

**Environmental Perspective of Dominican People**

By

Amanda Hooker

June 18, 2002

Study Abroad Dominica 2002

Dr. Lacher and Dr. Woolley

### **Abstract:**

The advent of the United Nations Agenda 21 enacted the principles to reduce environmental degradation that accompanies poverty in developing countries. The Dominica Conservation Association later became the forum for the people on environmental development and sustainable growth. The Association continues to participate in environmental issues as well as future concerns of the nature island.

### **Introduction:**

Awareness of environmental issues has been the main concern of global initiatives. The 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm gave way to the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP). The UNEP set the principles for sustainable development and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) provided people a forum to communicate their environmental issues on a global level. Twenty years later the 1992 United Nations Conference in Brazil on Environment and Development created Agenda 21 also known as the Rio Declaration to take action in the development of world resources in a sustainable manner. Prior to Agenda 21 extraction of natural resources was unlimited and developing countries placed precedence on economic gain to counteract poverty. The non-governmental Dominican Conservation Association was originally founded by Atherton Martin to preserve cultural resources such as artifacts and antiques as well as the spiritual being after hurricane David in 1979. Antique furniture was bought readily by the French because at that time Dominicans viewed their artifacts as worthless due to the damage caused by the hurricane. Through the early 1980s the Dominica Conservation Association held their meetings at its member's homes and in 1991 John and Kathleen MacArthur funded an office in Roseau.

This allowed the association to continue with a plan for environmental development and economic growth in the most sustainable manner for future generations.

**Materials and Methods:**

The materials used included referred and cited sources as well as interviews from the following people:

**Kent August:**

Member of the Carib Tribe Council

**Mona George-Dill:**

Manager of SCEPRTE

**Clem James:**

Tour guide for KHATT's

**Alphil Matthew:**

Former employee of the Rain Forest Aerial Tram and tour guide for KHATT's

**Atherton Martin:**

Former Minister of Agriculture, President of the Caribbean Conservation Association, founder of the Dominica Conservation Association

**Steinberg Henry:**

Diploma in Mass Communication Studies from CARIMAC, Mona Jamaica, and a BA (Hons) MA Communications Studies from the University of Windsor, Ontario, Canada

**Results:**

According to Atherton Martin Dominican farmers have a vast knowledge of their environment through agricultural practices. Dominicans are true farmers in the sense that

they “live by practice” therefore farmers know when to plant, practice crop rotation, and mind seasonal and weather change patterns. However there is great concern with the uses of agrochemicals such as pesticides and herbicides in the control of plant disease. Kent August explains that he has noticed a decline in the quality of bananas and passion fruit due to these agrochemicals. Paraquat has been used in the banana industry as a way of controlling weeds, but Clem James is concerned with its use in Dominica while he knows the use of paraquat is banned in the United States. Clem James explained that Edison James, a former banana supplier, could have addressed Dominica’s use of Paraquat after his acceptance into political office, and Dominicans are also somewhat discouraged by the governmental body changing every five years. Martin suggests that the people of Dominica should avoid overdependence on the governmental legislation. August is concerned with the potential teratogenic effects of these agrochemicals on the fetus and explains that the people of Dominica do not truly understand the adverse effects of these chemicals to the developing fetus. These effects on the fetus are merely regarded as something that just happens “in nature.” It is also important for farmers to be aware of the run-off potential of agrochemicals due to high rainfall (50-300 inches per annum) down the mountainous terrain. This chemical run-off empties into the Atlantic Ocean on the east and Caribbean Sea on the west affecting the fishing industry. The coral reefs are also affected by erosion causing the waters around the island to become shallow.

Industrial whaling in the waters surrounding the island of Dominica has been a pressing issue for the Dominica Conservation Association and Mona George-Dill for the last eight years. In 1994 the International Whaling Commission (IWC) communicated by fax that that they were planning to place a boycott on tourism in Dominica due to the

Dominica Conservation Association acceptance with Japan's whaling practices in their surrounding waters. The association responded quickly to explain that they did not approve of the whaling practices of Japan nor of their governments position on the matter. As it stands now the Dominican government voted to abstain on the whaling issue. The Dominica Government has a loyalty to Japan due to Japan's Fishing Division on the island, although George-Dill states that the local fishers of Dominica do not usually take advantage of the fish provided by the fishing division. The International Whaling Commission has placed a moratorium on the commercial whaling but Japan has found loopholes to continue with their whaling practices. The constraints that the IWC has placed on commercial whaling are not legally binding, therefore Japan has used the meaning of "whaling on a sustainable basis" and "wise use" to their economic advantage. George-Dill explains that the whales belong to the world and the whales such as Blue Whales, Right Whales, and Minke Whales cannot be induced to reproduce as with the agricultural practices of raising livestock. Japan often claims that their whaling is strictly for the purposes of scientific research with an estimated five hundred to a thousand whales per year killed. It is known that some of the whales killed are actually endangered.

Dominica is known for its pristine drinking water and many Dominicans cannot imagine not having clean drinking water. James believes that development of ecotourism has the potential to lead to water pollution and Dominicans do not know the true meaning of litter. Dominicans want to feel the concrete under their feet as Americans do but with that American ideal the reality of litter emerges. James states that, "Dominicans do not know litter like Americans know litter."

However Steinberg Henry does understand the threat of waste generated by the ecotourism industry. Henry explained that Dominica is not an island for cruise tourism due to the smallness of the island (twenty-nine miles long and sixteen miles wide) and the amount of tourists per ship, estimated at two thousand people per cruise. Dominicans view long-term ecotourism as of great benefit to their culture and overall spirit of the island. Dominicans feel that they have shared interests with the tourists that engage in research or work, for example, over a period of several weeks on the island rather than the day tourists that travels by cruise ship. Dominicans are not interested in attracting tourists to large five star hotels; instead they would like to keep in tune with nature by attracting tourists to small cottages that allow for a more “organic” experience.

Dominicans view ecotourism as an answer to sustainable economic development according to George-Dill, but ecotourism should be developed in a manner that does not disrupt the natural habitat and only leaves footprints behind. Unfortunately, the Rain Forest Aerial Tram, located in the village of Laudat, is of great concern to the people of Dominica due to the potential environmental impacts. Alphil Matthew explained that the tram is 5 feet in width and is constructed of nineteen towers with a total weight of seven thousand tons. The tram spans a total distance of 2 miles and runs on a cable wire underneath the body of the tram. The tram receives seventy percent of its power by the local power company while the remaining thirty percent is powered by generators that run on diesel fuel. According to Martin the initial Environment Impact Assessment did not meet the correct carrying capacity of the Boiling Lake and its forested area, however the American based Rain Forest Aerial Tram Company found the carrying capacity of the Boiling Lake and surrounding forest area acceptable. An estimated sixty thousand

tourists visit Boiling Lake annually or about five thousand tourists per month. The tram would create greater accessibility to the pristine Montane and Elfin Forest or low lying vegetation in the World Heritage Site. Martin suggested that the Middleham Falls area would be a more appropriate site due to the mature growth of the Rain Forest, thus causing less disturbance to the flora and fauna.

**Discussion:**

The World Commission of Environment and Development in their report “Our Common Future” defines sustainable development as “that which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The focus of sustainability is with regard to the natural environment and the humans that inhabit the environment. Environmental degradation of natural resources is of concern in developing countries where poverty is an issue.

The Dominica Conservation Association has played a large roll in the conservation of Dominica’s natural resources as well as imposing restraints on economic development that would be of harm to the “nature island.” The association was very successful in their defeat of the Australian based Broken Hill Company for the proposed mining of the non-renewable resource copper. This copper mine was located directly in the center of the island in the Forest Reserve. The copper was to be mined above a watershed that supplies drinking water to the people of Dominica.

The Dominica Conservation Association has also expressed to the people of Dominica on a local level as well as the people of the world on a global level the threat of commercial whaling. Some of these whales are endangered which may lead to the

extinction of the whales. This may occur if the whales are simply exploited due to the rareness of these animal species.

There are future concerns for the People of Dominica and the Dominica Conservation Association that address issues involving the environmental impact of the Rain Forest Aerial Tram. Some of the biological diversity of the forest may be impacted by noise pollution of the tram system, the pollution caused by the impact of humans to the area, and the pollution of carbon dioxide emitted from the use of diesel fuel powered generators. There are also concerns of metal deterioration that has potential for soil contamination from the nineteen towers that support the tram system. The forest will have to be clear cut at a width of 5 feet for a distance of 2 miles. This forest destruction may disrupt the ecology and behavior of native species. The tram runs on a powered cable line that must be kept operational by the use of nondegradable lubricants. The Rain Forest has an average of one and a half inches of rain per day during a rainy season that will cause run-off of the lubricants into the forest streams and eventually the larger bodies of water in the surrounding areas. The tropical vegetation in the area of Boiling Lake are of the most importance due to its preservation thus far and its great potential to be the model forest for all of the world. In the book *Dominica: Isle of Adventure* written by Lennox Honychurch, W.H. Hodge states, "Nowhere in the American Tropics can a better display of [tropical vegetation] be seen than in the interior of Dominica."



## Works Cited

Honychurch, Lennox. Dominica: Isle of Adventure, The Macmillan Press Ltd,  
London: 1991.

Rodda, Annabel. Women and the Environment, Zed Books Ltd, London: 1991.