



**Speech of Prof Dhanjay Jhurry, CSK, GOSK, FAAS
Vice-Chancellor of the University of Mauritius
at the Opening Ceremony of the UoM Virtual Research Week 2021
held on 08 November 2021**

Good morning and welcome to all to the Research Week 2021, a regular annual activity of the UoM since 2007. We no longer count the number of editions but we probably reached the 15th one. This is a most important activity of the University as the Research Week allows academics and MPhil/PhD students to showcase their research and interact with their peers.

Let me first thank the Honourable Minister, Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun for taking time to be with us this morning for the launching of the Research Week and for your unflinching support to the UoM. I wish also to extend my thanks to Dr Roberta Malee Bassett, Global Lead for Tertiary Education and Senior Education Specialist, World Bank for accepting to deliver a keynote address on *“World Bank’s Support for Higher Education and the New Policy Advisory Framework”*.

As last year, this year’s edition of the Research Week will take place virtually and the focus will be on *‘Building Resilience through Research in the COVID-19 Era’*, a most topical theme given the context. But let me go almost five years back, in 2017 precisely, when we envisioned research-engaged and entrepreneurial University. That was a bold and challenging vision as, you will recall, we had that year only Rs 4M for research from the then TEC. It was important to make good use of the funds and we decided to allocate funding to five research teams based on national priorities. Indeed, a first step towards the institutionalisation of research at the UoM was to prioritise research and lay emphasis on impactful research.

In 2017-18 budget, we had cut down on various expenses to allocate more internal funding to research. We increased the research budget 4-fold to Rs 16M which we could maintain each year thereafter until 2020. Simultaneously, we had put in place no less than seven (7) research schemes to allow all academics, at any career stage, to engage actively in research. Thus we could fund annually approximately 40 research projects on a merit basis.

To further foster research, we had re-engineered the Doctoral School in 2018 and entrusted it the mission of increasing doctoral intake in a timely manner without compromising the quality of the research. We are fully conscious that we have a limited number of active researchers. It is therefore important to engage in collaborative research with international partners so we can increase our pool of supervisors. Through our Matching Grant Scheme, we can also raise more funding and set higher and more ambitious research targets. To facilitate partnerships, we have put in place the Research Collaborative Agreement which is faster and less cumbersome than the MoU or MoA.

We had also set up in 2017-18 some twelve (12) Poles of Research Excellence and another ten (10) Poles of Research around agriculture and marine research, health, sustainable energy, IT and digital technologies and Policy and tourism. This had undoubtedly incentivise academics to pool together rather than working in silos.

We have been investing into the creation of specialized labs such as the GIS lab or the AI and Robotics lab to provide the necessary facilities for the growth of these areas.



Ladies and Gentlemen

In addition to this bottom-up approach to develop research which is basically led by academics and help in building research capacity, we have also instituted a top-down approach which enables the UoM to tackle multi-disciplinary research and research of national interest. Given the scarcity of funds and to make good use of tax payers' money, we have the duty to engage in research that solve real problems and respond to society's needs. They are numerous whether in agriculture, biodiversity, health, energy, finance, IT and digital technologies, ocean and climate change to name a few.

I have been talking of the Inputs for research to thrive at the UoM. It is equally important to take stock of the Outputs and Impact of our investment. On the output side, the number of publications in scholarly journals have been increasing significantly since 2017 but due to the pandemic and work from home, this rising trend was not maintained last year. But this is no excuse, we have to deliver on the research portfolio and I am confident we shall find ways and means to do so. It is imperative we increase the number of active researchers and active supervisors which cannot remain at 30-40% of academic staff. To further increase outputs, we need to at least double our doctoral intake which is presently at 225 students and attract more postdocs. This implies more scholarships from the HEC and a set of policy actions to simplify procedures to be able to attract postdocs. It is noteworthy that our ability to secure external research funding has increased several folds 8-9 times our own investment. This shows the competitiveness of our academics.

I would not stress more here on our outputs. My message is that we can do far better but this requires personal investment and fulfilling our responsibility as academics.

On the impact side, we have been stressing over the past years on the need to address societal problems and sustainability issues. We are moving slowly but surely in that direction by working closely with industry and the government. We have set up five (5) university-industry research clusters and we are confident those clusters will come up with impactful results.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Research is crucial for our country and for society. By 2030, a third of our population will suffer from diabetes and over 20% will suffer from CVDs and hypertension, let alone other unknown communicable diseases. We need to invest more in health research. We have set up last year the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences which has to play a leading role in addressing health problems plaguing our country. There are many opportunities for impactful research in other sectors too.

But this is not the sole responsibility of a few but of the entire academic staff. Being the main producer of research on the island, the country relies on us. We have to shoulder our responsibility. The PRB 2021 report recognised our effort to promote research by instituting the post of Research Chair. This is an important progress for the UoM.

Let me conclude by extending all my thanks to Pro-VC (Academia) and his organizing team led by Prof Ramasami for ensuring the Research Week is on target despite all other commitments.

I thank you for your attention and wish you a fruitful Research Week.