

Newsletter – December 2021 Eds

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1. PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Welcoming 2022...

2021 has been a very difficult year, for the Mauritian economy, for the business sector in general, and more importantly, for our women entrepreneurs who have been the most badly hit by the pandemic. And in these difficult times, AMFCE has been more than active in its initiatives to support women entrepreneurs. The last quarter of 2021 has indeed been instrumental for AMFCE, which has seen its major projects coming to light or to fruitful completion, in a very inspiring way...

AMFCE has closed its first cohort of the BWB program, with a resounding success rate of 70%, despite the very difficult conditions under which the program has been carried out. The AWE program with the US-Embassy has been successfully launched. And AMFCE has initiated its very first project under the COMESA Federation of Women in Business (COMFWB), entitled the RECAMP program, consisting of a 3-days training workshop for women in agri-business.

AMFCE now steps into this new year with a lot of anticipation, as it will be hosting the much-awaited FCEM World Committee meeting in May 2022. This promises to be a great moment but the challenge is enormous: resources are scarce; the Covid-threat still looms in the background; sponsorships are difficult; however, FCEM 2022 is also opening up many doors for AMFCE, and will definitely see the burgeoning of more projects in the pipeline.

And as more and more projects materialise and the workload increases, AMFCE has been able to recruit a full-time Administrative Assistant, in the person of Geraldine Secondis, who will accompany us throughout 2022, thereby relieving the administrative burden on our Executive team. A warm welcome to Geraldine amidst AMFCE.

And whilst AMFCE is gaining more and more momentum nationwide, regionally and internationally, here's wishing the same vibes to all of you, in your entrepreneurship journey. Once we hit rock bottom, the only way is up... And there is no denying that the past years have been rough for all of us. So let's welcome the new year with renewed energy and more importantly, with optimism... May the new year bring you lots of happiness, joy, good health, prosperity and growth in your respective enterprises. And 2022, please get ready! Here we come, stronger than ever, and ready to conquer...

Alone we are invisible, together we are invincible...

Rima Ramsaran
President 2021 - 2022

AMFCE EVENTS – What we've done...

“Contribution Sociale Generalisee – The Challenges Forward”: 19th October 2021

Effective as from September 2020, the “**Contribution Sociale Generalisee (CSG)**” has replaced the National Pension Fund contribution, and has created a lot of buzz in its wake. Amidst court cases and widespread criticisms, this measure has become a reality in Mauritius. And despite the fact that we are all already contributing to the CSG, most of us do not understand the basics of this new scheme, its long-term viability, and its implications for our society.

AMFCE therefore organized a panel discussion with key professionals, to run through the different aspects of the CSG, namely:

- The Economist Mrs Manisha Dookhony, who explained the macro-economic implications of the CSG
- The Actuary Mr Satar Jakaria, presented his insights on the sustenance of such a policy
- The Accountant Mr Bobby Yerkiah gave a practical overview and financial implications of the CSG Scheme for the entrepreneurs and employees.

This event was held on Tuesday 19th October 2021 at the Labourdonnais Waterfront Hotel, both online and onsite, and was followed by the usual networking cocktail.

Launching of the AWE (Academy for Women Entrepreneurs) – Start-Up Challenge: 28th October 2021

The AMFCE in partnership with the US Embassy (Mauritius) has launched the Academy for Women Entrepreneurs Start Up Challenge 2021 – 2022 (AWE) program on the 28th October 2021. The launching ceremony was held at the Caudan Arts Center and gathered AMFCE members, program handholders, handholdees and several VIP guests.

The Chief Guest for the event was the US Chargée d'Affaires Judes E. DeBaere. The Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare, Hon. Kalpana Devi Koonjoo-Shah, also supported the AWE initiative through her inspiring speech, which was read by the Ministry representative since the Minister herself could not make it to the event.

The launch was followed by a formal introduction of the participants on the program, including the 2 members of the Global Rainbow Foundation and 2 from Rodrigues, which brings in an element of diversity in AMFCE's approach that is unrivalled. A bonding ceremony between the participants and their handholders closed the launching, a moment of pride for the participants with a dash of emotion, as the handholdees opened up about their fears and their apprehensions through a personal letter to their handholders. The challenge is now upon the handholder to help them gain confidence and overcome their limitation, so that they can embrace entrepreneurship with open arms...

The next step, once the launching was completed, has been the contextualisation of the program to the local reality. 2 workshops have been carried out already:

- The first entitled: "What it takes to be an Entrepreneur", which saw the intervention of Vimi Appadoo and Shabnam Esmael from Dale Carnegie and Dr Roshini Brizmohun-Gopaul of the University of Mauritius. They explained the eco-system of entrepreneurship and ran through the process of creating / registering a formal business, in Mauritius.
- The second workshop was about "Understanding the intricacies of the Business Plan"; 7 resource persons, all specialists in their respective fields, gave a thorough insight into the various aspects of the Business Plan.

After about a month or so, the participants will meet up with the different resource persons again, this time to discuss about their specific business plans...

“The Intricacies of the Portable Retirement Gratuity Fund (PRGF)”: 18th November 2021

The Portable Retirement Gratuity Fund (PRGF) is a fund established under the Mauritius Workers’ Rights Act 2019 for the purpose of providing for the payment of a gratuity on the death or retirement of an employee, while recognizing the employee’s terms of service irrespective of the number of employers served. The PRGF is being implemented in Mauritius as from January 2022, and all employers will have to fulfil the related financial obligations.

To better understand the intricacies of the PRGF, AMFCE organised a talk with key institutions / speakers on the 18th November 2021 at the Hennessy Park Hotel. Some AMFCE members joined the session on-line, as the Covid protocol did not allow us to have too many members physically present.

Mr Didier Dodin, barrister-at-law, took the floor first and gave a thorough insight on the PRGF through a brilliant exposé. He was followed by 2 representatives of the MRA, Mrs Puholoo and Mrs Buchoo, who explained the practical aspects of the PRGF. Mr Gautam Gujadhur closed the session with a presentation on the private pension schemes available in Mauritius and the Defined Contributions.

After a heavy Q&A, AMFCE welcomed the members present as well as the respective speakers for a small networking cocktail.

The RECAMP (Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets) training program under COMFWB:

AMFCE has been nominated as the new COMFWB (COMESA Federation of Women in Business) Chapter for Mauritius since September 2021. This is an important milestone for AMFCE, which through COMFWB, sets its marks in regional cooperation. AMFCE can now proudly claim to be an important player not only locally and internationally (through FCEM), but also regionally...

The RECAMP Program is the very first initiative of the AMFCE under COMFWB. RECAMP is geared towards preparedness for regionalisation and internationalisation of businesses. The program focuses on improving competitiveness and market access of SMEs and other firms in targeted value chains in the COMESA Member States and on generally improving the business environment for SMEs in this region. The targeted value chains sectors prioritized for support under the programme are agro-processing and agro-inputs in particular quality seeds, horticulture and leather and leather products. RECAMP promotes business linkages, builds capacity related to sanitary and phyto-sanitary (SPS) and other standards, and supports regional public-private dialogues and value chain policies.

Under the RECAMP initiative, 20 women entrepreneurs in agri-business and leather manufacture were selected to follow a 3-days workshop at the Labourdonnais Hotel as from the 24th till the 26th November 2021.

The RECAMP program was launched by the Hon. Alan Ganoo, Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail & Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade on Wednesday 24th November 2021 at Le Sirius, Labourdonnais Hotel, Caudan Waterfront. In addition to AMFCE's President who took the floor to officialise our nomination as the new COMFWB-Mauritius Chapter and explain the upcoming initiatives under this umbrella, the Minister who expressed his Ministry's support and commitment to make COMFWB a success for all parties concerned, Catherine Malepa, one of the participants, also shared her inspiring journey as one of the rare (and very young) entrepreneur in leather manufacturing.

The 3-days training workshop ended with an intimate sharing and bonding. Since most of the participants were in the agro-industry, they organised a "tasting" of their products. So the heavy 3-days session ended on a festive (and noisy) note, with "locally-made rum", foie-gras and caramelised fruits, amongst others. Surprisingly, they made some sales at the hotel venue, as they invited some of the staffs to join in! This is what happens when proactive entrepreneurs are given the slightest market opening...

The graduation ceremony of the BWB (Business Without Borders) – Batch 1

In collaboration with The Australian High Commission and the Mauritius Commercial Bank (MCB), the AMFCE celebrated the graduates for the 1st cohort of Business Without Borders 2021 (BWB) program on the 30th November 2021. The Chief Guest for the Graduation Ceremony was Hon. Mrs Kalpana Devi Koonjoo-Shah, Minister of Gender Equality & Family Welfare, but the event was also graced by the presence of Her Excellency Dr Kate O’Shaughnessy, The Australian High Commissioner to Mauritius & Seychelles and Ambassador to Comoros and Madagascar and Mr Dominic Provencal, Head of Business Banking, Mauritius Commercial Bank.

BWB 2020-2021 has been carried out under the very difficult Covid-conditions, but has also risen to the challenge of carrying out a digital program with participants from Indian Ocean islands who still have limited access to the Internet. Amidst drop-outs, re-enrolments, company closures, Covid sickness, amongst others, AMFCE managed to navigate its way through, and closed the program with a resounding success rate of 70%. 35 out of 50 mentees graduated on the program, including 1 from Rodrigues, 3 from Comoros, 8 from Madagascar and 23 from Mauritius.

During the graduation ceremony, the mentees and mentors described their experience as enriching and fruitful, not to mention the considerable expansion in their professional network.

We are now closing this first chapter to open a new chapter with our 2nd Cohort of Business Without Borders starting January 2022.

TIAW Award – What we've achieved...

TIAW World of Difference Awards 2021



The International Alliance for Women (TIAW) is a global charitable foundation dedicated to the economic empowerment and advancement of women all over the globe. Each year TIAW presents two different awards to extraordinary individuals whose efforts have advanced the economic empowerment of women locally, regionally, or worldwide. TIAW recognizes 100 World of Difference Award winners and one Lifetime Achievement recipient. In October 2019, **Ms Aline Wong**, FCEM Commissioner and Past President of AMFCE, received the World of Difference Award in the category *Non-Profit/NGO*. In the latest edition of the TIAW awards, announced in October 2021, **Dr Patricia Day-Hookoomsing**, FCEM Commissioner and Past President of AMFCE, and **Ms Rima Ramsaran**, our current President, both received the World of Difference Award in the category *Entrepreneurship*. We hope that this international recognition of the work done by our three members will inspire other AMFCE members to carry on the collective effort in support of women's economic empowerment in both Mauritius and abroad.

Save-the-date – What's coming up...

EOY – or rather, beginning of year dinner

Covid-oblige, AMFCE has not been able to host its annual End-of-year event in 2021... But it's only been postponed and ... remodelled. Indeed, to palliate for this lapse, AMFCE will host a beginning-of-year dinner instead; rather than bid the past year goodbye, let's welcome the new year on a merry and festive note. More details will be communicated in due course

Annual General Meeting

Our AGM has been tentatively scheduled for the 9th March 2022... So ladies, save-the-date for yet another evening together...

FCEM World Committee Meeting – May 2022

And to top it all, AMFCE is extremely proud to be hosting the FCEM World Committee Meeting from the 25th to the 27th May 2022. Watch out for the array of opportunities coming up our way, and let's channel all our effort to make this happen, in a constructive way...

Concluding note

As we celebrate another year ending and a new one beginning, let us look back and appreciate the experiences we had and learn from the mistakes we made. And better still let us look forward to this new year with the anticipation and excitement of a child. Embrace the New Year with a positive outlook and a determined spirit to make all your dreams come true.

We'll end up with these few words borrowed from Theodore W. Higginworth: "You have the pencil and paper in your hand, you write the story of the upcoming year. May your story be a year filled with positive happenings and successes, with few erase marks and full of exclamation marks."

To which we'll add, "may your unique experiences tell a story of its own, with a fairy-tale positive ending..."

Happy new year 2022



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