

Speech at the Launch of the Blue Economy Course: University of Seychelles



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Anse Royale, Seychelles

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Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen

This is my first visit to the Seychelles and I can see why the ‘blue economy’ is so important to your country. Seychelles is made up of 155 islands with a land mass of about 459 square kilometers but your islands span over an Exclusive Economic Zone of 1.374 million square kilometers of water. Three quarters of the earth’s surface is covered by oceans and seas which have always been a key source of food security. Maximising the resources of the ocean in a sustainable way is certainly a way forward for the economic development of the Seychelles.

At the 19th Commonwealth of Education Ministers which was held in the Bahamas in June 2015, His Excellency Danny Faure, then Vice President of Seychelles and a member of the board of governors of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) requested COL to support the small states of the Commonwealth by developing learning resources for the Blue Economy. COL welcomed the request because it was very much in line with its mandate to support learning for sustainable development. Learning must lead to economic empowerment, social inclusion and environmental conservation.

COL facilitated the development of a self-study course which is meant for beginners and will provide an overview and introduction to the Blue Economy. It will also serve as a source of inspiration for future entrepreneurs wanting to venture or explore opportunities in the Blue Economy, be it tourism, fishing, aquaculture, transportation or emerging technologies. Learners from anywhere in the world, will be able to take the course and learn at their own pace. Through a series of self-reflection questions, quizzes and activities the course will monitor learners’ progress and upon completion, they will be able to print their own badge or certificate.

When Ministers of Education launched the idea of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth at their triennial meeting in Canada in 2000 they were concerned of being left on the wrong side of the digital divide. Far from being left behind, small states are now opening up new frontiers by being not just consumers of learning but also creators of knowledge using the latest platform of eLearning.

As an open educational resource (OER), this course is available to anybody anywhere in the world. The University of Seychelles will be able reach learners beyond its national boundaries and leave its imprint in the wider Commonwealth and beyond.

The Blue Economy is a novel concept and I am delighted that Seychelles is playing a leading role in its development and promotion. It is a pleasure to be here to launch the course which my colleague John Lesperance, Education Specialist: VUSSC has been leading this initiative in partnership with the University of Seychelles.

This course fits well with goal 14 of the Sustainable Development Goals which aspires to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources. Capacity development is central to achieving this goal. In addition, 'Africa Blue Economy: a policy handbook' provides several guidelines, one of which states the importance of 'enhancing education, training, capacity building and skills development of states'. COL's ICT-based approaches can support and scale this process and the course on the 'Blue Economy' is an important initiative.

This course will be of great value to all coastal and small island states of the Commonwealth. Equally, it will also benefit countries that are not members of the Commonwealth. It will help to consolidate the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) partnership and agenda. SIDS cannot imitate the growth and development models of the big states such as intensive agriculture and large-scale industrialisation. Therefore the 'blue economy' approach offers an alternative paradigm. The University of Seychelles, through this course will strengthen its position as a leading player and advocate of the Blue Economy.

The Commonwealth of Learning is pleased to partner with the University of Seychelles, Blue Economy Institute through the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth which has its roots here in the Seychelles since it was President Faure who first mooted the idea as Minister of Education. We look forward to strengthening this partnership and wish the University of Seychelles every success going forward. It now gives me great pleasure to officially launch the online course on the blue economy.