

The Balance Between Pristine Nature and a Rising Economy in Dominica

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Abstract

The island of Dominica is such a small island with intense terrain that the possibility of having a “city life” is slim. Some well-known personalities offer their insight into the mentality of Dominicans today and how to keep both the island’s assets and the nation’s economy better than marginal.

Introduction

Dominica is a volcanic island with lush tropical vegetation. The indigenous islanders use most of the island’s vegetation for community uses such as food, medicinal remedies, and crafts. However, there have been some proposals opting to use the land for commercial use such as resorts, mass agriculture, and international corporate business in order to maximize the country’s cash flow. Among most ministry members, active conservation members, and the natives, the current Dominican lifestyle of bare feet in the city is preferred as opposed to a city life with sky scrappers, time budgets, and high priced gizmos.

There are four main facets of the island’s culture to consider when evaluating efforts to conserve Dominican lifestyle. 1) The rainforest and forest reserves determine the productivity of the island in terms of timber, water (irrigation), and eco-tourism. 2) The aids of other countries and private industries for developing conservation efforts are prominent in Dominica. There may also be some programs that help mitigate ailing economic standards in the county. 3) Some programs can be a little overbearing, in conjunction with forest conservation, agriculture, and Dominica’s primary industry. They will contribute to the degradation of the land, soil, and natural resources unless utilized properly. 4) Preservation of some of the island’s natural resources helps promote eco-tourism and ensures that industry does not hinder the natural regeneration of the promoted land. These four points help to understand the culture of Dominicans and where they, as a whole, want to go.

Discussion

Forest Conservation/ Policy

Dominica is full of interesting and natural world wonders such as Boiling Lake, endemic parrots, and Elfin forests. The preservation of these wonders has been the contribution of the Division of Forestry and Wildlife. Forest reserves were first set aside by the division to help conserve the lumber use and farmland in the country. This land was also used to protect watershed areas and prevent the use of crown land, which is prone to soil erosion (including leaching) by both farmers and silviculturists. The government does lend out its reserved land for some farmers depending on what crop they want to grow. This program acts as a grant for those wanting to contribute to Dominica's agriculture industry.

The Forest Act of 1958 prohibits farming (also known as squatting) or tree harvesting on forest reserves without government permission. Violation of this act renders legal cases and sometimes compound cases dealt with by the Division of Forestry and Wildlife. If these acts were done in a national park only legal action would take place.

During the 1970's and 1980's Canada helped in the development and establishment of national parks in Dominica. Morne Trois Pitons National Park (est. 1975) is the home of the Valley of Desolation and Boiling Lake. With the funding by the Canadian International Development Agency and the technical assistance of Parks Canada, Dominica has been able to save one of its unique treasures, and capitalize off of it. Boiling Lake is one of two boiling lakes in the world. Help from the Rare Species Conservatory Foundation in Florida, USA established Morne Diablotin National Park (est. 2000). Cabrit's National Park (est. 1986) housing Dominica's dry forest and a Spanish fortress was funded by the Wildlife Fund and Parks Canada.

The island's endemic wildlife is also being protected under the Division of Forestry and Wildlife. The two parrots on the island, the Jacko and the Sisserou, are protected under the Forestry and Wildlife Act of 1976. These birds were rare after Hurricane David in 1979 and were nearly driven to extinction. Now, they are becoming pests in citrus orchards among high elevation farmlands. However, attempting to eradicate these pests will cause a fine of \$1000 EC.

Currently, there is a license requirement for hunting in Dominica. A general hunting and fishing license allows a limitless take of game and fish such as the Mountain Chicken, Black Crab, Red-Necked Pigeon, and Agouti. To increase the funding for the forest reserves, riparian zones, and parks the intention is to increase the license price, reduce time validity of the licenses, and propose bag limits similar to the United States' hunting and fishing restrictions. The proposals for change are still in the workings as the subject has only recently been broached (since 1976).

Outside "Aids"

Since Dominica is a small island with a large asset to the world and its scientists, other countries that are better organized have volunteered their time, money, and researchers to understanding more about the terrain, wildlife, and plants endemic and common to this island.

As mentioned before, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and Parks Canada have helped Dominica establish its national parks and forest reserves. From the United States private organizations such as the RARE Species Conservatory Fund helped to raise money for the Morne Diablotin National Park and helped to raise educational awareness to Dominicans about their own Sisserou parrots. They did this by performing plays, displaying bumper stickers and buttons, and holding poster contests among grade school children at school and at village festivals or national holidays. The Nature Conservatory in the US provided a Parks and Repair Program for Dominica's existing parks and their needed repairs for trails or information centers. The United Kingdom is the home of Fauna and Flora International, an organization that helped to take inventory of the island's game species. There are also local banks that will assist with environmental education pursuits. The Caribbean Development Bank funded the visitor center at Morne Trois Piton National Park and Morne Diablotin National Park and the rain shelters at Middleham Falls.

Of the help that is offered, some are not wanted among ardent environmentalists on the island. One example is Japan. According to Mona George-Dill, a director the Dominican Conservation Agency, Japan uses small developing islands to vote in their favor as part of the United Nations. Subsequent Prime Ministers of Dominica have fallen

for Japan's bribes, promises, and loyalty while Japan has only put forth a single fisheries building (for the education about fisheries) in the past 10 years. Only after Dominica's 1980 Prime Minister, Eugenia Charles, did the some Dominicans want to have an industrial lifestyle, big business, and high national revenues. Prime Minister Charles saw Dominica as a "Miami" or a "Chinatown" mainly because of the Taiwanese's dependence on Dominica. Taiwan citizens would purchase a passport from Dominica to gain access into other major countries such as the US or Canada because Dominica is commonwealth, a recognized country, while Taiwan was not a recognized country. Her vision spread thanks to her support by the Queen of England, Elizabeth II. Although that vision was presented in prior years, it is starting to be forgotten. Instead, the younger generation of Dominica wants the big city due to the influence of television. Older generations acknowledge the island's pristine and austere topography, and they aim to try to keep the island in its current state until the younger generation acknowledges the same ideals.

Agricultural Processes

With the help of human discipline, agriculture can continue to be the island's number one provider of income and jobs. Dominica has been split up into seven sections: north, northeast, east, central, southeast, south, and west. A team leader and his or her staff of 5 -7 people are assigned to each section. Their job is to supervise, educate, and mentor farmers in that region. A technical officer such as Manley James in the Division of Agriculture heads up all of the team leaders on the island and directs their education curriculum and farmer accountability. Through this decentralized system problem areas with farmers and their crops can be assessed, experiments on new fertilizers or pesticides are performed, and demonstrations of techniques for better crops, less disease, or resource efficiency are conducted. An area of government land is reserved specifically for these events.

Just recently irrigation has come into use. For years crops have been grown without reliance on irrigation. With the severe dry spell that had occurred about two years ago, irrigation is in more demand though the price of the service is very high. The

Banana Trust Fund, provided by the European Union, will pay for irrigation to those farmers who are eligible.

Aside from educating the farmers, educating the newer generation has become vital too. The Agriculture Extension Program offers courses in agriculture in primary and secondary schools. The international organization Christian Children's Fund provides funding for the education of organic farming to children with the help of Dominican schools for donated land and water. The Regional Young Farmer's Organization provides an apprentice incentive for future agriculturalists.

Incentives for up and coming farmers are just as rewarding as educational opportunities for children. Duty free concessions, four-wheeled drives, and waivers on tax help the growing farming industry. Since the decline of the banana industry in 2000 with Britain Dominica has made implementation efforts for the Economic Diversification Strategy which takes away dependence on a mono-crop. Included in this program is the promotion of eco-tourism, telecommunications, offshore services, and manufacturing. One way economic diversification is done is through intercropping, growing different crops concurrently on the same field such as coconuts growing with bananas and tannia, citrus with dasheen, and plantains with tannia. This method diverts the nation's dependency on one crop while capitalizing on its other crops. It also helps provide symbiotic relationships between plants to reduce disease. Another example may be to promote apiculture, the fertilization by a controlled bee population and later with a harvest of honey. There are many ways to profit from concurrent harvesting that can lead to diverse methods of national revenue.

Markets are found for non-banana crops through the use of hucksters, people who purchase from farmers and sell to other islands. They work in conjunction with Dominica Export Import Agency (DEXIA) who find international markets for the island-grown crops and Dominica Hucksters Association (DHA) who sell to other Caribbean islands. Those farmers choosing to only sell bananas are part of the Dominica Banana Producers Limited (DBPL). They are a private organization "owned" by its farmer members who have shares in the organization - Carib Indians included. This organization looks for the world's banana market, sells the Dominican-grown bananas under the

Feirtrade name, and directly profits from the exchange. Because of the private nature of this entity, converted banana farmers are returning to the crop.

The agricultural industry is growing at a pace that will help spawn monetary rewards while ensuring Dominica's number one provider of jobs and industry remain in tack.

Nature Islands

More Dominicans are starting to realize the features of Dominica that no other Caribbean island can offer: abundance of freshwater straight from the streams, Carib Indian heritage and their traditions, 4 volcanoes, and the majority of its island unharmed by human activity. A new mentality is in effect promoting Dominica as the Nature Island for the purpose of instilling pride in its inhabitants and attracting visitors. The farmers are keen on keeping the motto prevalent with the help of the government educating on land sensitive techniques and methods to agriculture such as organic farming. However, some farmers also use the motto to gain enough money from agriculture to purchase visas into other countries.

One person to help reduce the country's 90% emigration rate and capitalize on the "fruits" of Dominica is Mona George-Dill. She has set up an organization called the Fruit Processing Project that "cleans up" Dominica. The idea is to put to use all the waste of Dominica such as the over abundance of mangos rotting on the edge of the road. The program is a community involvement to make jams and jellies and bottle them according to international standards with the intentions to sell to tourist shops and international markets. The Fruit Processing Project is also a good way to initiate small businesses, innovative jobs, and eventually national revenue to maintain the conservation and preservation of the natural facets of Dominica.

The acknowledgement of Dominica's natural beauty is not something new to its natives. The Dominican national anthem includes poems of transcendentalism as well as many folk songs prior to the nation's independence. The Botanical Garden was established in the 1880s with the idea of preserving the island's beauty far before environmental issues presented themselves. But even with the appreciation, the reality is that Dominica has very little to offer those with formal education. The number of people

with college educations is fairly high in Dominica. The literacy rate alone is 95% for the whole island. It is not uncommon for a student to move out of the nation to finish a university education in the US, Canada, or the UK. Once their education is complete, those former students have the realization that their love of Dominica does not provide jobs for those with higher educations. The island has conserved most of their treasures by not having large cities to hold large business. The country cannot even make room for big businesses; the terrain will not make it easy or affordable. The hope for many older Dominicans is to bring back native Dominicans with higher educations and enough initiative to create jobs here to decrease emigration and increase the country's revenue by providing a product or service the rest of the world will appreciate and purchase.

Other efforts to instill new forms of national pride through environmental education are during patron saints' holidays. The Division of Forestry and Wildlife has an exhibit at many of the patron saint holidays for various villages over the island. Not only are families introduced to some of the island's unique and special attributes, but they can also learn to appreciate them by knowing an interesting fact about them. To increase awareness and appreciation, native Dominicans are also permitted into national parks free of charge. Many families take advantage of this during major holidays. Bathing in the waterfalls all over the island are frequently sought after family past times. Schools are also implementing ways to control human activities such as awareness of negative effects of littering on the environment.

Conclusion

In order to keep the island's unique geographical and resourceful nature, special attention must be made towards Dominica's biggest influence - agriculture. About 60% of Dominica is forest and about 30% of Dominica is agricultural land, which comprises the island's top industry. These statistics alone imply that there is little room for city growth if Dominica maintains or increases its crop exports. Not to mention, with the terrain including high mountains, volcanoes, and hard to reach valleys, city growth construction will be expensive and will take a long time to complete. Being prone to frequent landslides, droughts, and poor soil filtration will also cause additional costs to construction such as the cost of clean, fresh, drinkable water that previously was a major

export. Even now, most Dominicans continue to construct buildings by hand, harvest naturally grown vegetables from their rainforest backyard, and hitch a ride into town all in efforts to save money due to the low cost of living. Dominica is not a typical high dollar Caribbean resort island but is a time capsule full of natural phenomenon. Currently, all of its leading citizens and many of its inhabitants uphold plans and programs to ensure Dominica's status as the "Nature Island".

References and Acknowledgements

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