

Dominica's 20-Year Plan

by Mona George-Dill

Preparation of a country's development plan is no mean task. It takes a lot of time for research and preparation, and that means a lot of money. Nevertheless, it must be done if we are to cease chasing our tails.

In addition, an integrated development plan is required to deal effectively with foreign investors. This is the only way Government can know for sure what it wants, be united in its expectation, and convince the visiting negotiators of its position. Every one of those foreign governments or bona fide businesses that deal with Dominica have their own long term development plan. Japan has 50-year plans.

When the foreigners come to deal with us and we have no plan, the most we can do is to ask them what can we do for them in return for whatever it is that they might wish to do for us. For example, Japan wanted our votes at several international environmental fora and, I understand, at the Security Council. In exchange they dictated not only what project they wanted to give us for our votes, but also where they wanted the project located. It really did not matter to them that the Dame wanted the fisheries complex placed in a southern fishing community. They would have their Fisheries complex placed nowhere but on the newly built Dame Eugenia Boulevard, in order to give their project "high visibility". I understand that the British, who had just finished building the Boulevard, were not amused. Had we an integrated plan that outlined a location for our fisheries complex, things could have been different.

Many regional politicians have been afraid of planning in the past. They took their cue from Trinidad over 20 years ago. But that was folly because Trinidad had its oil, and at that time oil was king, so Trinidad's economy could afford many a 'white elephant'. We the smaller islands have suffered for long on account of that folly.

In preparing Dominica's 20-year integrated development programme I imagine that the planners will start first with our population statistics. They might examine the current figures and make growth projections taking into consideration in and out migration trends - current and potential. They will quite likely make projections for per capita income based on perceived Cost of Living Indices covering the 20 year span of the programme. They might then work out an economic development plan which will hopefully surpass the economic requirements of the population.

Using a keen eye for projects that could have positive impacts on the people and on the environment they would quite likely move into prioritizing projects.

Perhaps they will consider:

1. income generating projects, like agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries, industry, commerce etc
2. social projects like education, health, law and order etc;
3. Infrastructure like roads, airports, solid and liquid waste disposal facilities etc
4. the importation problem and import substitution type projects; and
5. they will want to ensure that the projects are integrated, with each one supportive of the other, to form a cohesive, integrated and whole national development programme.

There can be valid arguments as to why put industry and commerce before the social services, for example. This is just my view. Too much emphasis should not be placed on the order in which the projects fall unless it is for strategic reasons, because in reality several might come pretty much together. And what is more, the most successful plans are those that are not carved in stone. Working plans are alive, pliable and easily adapted to suit the exigencies of the times. So we can look at the order as a prioritizing exercise designed to help give a clear picture as to how things can work. This notwithstanding, I think that if the money projects are identified and properly thought out first, it would be easier for the planners to find the money to pay for health and other service projects.

In designing the projects planners might take stock of our assets - What do we have that are marketable? They would seek out what it is that we have that the world wants or can be taught to want. For example we have *Morinda citrifolia* growing wild in Dominica. The older Caribs know it as "Pain Killa" and have been using it all the time. Punch in the word "Noni" on your search engine on the www and see the billion-dollar industry that most Dominicans used to scorn and call poisonous, while we remain a poor nation. This plant grows organically, so it does not demand the costly and poisonous chemical inputs. It is a perennial tree crop so it fits into the type of agriculture best suited to Dominica's rugged terrain - agro-forestry. I am sure Dominica has a lot more of these little goodies up her hills.

Some of the points they will also quite likely consider are:

- Will selling of what we have deprive us and/or our following generations of something essential to us and/or their wellbeing? (Like allocating large amount of our land to copper mining or any other project that permanently depletes our soils of their nutrients) Would the planners want to consider other projects which although they deplete the soil, but in a way that is reversible?.
- Do we have hidden historical artifacts of value? If we do, how can we preserve them? Should we hide them? Use them? Display them? Dispose of them? Should we play the waiting game and hope for a better price or greater value at a later date?
- Do certain projects have a penchant for belittling our people? (example: prostitution in tourism). If so, can we find ways of mitigating the negative potentials? How can we integrate the young into tourism and still protect them from the negative influences of the industry? How do we maximize the

potential of tourism in a socially responsible and environmentally sustainable manner?

- Will certain projects deprive us of a treasured identity - robbing us of our history? Our birthright? (For example do we just pull down historical structures with no compromise, not even replacing the facade of the past architectural uniqueness on the island?)
- What do we do about our 'Nature Island' image? What value is it to us? Could we grasp an opportunity to become standard bearers of the movement to preserve man's health and his habitat? Could we be regarded as a leading nation in organic agriculture and appropriate technology? Can we effectively blend this into the eco-tourism market niche that is supposedly the fastest growing sector of tourism? Can we find the right markets? Can we get the right prices? Can we attract the right visitors? Can we find the funds for upgrading the tourism product of Dominica? Can the project be so designed that rural communities including youth will also benefit?
- Thinking about rural communities has brought to mind the whole question of decentralization. The Shankland Cox Tourism Development Plan of the 70's recommended Decentralization for social and economic reasons. Do we borrow from that report to formulate our plan for decentralization? I believe that Scotts Head/Soufriere; Grandbay; Marigot/Wesley; and Portsmouth were identified in that report for urban treatment. Will we follow that path or do we identify other areas?
- What do we do about our "Food Basket of the Caribbean image"? Of what value is that image to us? Is there room for expansion in the regional markets? The hucksters are doing a wonderful job selling our produce in the region, Dexia is also working on that, but is there any reason for government to further assist with a view to increasing the market potential and the rewards for efforts?
- How can we diversify into value-added agro-industries, Every year for about two months Dominica is covered with rotting mango during season. There are many other crops that could do with processing. Can we secure worthwhile markets for those products?
- What will be Government's relationship with civil society? Any opportunities for joint venture projects?
- What do we do about the impact of adult and violent movies on our youth? Is there anything further we can do about the drug problem? Apparently, America's might and money is not working, is there another way?
- Is there a profitable and healthier way of disposing of our waste?
- Can our infrastructure and social services (like health) meet the basic international requirements particularly of the tourism industry? Are our roads and road signs supportive of our tourism thrust? What about road codes and courtesies? Do we have to develop a project to improve the local appreciation of these to create a more harmonious and safe road experience for both resident and visiting road users?
- What about our laws? Are they fair and are they enabling. We have many laws on our statutes that have no teeth like the Noise Abatement Act. What should

we do about that? What do we do about laws that discriminates against women for example the Marriage Act which requires a Male Christian Ordained etc. etc. to be Marriage officer, with the exception of the Registrar who is a Marriage Officer by virtue of his/her office. Do we leave this discriminating Act on our 21st Century Statute? What about the Mining Act which has little relevance to Dominica's reality and places much power over private land in the hand of the Minister. Do we leave this on the Statute? If yes, Why? There are many others, according to DBS, that are "too numerous to mention".

These are but a few of the areas that will come up for consideration in any well thought out development plan.

I expect that the public's participation will be actively sought. In such a scenario there will be propositions, counter propositions, and shooting down of propositions. I hope it will be in a spirit of friendship and national unity. I hope Dominicans abroad will be given the opportunity to participate - perhaps even via cyber space. The CakaFete.com/ and the Sir Raglan Presents web pages are excellent media for this type of activity. By inviting the cyberites, there might come more than a fair share of harsh words and flaring tempers before we get concensus. Nevertheless, I hope that there will be a period when we as a nation together will concentrate on and hopefully commit to the future of our beloved Dominica.

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