

NAME: VANESSA WILLIAMS

SCHOOL: GRENADA SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST COMPREHENSIVE

COUNTRY: GRENADA

TOPIC: Are we doing enough to promote sustainable use of our local products and natural resources and in so doing promote self-sufficiency in the OECS?

In this essay, I will define self-sufficiency, explore what are our local products and resources in the OECS and state the uses to which they are put, identify what is being done to promote sustainable use of these local resources and whether these are effective in promoting self-sufficiency and then, evaluate whether enough is being done in the OECS with our natural resources to promote self-sufficiency.

What is self-sufficiency? It is, “having the necessary resources to get along without help” (Agnes, 2007). In the context of this essay, it refers to whether or not the OECS is moving away from dependence on others and towards sustaining itself.

Given the definition of self-sufficiency, is the OECS equipped with sufficient resources to actually provide for itself? According to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) (2010) the natural resources present among OECS member states include: salt, fish, lobster, pleasant climate, tourist attractions, arable land, minerals, mineral springs, geothermal potential, timber, hydropower, forest, exotic tropical fruits, spices, wildlife and deepwater harbors. It is clear that the resources contained in our region, are numerous and if cooperatively, our OECS member states execute well thought-out plans, quality sustainable self-sufficiency can be realised.

It is now fitting to discuss the uses to which these resources are put. A sizable percentage of these resources is simply used as tourist attractions in their natural state. These include sightseeing of our rich historical sites, artefacts, beaches and their reefs and wild life like the Mona Monkeys in the Grand Etang forests in Grenada, among others. Other products like

fruits are gathered and simply sold in many local markets to tourists and the local population, while excess amounts are exported to overseas markets. An example of that is seen in Dominica as people ship vast amount of fruits, tubers and other products to islands as far north as the Virgin Islands. Moreover, our arable lands are used for various purposes, most commonly for agriculture and animal grazing. Timber is often used for charcoal making, and house building and furniture making.

Are the uses to which our resources are put, sufficient for sustainable development? Let's consider a situation in Grenada. Mr. George Brizan, noted in his book 'The Nutmeg Industry, Grenada's Black Gold' that the industry collapsed financially in 1993. Prior to this it was recommended, he added, that value added to the nutmeg industry must be done through the manufacture of certain products, like nutmeg oil along with other secondary and tertiary creations. It is well known that Grenada was the second largest producer of spices in the world, second only to Indonesia. Indonesia had always controlled the market prices and this has partly caused Grenada to lose hundreds of millions of dollars by not having a sustainable strategy for this valuable resource. Furthermore, in March 1985 a study on a nutmeg distillation plant was done for GCNA by Sotecna S. A. of Brussels. The plant was built and, between 1995 and 2000, GCNA earned 4,480,833.31 EC dollars from sales of nutmeg oil with expenses of 550,337.00 EC dollars resulting in a net profit of, 3,930,494.00 EC dollars. This was from only one brand of essential oil of nutmeg and considering that there are over 25 secondary products that can be made; the prospects could be quite bright (Brizan, 2003).

Another example is in St. Lucia. The Caribbean Natural Resources Institute; Soufriere

Foundation (1994) protects the coral reefs of St. Lucia and promotes sustainable development for the island's local communities. Coral reef conservation activities include monitoring of the reefs and water quality (Bryant, 1998). The resources in the various islands are managed similarly in some aspects. In Grenada for example, the authorities have placed a ban on fishing and hunting in the spawning and reproductive seasons, to preserve these fragile resources. Complete bans have now been placed on the hunting of the Mona monkeys in Grenada and certain of its other wild life like the National Dove. These and other measures are positive efforts for ensuring sustainable development.

Further, some of the governments of the OECS have taken steps to limit deforestation, thus helping to preserve wild life habitat. Tourists and the island population can then enjoy these preserves for many years to come. The financial benefits to the different states are quite promising. Nevertheless, these steps are a welcomed change in attitudes and in the way we manage our resources for the future, but they are not enough for self-sufficiency and sustainable development.

The question of effectiveness and efficiency of these measures in promoting self sufficiency are the concerns that I will address next. One of the biggest issues in many islands is the inadequate solid and liquid waste management system, especially in the lesser-developed interior of these islands. The exterior of the islands developed by the respective tourist industries face other environmental problems such as habitat loss and coastal pollution. Additionally, the coral reefs have been obstructed by coastal construction, to some degree in certain locations. There are increasing amounts of industrial and agricultural activities on some

of these islands as well as problems leading to soil erosion. These can destroy our chances for sustainable development.

In spite of challenges that may surface, we must continue to strive for new and intelligent ways to attain self sufficiency and sustainable developments. We can do this in part by making use of our arable lands in ways that cultivate different crops year round so that we can consume more of what we grow. There must be practices aimed at preserving our wild life, water supply, reefs, fisheries, forests, clean air, pleasant weather and environment.

What we fail to do today to preserve our rich heritage of natural resources and products will come back to roost in our back yard one day with disastrous consequences for all. With this in mind, it is very important for the OECS, to work together to promote a greater sense of sustainability and self-sufficiency with the appropriate use of our resources.

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