. The positions as President, General Secretary and Treasurer are directly elected at the General Assembly. The president is the chief executive of the union. He is supported in his task by the bureau members and the executive council which meet once a month or more frequent if necessary. Delegates meetings are organised frequently, held almost every third month. Though the major decisions regarding union policy matters rest with the president and the council, resolutions are voted at Delegates Assemblies to determine future orientations of the GTU. All decisions taken are democratically based and voted unanimously. Members are informed about current issues through the distribution of the newsletter ' Teachers News'. These unique features makes GTU an open and democratic organisation. General assembly is held once annually, and election every two years. The GTU organise regional meetings with members at times and mass meetings if necessary. The executive council meet regularly to discuss issues of concern and the decisions made are based on consensus.

Elections and the system of factionalism is quite peculiar to local government politics in Mauritius and the same pattern prevails concerning trade unions in general. Normally two or three teams, called '*groupement*', around a particular leader are contesting for power in the union, as it is with elections to village councils. The team or groupement is founded around a leader who picks a team (a list of candidates) who has agreed to contest together with him. The members usually vote for a particular team (groupement) collectively, which means that the winner takes all. This is the same pattern as with general elections and one can of course discuss whether this is democratic or not, it does not ensure proportional representation. During the last election the Challenger group lost the election in GTU. This group was considered close to the present MSM/MMM government and the leader is a brother of the Minister of Telecommunication. When a team is put together by a leader it looks into factors such as teacher popularity, union work, regional representation and broad ethnic composition. The defeating team 'Challenger Group' has been circulating recruitment forms for the GPTU (General Purpose Teachers Union) among those who have been working for long years in star schools. They are using this new union to defend their interests to avoid a transfer to a low achievement school. The creation of a competing union to the GTU is seen as an attempt by the new leadership in GPTU to look after their personal benefits. How the GTU look upon the break away faction is evident from their statements in the newsletter: '*GTU has learnt that recently the Challengers have met the minister and discussed ways to weaken our union. They will continue to sabotage and boycott industrial actions and try to defend the ministry so that they can reap benefits in terms of postings, promotion and time-off facilities*' (Teachers News March 2003). This also shows how union activities in general is related to personal benefits and strategies. The GTU is anxious that the rival union will use political connections to ensure promotion to mentor grade for their supporters.

1.4.2 The role of women in GTU

Although the GTU has its Ladies Wing and half of all primary school teachers are women, only one woman teacher was elected to the executive council. As many as 48 % of the GTU members are lady teachers. Some 25 % of the delegates from schools are lady teachers. The bureau and executive council encourage lady teachers to join in union activities but feel that lady teachers are difficult to mobilize. Political activity and trade unionism in Mauritius has always been a male-dominated domain. As one of them said: '*Trade union activity is the men's world*'. This is also the case with politics in Mauritius, where only one woman is a Minister in the government and there are only four women who are members of the parliament. Earlier there were two lady teachers in the executive council of GTU and one of them was a member for 12 years. She stated that lady teacher representation should increase rather than decrease. Some lady teachers claimed that they are not nominated or asked to join or contest for the executive council.

Lady's wing have their own meetings to discuss the needs of lady teachers. Different topics are raised in seminars they organize together with Mauritius Family Planning Association (MFPA). It concerns Family Life Education or the situation of HiV/Aids in the country. Sexual education has become Family life Education. Seminars are conducted for teachers to make them aware of their role in combating the increase in Aids cases. They are conscious that it is important to disseminate the knowledge of it among teachers and pupils. New issues of concern are those of women's health, youth sexuality and social problems connected with HiV/Aids which is still very much a taboo. If a teacher/student is affected by HIV/Aids they will be rejected.

More lady teachers are now doing the upper classes in primary schools. But there is still a tendency that lady teachers are only allocated lower classes. There is a priority for male

teachers who get opportunity to do upper classes, but it all depends on the Head Teacher. But lady teachers in GTU are aware that they should fight for their right to do upper classes. When they do upper classes (4th. - 6th. standard) they can give private tuition and in this way increase their earnings. The lady teachers of GTU still feel that there is some gender discrimination regarding the allocation of upper classes in the primary schools.

The lady's wing showed a concern for the school environment as such and they claimed that it was not in a good condition, pointing out that it was not clean, lacking necessary infrastructure, lack of staff room, deplorable toilets, not providing teaching aids and learning material. They have to teach science subjects but there is a lack of laboratory facilities. Requests were being made to the Ministry of Education but their voice was not being heard. Another issue of concern for lady teachers were the increase in work load with 8 subjects to teach and the increase in examinable subjects from five at present to the proposed 8 subjects. Lady teachers showed more concern for school environment and the problems the children are facing in primary education. The language situation was mentioned as a problem for children, education appear as something 'foreign' both in content and means of instruction and communication. The lady teachers in GTU also mentioned the problem with automatic promotion to the next classes and that there is a need to cater better for the slow learners in terms of specialised classes. The lady teachers seemed to be more concerned with improving the school environment in general and claimed that improving the facilities in schools would also contribute to raise the status of the teachers.

Most teachers in primary schools are organised in teachers trade union, either the GTU or any other of the 7-8 trade unions which exist within the primary school sector. Until recently the teachers in GTU paid a monthly subscription fee of Rupees 15. This membership fee was increased to Rs. 25 in December 2003 at a delegates meeting, but it is still considered nominal. Given the fact that a teacher with 27 years of service is now earning Rs. 14,500 monthly plus additional allowances for travelling and conducting the NLNP project, the membership fee to the union is an insubstantial expenditure. The low membership fee may also explain why most teachers opt to be a member of a teacher union, the majority in GTU.

There is much dissatisfaction internally among teachers, between Asian language teachers and General Purpose Teachers, and Physical Education teachers, concerning their responsibilities, work load, salaries, benefits and allowances. Asian language teachers are difficult to handle because they represent the vote banks of political parties and politicians. In some respect they represent a 'protected species' due to the symbolic significance oriental language plays in politics of identity.

Members approach the union and need the help of executive members or bureau when they get some problems in schools or are dissatisfied regarding transfer for example. There may be problems between the Head Teacher and the teacher, between teacher and parents or other kinds. The teachers who get good classes, transfer to 'star' schools, maintain good relations with the Head Teacher who allocate upper standard classes (4th., 5th. and 6th.) where there are scope for private tuition and extra income, seem to make less use of the union. Although the teachers' unions have a responsibility to defend the interests of their members, there are many members who use other means and political contacts to obtain their desired goals.

There are many objectives of the GTU according to their constitution. However, in short one could state that the main function of the teachers' union is to make representations to the Pay Research Bureau (PRB) in connection with salary revision exercise and various conditions of service. It also negotiates on behalf of its members with the Ministry of Education concerning matters such as transfers, leaves, complaints and grievances. The GTU

also regularly submits memoranda and organize press conferences to express their views on education and other important issues affecting teachers' work load and status. Teachers News reflect to some extent what are the functions and duties of the GTU and their concern. Many issues are related with teachers' problems, either due to complaints from parents, constrained relationship to Head Teacher or problems related to absenteeism. The GTU often have to visit schools in this connection and try to solve these disputes and problems involving their members and to defend them.

2.0 The Teachers' conditions of service

Conditions of service of teachers, similar to those of all Public Servants, are regulated by PRB (Public Research Bureau) recommendations and the Personnel Management Manual (PMM). The PSC (Public Service Commission) is the body that deals with recruitment, promotions and discipline in the Civil Service. Pay Research Bureau (PRB) is an independent body consisting of civil servants who throughout the period of five years work with revision of salaries and conditions of service for all categories of employees in civil service (i.e. government employees). They have put forward their recommendations in a report (2003), while the last revision took place in 1998.

The primary school teachers' monthly salaries have been relatively low if one considers their basic salary, educational qualifications, duty and responsibility. However, basic salary, allowances and increments do not always represent their actual and total monthly earnings or household income which affect their living standards. The GTU has demanded an increase in the teachers' salaries and a longstanding issue has been to get their salary aligned with those of the secondary school teachers, who hold almost the similar academic qualifications.

With the publication (and recommendations) of the PRB's report, there was a revision of salary scales based on years of service (seniority) and a substantial increase in basic salary at all levels. The starting salary for a qualified primary school teacher increased from Rs. 5,600 monthly to Rs. 8,025 (in 2003). There is an annual increment of Rs. 125 which changes with salary scale and years of service. Although the increase in basic salary may seem to be a substantial increase, it actually includes a compensation for added working hours (25 minutes daily) connected with the introduction of the literacy and numeracy project. The special allowance ranged from Rs. 800, Rs 1100 up to Rs. 1900 (for Head Teacher) depending on category of teachers and seniority. Some teachers claimed that since the allowance for extra teaching time was included in their pay rise, the real increase in salary was less apparent. It was said that the government first gave them a special allowance and then took it back or reduced it by the recommendations in the PRB. If the teacher possess additional professional qualifications and training from Mauritius Institute of Education by holding an ACE (Advanced Certificate of Education) and a Diploma, they are entitled to a special allowance of Rs. 1000 for each of these qualifications monthly.

The GTU feel that they have been heard and have obtained something with the increase in basic salary and their scales, which they take as a sign of acceptance for the status of the teachers. For the first time they are better paid than nurses and their starting salary is slightly higher than for example other civil servants such as police officers, customs officials and clerical workers in government departments. Their demand for equal pay and alignment with the salaries of secondary school teachers has been met. This principle of equal pay among teachers holding similar academic qualifications has been recognised by the government. Although there has been an increase in salaries, many teachers are not satisfied due to the rising cost of living and an anticipated better living standards.

2.1 Reduced vacation leave and other rights to leave.

A teacher's right to vacation leave is based on years of service. Up to the first five years of service they are entitled to 25 days of vacation leave annually. With 5-10 years of service they are entitled to 30 days, 10-15 years of service or more they are entitled to 35 days vacation leave. If a teacher had more than 15 years of service he was entitled to take annual accumulated leave up to 180 days. A teacher with less than 5 years of service could accumulate a maximum of 90 days leave.

There has been a practice of accumulated vacation leave, but the government has reduced number of accumulated days to half, that is 90 days, due to shortage of teachers. And now the government will do away with this system of accumulated annual leave. A teacher who gets 35 days of annual leave can no longer transfer unused days till the next year, if the teacher do not utilize these vacation days they will loose them. The PRB has suggested these changes in annual leave, reduced to 17 days. The Ministry of Education has suggested this reduction in annual vacation leave to the PRB and argued that schoolchildren are left unattended and there is a problem to replace the teacher who takes his annual vacation leave. The GTU feel that the Ministry are taking the side of the parents and giving in to the pressure exercised by them on this issue. The shortage of teachers also make it difficult for teachers to get the approval of vacation leave. They have to apply through the Head Teacher who suggest the approval or make a condition that leave can be granted if there will be a replacement and the school or education of children is not adversely affected by the teachers absence during vacation leave. However, the GTU will continue to protest against the reduction in accumulated leave. They want to preserve their rights to take accumulated leave.

Apart from the vacation leave, a teacher is entitled to 21 days full pay sick leave and another 11 days of casual leaves annually. If one plans to take a casual leave (or local leave as it is called) one normally should give one week notice in advance. Casual leaves can be taken in connection with some social obligations vis-a-vis family and the kinship group. These terms of service connected with vacation leave and other types of leaves may seem to be a privilege compared to many other countries lacking the social welfare policy of the Mauritian state.

Lady teachers are granted 3 months maternity leave to a maximum of 3 confinements. Mothers who want to look after their babies can be granted up to 6 months leave without pay, but subject to the exigencies of the service.

Vacation leave is now being reduced to 17 days and the GTU feel that the right to vacation leave and accumulated vacation leave is a right that is being reduced and gradually taken away from them. Conditions of service in this respect are being deteriorated rather than improved compared to earlier practice. This is a discrimination vis-à-vis other public servants and GTU as well as other teachers unions disagree with this reduction in annual vacation leave and the attempt of doing away with accumulated annual leave suggested by the PRB.

2.2 Other conditions of work – the transfer system

In the educational sector and applicable to the government schools there is a transfer system of teachers which will take effect after 6 years of service. With seniority and other considerations such as family, health conditions, residence etc., the teacher can be posted to a school close to their home. In the beginning of a teacher's career, he or she can be posted to a school far away from their residence and it involves more travelling.

Since 1988 the teachers' trade union got a greater influence on the transfers by being included into the transfer committee of the Ministry of Education, where they are able to championing the interests of their members. It is sometimes difficult to strictly abide to the criteria for transfer and ensure equity. This is related to tensions that transfers produce and the political interference into the decisions of transfer. Those teachers working in good schools in urban areas try to avoid transfer by making use of political connections. The rational behind is as follow; - when they work in a good school in urban areas they can earn a substantial extra income from giving private tuition for which there is a high demand from rich families who are ready to pay in order to make their children become more competitive in the field of education. Being transferred to a rural school in a more peripheral location with low achievement pupils would result in reduced income, increased travelling time and a poorer school environment.

The political interference into transfers of teachers can work both ways, those who are well-connected with politicians either directly through kinship or mediated by the brokerage of political agents can get transferred to good schools ('star schools' with high rates of passes at CPE (Certificate of Primary Education) exams at the end of 6th. Standard and the final year in primary school). On the other hand if you openly criticise the government or are in political opposition to the ruling political alliance in power, you may face punitive transfer for political reasons. Transfers frequently causes frustration, disappointment and jealousy among teachers. But in general the teachers understand and accept the system of transfer on a principle basis.

The Ministry of Education will prepare their list of transfer and the GTU do this as well and then they meet to do the transfer exercise and negotiate. The GTU tries to protect the interests of their members in such a way that the teacher is transferred to the school that he demands. Transfer exercise is crucial for the union. Teachers who are not satisfied with their transfer are likely to be against union leaders and dissatisfied with the trade union. It is important for the election and re-election of union leaders that members are being satisfied with the transfer exercise. The union believe that the practice of interference by Ministers and inspectors in order to protect the interests of their supporters have been reduced. The GTU see to it that teachers who have worked in '5 star' (good) schools are transferred to low achievement schools for a change, while those who have worked in low achievement schools get the opportunity to work in a good school. The teachers' unions and particularly GTU have much more influence on transfers now than earlier when it was decided by the Ministry of Education exclusively.

2.3 Recruitment of and post-education training of teachers.

According to the Ministry of Education there are enough teachers. They are recruiting new teachers every year. The teachers on the other hand claim that recruitment of teachers are not made regularly – there is a shortage of teachers working with overcrowded classes. Shortage of teachers make replacements difficult- even if they apply for vacation leave they do not get it. The GTU and other teachers unions have demanded appointment of more teachers but there is still a shortage according to their views.

Teachers used to following post-education training courses at MIE (Mauritius Institute of Education) leading to ACE (Advanced Certificate of Education) and Diploma in Education. There has been a practice that the teachers were entitled to leave to be able to attend these courses that starts at 3 p.m. Teachers were formulating complaints against the decision of the ministry of education to run a number of courses during their holidays. The GTU has also

protested against the attempt to reduce the teachers' right to attend upgrading courses during working hours. A circular letter sent to Head Teachers in schools by the ministry instructing teachers to follow upgrading courses only in the afternoon after 5 p.m. and during weekends became a hotly debated issue in the GTU and the other teachers unions in the Primary Common Front which they protested against. The Primary Common Front met the Minister of Education concerning this matter and the president of GTU showed a copy of an agreement between the Ministry and GTU that states that courses should be held during school hours and that permission to leave had to be granted. Normally such upgrading courses for ACE/Diploma is conducted between 3 p.m to 5 p.m. It was agreed that the teachers would be allowed to continue attending their courses during working hours. The GTU will continue to defend the right of teachers to attend training courses during working hours. On this issue as well as other related to their working conditions and terms of service it shows that the union has a say and are able to change decisions made after protests.

A teacher follow a 2 year full-time pre-service and study at MIE which leads to TCP (Teacher Certificate Primary). After a successful completion they can start teaching in primary schools. From 1991 an in-service course to improve the teachers skills and knowledge (renew their knowledge and training) started to be offered. It is a part-time course for two years which leads to ACE (Advanced Certificate of Education). The upgrading courses focus on improving the teachers' knowledge, updating their knowledge in main subjects. The GTU and other teachers' unions wanted further training of teachers, as a result a Diploma in Education was introduced in 1988. It was realised by the Ministry and the MIE that there was a need for these post-education courses to upgrade the teachers knowledge. Teacher Diploma, a distant education part-time over 18 months, focuses on learning strategies, school- and classroom management, child development and pedagogy. The Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE) take a batch of 500 for the ACE course and 540 students for Diploma Course.

The unions always press for a larger intake of teachers, but limited resources at MIE is a constraint. The teachers union were not involved in working out or formulating the educational programmes. Representatives of the MIE accused the unions of being less concerned with their professional development and identity. Teachers were most ly motivated for the upgrading courses due to the increments and increase in salaries. Having ACE and a Diploma a teacher get Rs. 1000 each monthly as an increment. It remains to be seen if teachers come to upgrading courses for the sake of material benefits or to increase their knowledge and change their way of teaching.

According to the teachers' news and informal discussion with union representatives no reference were made to the way these upgrading courses could affect the quality of education and improve the professional identity of the teacher. There is an impression that the teachers' union are more concerned with what they can get out in terms of material benefits in their role as teacher and less concern with the inputs in terms of how to improve their teaching profession and contribute to raise the quality of education for the advantage of schoolchildren and the society. In these field there remain a lot of work to be done by the teachers unions and to raise the consciousness of their fellow members. If always concerned with improving and defending their conditions of service, there is a danger to loose other important duties of the teaching profession out of sight.

2.4 Increased work load and working hours.

The work load of the primary school teachers has increased due to longer working hours and the introduction of new subjects to be taught. There is more pressure in terms of new syllabus

and curriculum, new subjects and projects regarding literacy and numeracy, and there is pressure from parents, inspectors and head teachers. Teachers are already being made to work more with introduction of additional and new subjects such as Citizenship Education, Creative Education and Art, Health Education and the National Literacy and Numeracy Project (NLNP). The projects introduced as part of the Educational Reform has meant more workload for teachers and these are not considered favourable to teachers. (Teachers News 2002). In 2001 the primary school teachers staged a demonstration in the streets of the capital Port Louis to protest against the absence of proposals to improve teachers' status in Government proposals for reform in the Education sector. The teachers were paid an extra allowance of Rs 800 to 1900 for partaking in the Literacy and Numeracy Project which led to the increase of 25 minutes teaching daily.

According to the Civil Service Industrial Relations Commission, the government argued that although there has been an increase in the number of subjects at upper Primary from 4 to 8, the workload of teachers has not considerably increased as mentioned in the dispute (CSIRC 11/26 2002). In accordance with their Scheme of Service, Teachers are required to '*teach subjects forming part of school curriculum*' and as a matter of fact the number of hours of work have remained the same, was the reply from the government. The new curriculum will meet the development needs of the country, in terms of an educated and a skilled workforce. Moreover, it is argued by the Ministry of Education that the new Primary School Curriculum is in line with international best practices - Health & Physical Education, the Arts, Information Technology, Citizenship Education and Science are an integral part of the curriculum of the developed countries (Curriculum Renewal in the Primary sector 2001). While other countries like Australia and the UK undertake curricular reforms regularly when needs are felt, the last major curriculum reform project in Mauritius goes back to 1980 when the CPE was introduced and Environmental studies (EVS) replaced Geography as a subject. The Ministry of Education seemed to be concerned with having an education relevant to the needs of the country in a rapidly changing world which gives an opportunity to review the primary school curriculum to give the children a broad-based education that will promote their mental, physical, aesthetic, spiritual and cultural development. The new curriculum will allow the children to face the new challenges of the economy and the trends of the 21 st. century society. However, the Commission observes that an increase in the number of subjects to be taught at upper primary implies more preparation from the teachers. Time of preparation of additional subjects at home is a factor that has to be taken into consideration. Teachers unanimously stated that their workload had increased with the introduction of new subjects.

The increase in work load among teachers with the introduction of new subjects and the prospects of increasing the examinable subjects from five to eight has seriously question the distinction between the two categories of teachers in the primary school, the General Purpose Teacher versus Asian Language teachers. The first category of teacher is the jack of all trade who has to teach all subjects including the Literacy and Numeracy project whereas the AL teacher is a specialised teacher, teach only one subject. This has led to a higher work load and more responsibility on the part of General Purpose Teacher who feel disadvantaged compared to AL teachers who have the same academic qualifications and training. This issue has been discussed in GTU and in the Primary Common Front, and they have agreed that there should be a greater degree of sharing of responsibilities and duties between the two categories of teachers. The Primary Common Front with the consent of unions representing Asian Language teachers have agreed to share responsibilities. It is being argued that AL teachers could teach the new subjects in addition to oriental languages since they have the same qualifications, same training and receive the same salaries as the General Purpose

teachers. It is believed that if the AL teachers start teaching other subjects as well it will positively affect teachers' status in general. Teachers are all the same, and the teachers unions think it is better to avoid the distinction between AL and GP teachers.

2.5 GTU against increase in examinable subjects for CPE exams.

The intention of the Ministry of Education to increase the number of examinable subjects for the CPE exams (6 th. standard) has met with firm protest by the teachers' union, the GTU as well as the Primary Common Front. It is argued that the increase in work load for the teacher is substantial. They have also showed a concern for the affects on children who would be forced to take part in exams in 8 subjects when completing primary school. The GTU accept the principle of five examinable subjects at CPE level but not eight. The discontent with the introduction of new subjects is due to a number of factors, it has been very demanding for both teachers and pupils. One issue of concern is the subject called Citizenship Education that was introduced into primary schools two years ago. Some teachers in schools have taught it while others have not yet received the text books. The GTU has expressed their dissatisfaction about Citizenship Education for which there is a lack of teaching material. The GTU supported the introduction of the subject but teachers have experienced that it is too difficult for pupils and the textbook did not indicate which part should be taught at different levels. When the GTU learned that it would be an examinable subject for the CPE it launched a protest together with the Primary Common Front outside the Ministry of Education. The Minister took notice of it and called them for a meeting to listen to their views and took their grievances into account. The Minister agreed to make the subject optional due to the constraints and unequal access to the textbook. This shows that the union's voice is being heard and that they are able to influence on decisions made in the Ministry. However, Citizenship Education will probably be an examinable subject for CPE exams in 2004.

The objective of the teaching and academic content in primary schools should be reviewed. However, the GTU and other teachers unions are not invited to discuss the academic content in the primary schools. Educational policies and their implementation is still a top-down process in Mauritius.

2.6 The problem of overcrowded classrooms and class-size.

In most government primary schools the class size tends to be high with 37-39 pupils, and in some cases it goes beyond 40. The large number of pupils makes the classroom overcrowded and it is difficult to teach under such conditions. There are problems connected with noise and discipline. With such class size the pupil population becomes much more differentiated in terms of achievement and educational capacity. There is no room for a follow up or concentration on the individual pupil. The class size is not being reduced because there is no expansion of school buildings and not enough teachers. Teachers always raise the question of reducing class size but they feel that their demand is not taken into consideration.

The government has issued a circular that stipulates officially the class size to be limited to 40 pupils. Although it seems that class size ranges between 37-39, there are still some classes that has 43-45 pupils. There is a slight improvement from earlier years when the classes counted more than 50 pupils. There are not enough teachers and school buildings, classrooms in order to reduce class size further. The GTU has continued to raise the issue of reducing class size without any action being taken by the Ministry of Education. It is very vital to reduce class size in ZEP schools which have pupils with poor performance at CPE

exams, mixed abilities and a need for more individual attention. The teachers are concerned with big class size and with more subjects to be taught this affects the workload in general.

2.7 Industrial actions and disputes

The Industrial Act of 1973 is by trade unions considered a repressive act and since it was passed in the 1970s no government has dared to remove it, change or amend it. After the publication of the PRB report the government has amended a section of the IRA making it impossible for unions to declare disputes on recommendations or suggestions made in PRB - if it is signed by members on option forms. All trade unions in the public sector were against the amendment and has reported it to ICFTUC. The IRA (Industrial Relation Act) amendment bill that was voted in the National Assembly in 2003 is by the GTU considered to constitute a serious threat to the liberty of the trade union movement. It represents a serious challenge to the rights of the trade union in their activities and rights to industrial dispute and actions. It is also seen as further reducing opportunities for collective bargaining. The trade union confederations, the MLC, the NTUC and the MTUC, all propose to enter a case in the Supreme Court to challenge the amendment and they have informed international organisations such as ICFTU and CISL and ILO on this matter. According to the GTU the present government had deliberately chosen to amend the IRA thereby refusing the possibility of unions to declare disputes on remuneration and allowances (Teacher News, June 2003). It seem to further deteriorate the negotiating power of the union and their possibilities to take on industrial dispute. The GTU's opportunity to negotiate directly with the state regarding their salary and working conditions are already limited by the system with PRB (Public Research Bureau). The GTU can try to influence the recommendations from the PRB by supplying them with reports and other documents concerned with the status of teachers, their salaries and working conditions. The Sewraj report was such a document which was used to try to convince the PRB. However, when the recommendations come from the PRB there is little scope for further disputes and negotiations to generate changes in the proposals made on the part of teachers trade union.

The amendment of the Industrial Relation Act (IRA) certainly affects the status and role of trade unions in general. It limits to a large extent the scope of unions to defend workers' rights. According to this law they cannot go on strike. The same law does not allow collective bargaining in the private sector. Among the public employees there are already limited scope for collective bargaining with the present set up of the recommendations made by the Pay Research Bureau (PRB). The amendment of a section of the IRA suppresses the unions and teachers' organisations to dispute the recommendations made by the PRB.

3.0 Educational policies and reforms

Earlier there had been attempts at educational reform in Mauritius. The previous Labour government (Ptr) prepared an Action plan in 1998 in which they proposed Nine year schooling for all children whether they pass the CPE or not. They suggested pre-vocational centres for those who failed in CPE for a three year course. One of the main objectives of the Action Plan was the idea of a nine-year compulsory and fundamental Education cycle which was based on the notion of equity and fairness to all, irrespective of social class, ethnic or gender differences. It aimed at removing the fundamental disadvantages associated with the system that sought to grade and select children at an early age when they are not prepared for a competitive examination. The Action plan met with resistance within the Labour

government and was never implemented. The Action plan was designed to close the gap between social classes in an educational system that was more exclusive than inclusive. The plan was opposed by the urban upper and middle classes who considered it too radical, breaking too much with the existing system of education.

According to the new educational reform, introduced by the new government who came into power in 2000, and the regionalisation, four educational zones were created. These zones are geographical but their boundaries were redrawn in order to include both rural and urban schools, good schools as well as low achievement schools. The four educational zones are; Zone 1 (Port Louis/North), Zone 2 (Beau-Bassin/Rose Hill and East), Zone 3 (Curepipe/South) and Zone 4 (Vacoas-Phoenix, Quatre Bornes/West). The idea behind the division in four zones comprising both urban and rural schools is to give pupils a chance to get admitted to a good school closer to their place of residence.

One of the main objectives of the new educational reform was to abandon the ranking of secondary schools and individual pupils after the CPE exams at 6th. Standard. The ranking system has been replaced by a grading system at primary level. The educational reform concern the following means and projects:

- introduction of National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy in primary schools
- implementation of a new broad-based curriculum project with the inclusion of new subjects to be taught such as Citizenship Education, Science, History and Geography, Arts and Physical education. Three additional subjects are suggested being examinable.
- construction of new State Secondary Schools (23) throughout the island which will be Form 1-V schools.
- converting former elite secondary schools to separate Form VI colleges, doing only Higher School Certificate (HSC), and thereby remove them from the competition for Form I-V.
- setting up of a prevocational stream in secondary schools meant for the CPE failures. It is a 3 year skill-based programme. Earlier there was no future for those who failed the CPE exams at the end of 6th. standard. There were left with no secondary education and stayed at home or took up casual work, before they legally entered the labour force at age 15. There is now a special stream for the pupils who failed CPE where they are offered an appropriate education. There is no formal examination for them but they get a certificate of competency.

Critics of the educational reform has emphasized that the reform is directed mostly towards improving the infrastructure, the building of more secondary schools to increase access due to higher enrolment, but there is less stress on or changes in curriculum development, examination forms, ways of teaching etc. It is being questioned whether the educational reform will do away with and contribute to any major changes in the competitive nature of education. As one teacher in secondary school expressed: 'there is a concern that new schools are being put up, but education has to do with much more than school buildings and improving the infrastructure'. This raises a principle question regarding the relationship between the quantity and qualitative aspects of education.

The GTU supported the regionalisation (creating four new zones) in the educational reform and the abolishment of the ranking system. They also welcomed the building of 23 new state secondary schools in order to accommodate the increased enrolment of students into secondary education. However, they also stressed that there should be more equitable conditions in the schools in different areas of the country. At present there is an inequity of

conditions between 'star schools' in the major towns and low achievement schools in the deprived urban areas and rural regions.

Teachers, members of GTU, feel that they have no say in formulating and planning of educational policies and educational reforms. These are merely imposed upon them from the policy makers in the Ministry of Education. Afterwards, when they get to know the content of these policies and reforms, they can express their discontent through the teachers' union but their grievances are often not taken into account. Teachers feel that the union is unable to make their influence and direct change in educational policies and reforms. The good thing about the educational reform is the reduction in competition but it has created more workload for the teachers and pupils.

According to some critics of the educational reforms, there is no equal opportunity in the educational system at present. The reforms in education is limited to infrastructural improvement in secondary education and concerned with quantity rather than changing the quality of education. To some teachers the changes are minor or even cosmetic, as one teacher suggested '*the house is the same only some new paint*'.

Some teachers interviewed regard the educational reform to be the same as before. There is only more workload on the part of the teacher due to introduction of more subjects. There is still competition in school, to achieve an A – the pupil needs 75 points. It is still an achievement or result oriented educational system, although the grading now is only at school level. The educational reform is more concerned with changes in secondary education, and not education as such.

Building of new state secondary colleges, improved infrastructure and increased enrolment in secondary schools form part of the quantitative improvement of education. The reform is implemented in the government schools, while private colleges seems to be marginalised in the reform work, commented a Deputy Head Teacher in one of the Private Colleges. There is a drain of teachers from these colleges to new State Secondary Schools because a government job means greater security.

According to some teachers interviewed the policy makers should take into account the working day of teachers and pupils before imposing new educational reforms. Policy makers make paper plans which they impose on teachers and schools. The educational authorities are accused of not listening to unions that is why the teachers organisations are unable to influence on educational policies. The officials working in the Ministry of Education are accused of lacking knowledge about the problems the teachers are facing with increased workload, deteriorating conditions of service etc. They have distanced themselves from the daily life of the teachers.

The Ministry of Education take the major decision concerning educational matters and policies, they are the policy makers while other partners in education have to abide. The Ministry prepare most documents and educational projects without the participation of partners concerned. Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE) would be a natural partner because they are in charge of teacher training but it is felt that they simply execute the directives from above. Educational reforms should be discussed with relevant educational institutions but they are not consulted or involved in formulating educational policies. Staff at MIE and other relevant partners stated that they were not involved in discussing the possible consequences of the educational reform. Likewise, the unions seem unable to influence educational policies only left with the opportunity to protest against the provisions made in them after they have come to know how the policies affects them. There seems to be a lack of partnership between Ministry of Education, MIE and the teachers' unions. This suggests that

educational policies have always been top-down, where little chance is given to teachers and their unions to influence. They may suggest, protest or forward complaints afterwards.

A representative for one of the teachers organisations claimed that reforms in education has always been a matter of interest for politicians. Their approach is more political and not pedagogical. Trade unions tend to think in terms of pedagogy first, that is the child at the centre of education. There is a difference in approach between government and unions. The government give the impression that they listen to the unions but they take their own decisions based on political considerations. The teacher's organisations' influence on educational policies are not only limited but absent. The GHTU presented a memorandum to the government when they came up with reforms in the educational system – asking them to eliminate anomalies or discriminations existing in the educational system. The government remained silent and when the reform came nothing has changed in this respect. They brought the matter of reserved seats based on religious belonging in RCA schools before the court to get a decision and thereby direct the government to eliminate such anomalies. The government is accused of being engaged in superficial reforms, they do not want to make fundamental changes.

When the new government (alliance between MSM/MMM) assumed power in 2000 the Ministry of Education produced a number of documents on issues like abolition of ranking, reform of the curriculum, changes in the secondary school sector etc. However, the GTU claimed that the reform in the Education sector did not show concern for or improve the status of the teachers. The trade union thought that the Sewraj report could pave the way for improved conditions for teachers if the Ministry would implement some of the recommendations made in the report. But the ministry claimed that the report was only for internal use.

The teachers' organisations committed themselves to ensure that Head Teachers, Deputy Head Teachers and Teachers fully partake in the implementation and monitoring of the educational reform announced in the official documents such as:

- Ending the Rat Race in Primary Education (2001) (abolishing the ranking)
- Reforms in Education, Curriculum Renewal Project (2001)
- Zones d'Education Prioritaire (2002) - the classification of backward schools as ZEP schools with certain incentives and support

The Government acknowledged that this meant additional responsibilities and extension of school hours in addition to a need for training sessions within school holidays and therefore they offered an additional allowance to be effective from 1st. January 2003.

3.1 ZEP-schools and inequitable conditions in education.

As part of the educational reform the Ministry of Education wanted to set out a new strategy to upgrade the performance level of low achieving schools. These attempts have been going on for the last ten years under various names such as 'Project Schools', 'Special Support Schools' and the recent strategy is known as 'Zones d'Education Prioritaires', short for ZEP-schools. The ZEP concept is based on a desire to improve school infrastructure and environment and aims at mobilising all the resources within the Zone to contribute to raise the standard of achievement of the school. It is a new and ambitious strategy based on partnership, and a premise that positive reinforcement is required to create favourable learning conditions for children living mostly in the less developed regions. This approach aims to

reduce school inequalities and in a broader perspective, to combat social inequalities by providing equal opportunities to all primary school children in Mauritius.

The strategy intends to empower Head Teachers and his/her team by implementing a school development plan with all the other key players in education such as the parents, the community-based associations, NGOs, and business organisations. On the pedagogical front, the ZEP approach allows for flexibility, and greater autonomy for completing cycles of learning as the curriculum is not time-bound.

A school is classified as a ZEP-school when it has had a CPE pass rate of less than 40 % over the last 5 years or if it is a former Special Support School which had on an average a CPE pass rate between 40-45 %. In these low achievement schools the majority of children fail and cannot pass the CPE exams at the end of 6th. standard. They fail in one or several of the five examinable subjects. For the year 2002 there are 28 primary schools classified as ZEP schools. Most of these schools are found in the capital Port Louis and other urban areas, particularly on the outskirts in neighbourhoods with a majority of low income earners living in low-cost housing schemes called Cite. Some of the schools are found in rural areas, in deprived regions, generally less developed and considered backward. Social inequalities and lack of community support for school has negative impact on the school performance. From these schools you many 'drop-outs' who also fail the CPE exams twice and these children are left with only primary school education. These pupils are ill-motivated for learning and school work due to low income families, social problems, illiterate or poorly educated parents, broken families and marriages and overall poor standard of living. There are lower expectations regarding pupils' educational achievement from the parents who are mostly belonging to the working class. With low income they are not able to offer private tuition to their children in the same way as parents with higher incomes.

As has been stated, the low achievement schools, classified as ZEP schools has a pass rate at CPE exams which is less than 40 %. The national average concerning the rate of passes was 62% for the cPE exams in 2003 and this average has been decreased compared to earlier years. For the last few years it has been between 65-70 %. In the other end of the scale one finds the good schools locally known as the 'star school' which has pass rates as high as 80%. A good primary school has well-qualified teachers, a good school management is also important in the sense that the Head Teacher/DHT can control the teachers and reduce absenteeism. It is also related to the social background of the pupils and their educational performance determined by the rates of passes at CPE exams. The pupils in the 'star schools' are better motivated, the expectations of their parents are higher and this encourages teachers to perform well. The educational performance of the pupils depends on the parents' financial, social and educational background. Their parents can afford to give their children private tuition in order for them to perform well and pass CPE exams.

There is inequitable conditions in primary schools as the classification of ZEP schools versus 'star schools' show. And this leads to attempts by parents to get their children enrolled in a different school than its catchment area. They try to convince the HT or change the address of the child, let it live with relatives etc. in order to get the child enrolled in a school at their preferred choice. Teacher prefer to work in good schools and 'star' schools because the opportunities for giving tuition is better and they will earn more money. They do not like to be transferred to a low achievement school and those who are working in a ZEP school use various means to get a transfer away from it.

The new strategy for improving ZEP schools consist among others of posting of teachers to a ZEP school which will be voluntary and on the basis of selection. Teachers will be posted for six years. At the end of an academic year, a teacher, if he/she wishes, may apply for a transfer. At the end of the period of six years or more, priority for choice of posting

could be offered to them. Performance related reward schemes for individual staff as well as for the school personnel will be introduced in all ZEP schools as a way of promoting them. Teachers who are posted to ZEP schools are offered Rs. 1000 monthly as a special allowance. Upgrading the overall school infrastructure of ZEP schools is considered a priority as it forms part of the deliberate effort to create the most favourable conditions for learning to take place. This concerns renovation and construction of toilets, fencing, tarring of school yard, upgrade classroom furniture, improve teaching staff room, provision of sports and playground facilities. Considering the constraints within the child's environment it is proposed to implement a health and nutrition programme which includes health care, free meal and provision of school kits, shoes and uniforms for children in need. ZEP schools will be encouraged to innovate the pedagogical content and the way it is delivered which could include greater use of non-classroom settings, discount the time-bound curriculum, greater use of teaching language (e.g. Kreol rather than English and French) which is most child friendly and the support of external resource persons to facilitate learning processes. All the primary schools within the ZEP will be expected to set themselves challenging targets for improvement. Achieving and being able to demonstrate measurable results in terms of improved standards within a three year timeframe will be a challenging task. It is indeed an ambitious project that will need financial inputs into these schools and their environment.

Teachers who were performing well in ZEP schools would be entitled to some allowances but the GTU claim that in this field nothing has been done from the Ministry of Education. Allowances were introduced as an incentive but the union claim that these have not been paid to the teachers concerned. The GTU understands that some special attention has to be made to ZEP schools due to the attitude of parents, difficult environment, low income families with social problems, security of teachers, the behaviour of pupils etc. Teachers were supposed to be paid a motivation allowance of Rs. 1000 monthly, in addition it was suggested to introduce school performance bonus and individual performance bonus in order to raise educational achievement, improve the results and increase the pass rate at CPE exams. Unfortunately these incentives were not sufficient to recruit enough teachers to work in such schools, the trade union has learned. Some teachers like to get a transfer from these schools. It has been an attempt to create more equitable conditions but the GTU is uncertain of the outcome. It is particularly important that class size is being reduced in ZEP schools in order to improve conditions of learning, the union argues.

The GTU show some concern and anxiety for the completion rates at CPE last year which decreased to 62% and will raise the issue in discussion with the Ministry of Education when they meet them. It is important to identify the reasons for this decrease in results. It may be an affect of the abolishment of ranking with the introduction of educational reform. But it may also be an indicator of the lowering standard of education. The incentives to the zEP schools may not have worked the way that was intended. In one particular ZEP school in the outskirts of Port Louis, Roche Bois, the rate of passes at CPE was as low as 10% and it dropped from 14 %. It is an area of low cost housing and low income families, with a certain concentration of Creoles (people of mixed African, Indian or European descent) who are Catholics but in many ways excluded from the mainstream life. The GTU want the government to do more for the ZEP schools because they do not want to sit and look at these high degree of school failures.

3.2 Relations to the Ministry of Education

Many of the changes in conditions of service (vacation leave, leave to attend courses, transfer etc.), the increased work load as part of educational reform and administrative problems could

be solved if there had been better consultations between the teachers' organisations and the Ministry of Education, but the relationship is not functioning well it seems. The trade unions and GTU feel that they can exercise more influence through the press rather than discuss educational issues directly with the Ministry of Education. Press conference becomes a means of communicating their grievances and dissatisfaction with decisions in the Ministry. Concerning the introduction of new subjects that will increase the examinable subjects to eight, the introduction of Numeracy and Literacy Project and extension of the school day with 25 minutes is interpreted as a pressure for teachers on the part of the Ministry of Education. Teachers feel a pressure to have lengthy notes as their preparation for their work and way of teaching. It is also felt that the Ministry give in to pressure and complaints from parents against teachers.

The relationships between the GTU and the Ministry of Education may not be as good as expected and wanted, but they tend to deteriorate when there are disagreements on important issues regarding their working conditions and educational policy matters. But in general the GTU are of the opinion that they have a say on many issues concerning the teachers' working conditions.

The GTU and the Primary Common Front (six unions) regularly invite the media (radio and newspapers) to attend their press conferences in order to inform the public about current issues affecting the status and work of teachers. But the press conferences are also means of expressing their discontent with the Ministry of Education or the Government regarding their way they deal with educational matters. The GTU asked for more transparency in the transfer exercise because of political interferences and the government's desire to protect their political agents. The relationship between the union and the Ministry is also depending on the fact that promises are not kept and suggestions not being implemented. For example that payment of allowances for teachers in ZEP schools are not being made, less appointments for DHT positions, a new position as mentor has been suggested and GTU are still waiting for these posts to be filled and no one has been appointed. The GTU raises these issues in meetings with the Ministry of education but feel that their suggestions or grievances are not taken into consideration, and promises are not being held. Recently, the Primary Common Front submitted a list of 25 issues on the agenda for the negotiations with the Ministry of Education. In their newsletter the GTU states the following: '*We have regularly complained about absence of negotiations and this is the reason for which twenty-five items figure on the agenda. If the Ministry had accepted the principle of regularity of negotiations many of the problems being encountered now would not exist and teachers would not feel exasperated by some of its unreasonable decisions like the one about the elimination of release to attend upgrading courses. This decision constitutes an absolute provocation to all primary school teachers*'. (Teachers News, Aug. 2003). It clearly shows that the union is not very positive towards the Ministry of Education which is accused of poor management and coordination while implementing major decisions such as construction of secondary schools, implementing the ZEP project, provision of computers and science laboratories to the schools.

3.3 Education for All (EFA)

Education for All is a highly valued goal in development terms.

' Every person – child, youth and adult – shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. These needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as knowledge, skills, values and attitudes) required by

human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning. The scope of basic learning needs and how they should be met varies with individual countries and cultures, and inevitably, changes with the passage of time'.

(Article 1 of the World Declaration on Education for All, Thailand 1990)

In the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA), adopted in 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand, the world community identified several goals concerning the future global agenda for education and literacy, including universal access to primary education for every child. It also included an improvement of the learning environment in which everyone would have the chance to acquire the basic elements which serve as a foundation for further learning and enable full participation in society. Moreover, it included improved access to early childhood care, development programmes and reduction of adult illiteracy. This vision implied both access to education for everybody, equal opportunity for the sexes and levelling of the disparities between them disadvantaging females, meeting the diverse learning needs of children, youth and adults. An international strategy was developed to support the implementation of national EFA plans.

In Dakar in 2000, the World Education Forum re-affirmed this vision, and adopted a Framework for Action that emphasised the need for quality in basic education as well as access to it. Focus was placed squarely at the national level and on the responsibility of national governments towards education. One of the goals among others was to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by year 2005. And by 2015 ensure that all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality. Although many countries have made significant progress to attain the goals set out in the EFA, a lot remains to be done to improve the learning process, acquire equal access to education, increase education for girls and ensure equitable conditions in the fields of education.

In the wake of the Jomtien Conference in Thailand, a large number of research projects including the Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) projects was initiated as means of educational assessment. They aimed at obtaining information on the effectiveness of basic education provision in terms of actual learning achievement. The MLA project comprised the development of tests to measure the learning achievement of Standard IV learners with respect to basic learning competencies which entail the minimum basic knowledge and analytical skills that learners should be expected to have in Life Skills, Literacy and Numeracy. About fifty countries all over the world have participated in the MLA projects to date, among them 18 African countries including Mauritius who took part in such projects in 1992 and 1999. A representative sample of 1800 pupils studying in Standard IV was chosen from 60 primary schools. The Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) is aimed at obtaining information on the effectiveness of basic education provision in terms of actual learning achievement at the Grade 4 level (8-9 years old children). Another aim is to form a thorough overview of the learning environment of the pupils. These surveys formed part of the EFA Assessment which aims to construct a comprehensive picture of progress of participating countries towards their own EFA goals.

In that respect the surveys showed that Mauritius has not yet met its Jomtien targets (where at least 80 % of the learners should attain the defined minimal learning competencies) in any of the learning areas. However, Mauritius has made significant progress in the pursuit of the EFA goals. The percentage of learners who have attained the minimum mastery level (MML) in all the learning areas, (Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills), increased from 56% in

1992 to 70 % in 1999. But the surveys also reconfirmed many sources of educational inequalities that exist among them the differences between the urban and rural areas. In general, children in Central and Port Louis (the major towns and capital) outperformed those in other regions, the poorest performance was recorded in the districts in the south and south-west (Savanne and Black River). These are districts that in socio-economic terms are regarded as more backward than others, with a relatively high proportion of fishermen and sugar plantation workers compared with other districts. A few (9%) of the parents confirmed that their children could not attend school due to financial constraints – the majority of them living in the southern part of the island. Despite the fact that primary education is free in Mauritius, nearly one out of every two parents spend money on private tuition, especially for standard 4, 5 and 6. In addition there are also other costs related to exercise books, school uniform and transport. Children in urban schools performed significantly better than those in rural schools in all learning areas. An interesting findings is the significant gender-related differences in mean scores on all three tests where the girls performed better than boys.

The ultimate goal affirmed by the ‘World Declaration on Education for All’ was to meet the basic learning needs of all children, youth and adults. A ‘Framework of Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs’ was prepared and could be used by individual countries to develop their own specific plans of action and programs in line with support and mandates from their constituencies. The actual needs of the citizens of different countries would vary in nature and intensity depending on contextual factors such as existing levels of basic education available and the socio-economic conditions prevailing.

The commitments of the Mauritian government towards the working out of national plans for EFA was not entirely clear. Representatives for the Ministry of Education stated that the country’s commitment to ‘Education for All’ is reflected in Budget Expenditure on Education. Public expenditure on education was almost 15 % annually in the period 1997-99. It was not clear whether such national plans for EFA existed or had been worked out. Some said that there were no national plans. It was considered that there was no such need in the case of Mauritius, because basic targets had been met in a number of fields. Gross enrolment in primary school is 103 % while net enrolment is as high as 96 %. The country is moving fast towards free and compulsory education up to age 16 as from 2005. The policy makers in the Ministry of Education feel that they have already met the basic targets in EFA such as access to education, enrolment, equality based on gender and the issue of free education.

The present educational reforms are within the range of the commitments made according to EFA. The achievement is country specific. Mauritius is well aware of the fact that some countries have formulated EFA plans. The World Bank has offered a loan to Mauritius and the conditions therein is related to the encouragement to improve equity and access to education. One of the goals is improved adult literacy and one NGO is engaged in this work. Mauritius face no major problems concerning gender disparities in education up to completion of secondary schooling. There are in fact slightly more girls enrolled than boys in secondary schools. There is only a disparity between the sexes at university level.

According to spokesmen in the Ministry of Education, the teachers union are important stakeholders. Without partnership the reforms would be jeopardised. Unions have agreed to the educational policies presented by the government. Most of them have not been very constructive in suggesting improvements in education, except very few unions. The public have responded positively towards educational reforms. Everyone agreed to abolish the ranking system and building new secondary schools and provide better education for all. As from 2005 there will be 11 years of compulsory schooling for all.

The GTU are aware that there are plans of EFA, but they are not being involved in them by the Ministry of Education. The issues raised in EFA documents have not been of any concern and is not referred to by the Teachers News.

The teachers agreed with many of the principles of the reform, but would like to see a step by step introduction. One of the consequences by adding new subjects and additional schooling hours by 25 minutes was an increase in the workload of teachers. They understand the necessity to prepare the coming generation of population better. However, the increased workload does that the teacher cannot deliver quality education. The teachers disagreed without being heard by policy makers, and they were not consulted prior to the implementation of these decisions.

4.0 Summary and conclusions

The GTU and other teachers' organisations have limited power and only to some extent a 'voice to be heard' in influencing their salary and working conditions. They can put forward their demands such as the alignment of their salary scales to those of secondary school teachers, the 5 % advance, the recommendations in the Sewraj report to be implemented etc., in their memorandum to the Pay Research Bureau (PRB) and try to convince them of the justice in their claims. But it is the PRB which regulates salaries and suggest other recommendations regarding changes in terms of service for all public servants, including teachers. But by submitting memorandums to the PRB the teachers' organisations can make their voice heard and hope that anomalies are being corrected.

This study shows that teachers in primary schools experience a number of setbacks which seem to pose a threat to their status and rights, resulting in a deterioration of their working conditions. This is mainly due to introduction of new (examinable) subjects and the National Numeracy and Literacy project as part of the educational reform which have increased the workload of teachers. They are faced with a reduction in their entitlement to vacation leave and leave in connection with upgrading courses. The GTU and other teachers' unions understand that they have to fight to defend their obtained rights and privileges. It seems that their concern with their rights and privileges consume much of their energy while facing such challenges in the PRB report, that other important issues related to the education system (i.e. equality, equity etc.) and educational policy, do not get the proper attention that they deserve.

There is an impression that the GTU is relatively more concerned with the pragmatic and material benefits of the teachers. There is a strong concern with salaries, increments, allowances and working conditions which indicate that their main objectives are directed towards defending the rights and interests of their members regarding conditions of service. What is less evident is their interest, focus and attention towards issues related to improving the quality of education in the primary sector, educational policies and their professional identity. This does not mean to say that such concerns are absent but they should be brought forward and discussed in their organisation and together with other unions in the educational field. There is a lot of work to be done to make teachers better aware of how they can influence educational policies and become a legitimate partner in improving the education system in Mauritius.

The GTU is a well-organised trade union for primary school teachers, it is the largest of teachers organisation and a leading partner in the Primary Common front which consist of six

trade unions for teachers in the primary sector. It is governed by its constitution under the laws of the country. Delegates meetings are organised regularly, general assemblies are held annually and elections of members to the executive council and the bureau are held every two years. Each school with more than five members elects two delegates. The executive council meets once a month. All decisions taken are based on consensus. Members are informed about current issues through the distribution of their newsletter 'Teachers News'. These unique features makes GTU an open (transparent) and democratic organisation. Members have easy access to the GTU's office in Port Louis and can address the members of the bureau concerning problems at school, payment of allowances, transfers, promotion and other conditions of service. Given the fact that lady teachers amount to 48 % of all members in the union and 25 % of the delegates from school level, there is a poor representation of lady teachers in the executive council. Earlier there were two lady teachers in the executive council but at present there is only one. Lady teachers can make valuable contributions to union policies and priorities because they often pay attention to other matters e.g. improvement of school environment, than male teachers tend to do.

It was noticed that there is more concern for the status of the teachers in terms of salary, their material benefits, privileges and working conditions than their role in school, in education and their professional identity. As the demands for education is increasing, its importance for the development of society, the role of the teacher is also undergoing changes. This should be discussed among teachers and GTU should play an active role in encouraging such discussion of their complex role in society and in education system.

With the educational reform came a curriculum renewal in the primary schools. New and additional subjects were introduced and there will be an increase in number of examinable subjects from five at present to eight in the near future. To the teachers this meant an increase in the work load, especially for the General Purpose Teachers. The GTU protested against the introduction and increase in number of examinable subjects from the point of view that it represents an increase in workload. It is a concern with how it affects the conditions of service for the teachers. One strategy they have embarked on is for a greater sharing of responsibilities between the two categories of teachers, the General Purpose Teachers and Asian Language Teachers regarding the teaching in these additional subjects. But the development of a broader and more appropriate curriculum also concerns the qualitative content in education which ought to be an important concern for the teachers' unions.

There is a chance that the Ministry of Education did not consider well enough the implications of the reform while the teachers experience more work load and greater responsibility. Anyway much dissatisfaction with the introduction of new curriculum could have been avoided if there had been a better communication between the Ministry and the teachers unions on these matters, and also between other relevant partners in education as well. The future work load of General Purpose Teachers will depend on to what extent subject teachers will be introduced in the primary sector.

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