

# ***TEN THESES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF DOMINICA***

by  
[Bernard Wiltshire](#)

The "*Ten Theses on the Development of Dominica*" is circulated to get a discussion going among the intellectuals of the country, at home and in the Diaspora, on defining a "**big idea**" for our development, and is intended as a contribution to such a discussion.

## 1. RECOGNISE THE NICHE OPPORTUNITIES

Under conditions of globalization, micro- states such as Dominica face increasing competition to survive. Their fate will depend on their ability to succeed in the international market-place. Dominica will only succeed as a viable national community if it can create a niche or niches for itself in which the terms of competition are decidedly on its side. It can never compete with its rivals on terms already dominated by them. It must, therefore, build on its special strengths, and turn its apparent weaknesses into special strengths too. Its small size, its vibrant, tight-knit society, its dramatic and extraordinary scenery, its rich cultural heritage, its seclusive remotenesses, and its great Diaspora of experienced people can all help it find unbeatable niches into which the bigger nations cannot trespass.

## 2. THE NATURE ISLAND OF THE WORLD

A key strength for Dominica lies in the intensity and dominance of its natural environment which has a more powerful manifestation here than in any other place of comparable size, perhaps, anywhere in the world. Over the last two or three decades, a growing demand for things natural has swept the developed, industrialized countries, with respect to food, clothing, leisure and environment. Long ago, with imaginative foresight, our predecessors laid claim to, and secured acceptance for, the logo of "Nature Island of the Caribbean" for our homeland, a theme celebrated in virtually every line of our national anthem. But today we can be more ambitious. We should decide and declare that we are going to establish and, seek international recognition for, this island as the Nature Island of the World and make that the overall objective of all our policies, the "holy grail" of our striving for development, the big idea governing our national effort.

## 3. THE NATURAL FOOD MARKET - THE ORGANIC REVOLUTION

In no other department is this demand for naturalness more evident than in the department of food production. The excessive, not to say obsessive, reliance on untested science and cost-saving in this area, have resulted in spectacular public health disasters that have alarmed consumers, and led to an acute sensitivity to, and even fear about, what people eat. The recent BSE (mad cow) epidemic that flared up in the UK, and many other countries, and the people's

revolt against genetically modified foods, are cases in point. A phenomenal demand has arisen for a return to traditional methods in agriculture: “organic” and semi-organic food products now command a premium price. At the same time there is a growing demand for specialty, niche market foods, and for foods with a heritage. We should therefore decide and declare that we are going to specialize in, and dedicate this island wholly, though gradually, to organic agriculture, agro-processing and associated light industries and gain for Dominica recognition as the “organic island of the world”.

#### 4. NATURAL LEISURE (ECO-TOURISM)

Dominica’s destiny is to become the premier eco-tourism destination of these Caribbean islands. It can do that by rejecting mass tourism, and developing a new sustainable tourism based on quality, small-scale development, built on the natural and human heritage of the island. Dominicans can blend global best practice in eco-tourism with their natural hospitality. The gradual conversion to organic agriculture would at the same time cleanse the land, rivers and sea, restore their flora and fauna and preserve our bio-diversity, thus rendering our island far more attractive as an eco-tourism destination than it is today. Niche market tourism and niche market food production possess a natural synergy in marketing terms. The opportunities of electronic marketing can benefit both.

#### 5. THE CULTURAL HERITAGE

Closely coupled with food and hospitality comes the remarkable human heritage of the island. The triumph of freedom, democracy and of the human spirit over the long years of slavery and adversity in the midst of these green, bewitching, mountain-forests, present a moving and compelling human story - a unique selling point. That selling point manifests itself in the remarkable cultural creativity, diversity and adaptability of the people, tempered by their enduring optimism in a history of struggle and survival - of Maroons and Caribs, freedom-fighters before the invention of the word, who fashioned new creations of language, music, dance, cuisine, from the shards of broken cultures and shattered dreams - all linking well to speciality food and speciality tourism. This specialism will have the effect of solving one of the main problems which have eluded successive administrations, namely, how to effectively market and promote the island to the rest of the world so that it commands attention as unique and special. It is only by standing out from among the pack of other backward places that this island will be able to attract more foreign investments as well as more tourists.

#### 6. THE NATURAL CORNUCOPIA - (BREAD-BASKET) OF THE REGION

We should re-orient our policies to seize the lost opportunities of regional trade. We should aim to make Dominica the natural cornucopia (bread-basket) of the region, supplying the tourism industry and the population of the neighbouring islands as well as our traditional international trading partners, with speciality foods, quality water and speciality beverages. Dominica’s three hundred and sixty-five rivers, its high rainfall and fertile soils put it in a uniquely advantageous position to achieve this.

## 7. THE ALTERNATIVE TECHNOLOGY - ISLAND

Dominica can become the showcase for a new alternative technology approach to Caribbean living. Alternative technology should encompass solar power, wind power and the trials of new ideas for sewage and waste disposal. But Dominica should also seek to use the alternative technologies of the electronic age to break its isolation. It can provide financial and other off-shore services, especially associated with the vast emerging world of e-commerce on a competitive basis. It can also offer “think-tank” facilities for international companies in the stimulating air of the mountains, offering escape to freedom of thought and discussion in an atmosphere specialized for relaxation on the nature isle. This would be in keeping with the development of our island as a knowledge-based economy founded upon the appropriate and rational utilisation of the resources of its unique natural environment.

## 8. TOWARDS A GREEN FOREIGN POLICY

Foreign policy is always a reflection of domestic policy. A domestic policy that aims at creating a “nature island of the world” must have a foreign policy consistent with that theme. This means that Dominica should place itself firmly within the world environmental movement and at the same time challenge the world to show that environmentalism can lead to a rational and sustainable development of the national resources. Dominica should seek funding to be the model for new green policies for tropical lands.

At the same time our foreign policy must reflect Dominica’s unique geopolitical position, situated as it is between the two French Departments in the European Union. This will mean the establishment of a special relationship with the EU through France, without compromising commitment to our national sovereignty and to ever greater and closer regional integration, especially within the OECS.

Our foreign policy should also be designed to link our fundamental aim of an environment and knowledge-centred economy with the drive for inward investments. This will involve a more focused and targeted method than the scattergun approach of this and previous administrations. It would especially focus on an ethical investment and fair trade policies, seeking to tap into the growing area of green funds.

## 9. CAPACITY BUILDING AND THE DIASPORA

The real key to the development of Dominica is the development of the people of whom there are more outside than inside.

Another central key would be growing linkages with Dominicans around the world, drawing on their experience, contacts and expertise. This exercise will require the establishment of a central data base of all Dominicans abroad, which should be drawn up with the assistance of their relatives and friends at home and involve the recognition of all children born to Dominican parents abroad, as Dominican and part of the national community.

Just as Ireland, after a century of devastating depopulation has used its Diaspora and its drive for education to become the new Celtic tiger, so should Dominica revive its economy through new links with targeted learning and its lost peoples

Education and training should provide the nexus between nation building, conservation of the environment and the economy. This capacity building should concentrate on alternative technology and self-help, local enterprise policies, such as the development of secondary products from the vast and fascinating world of herbs and other natural materials which we possess in rich abundance.

#### 10. CONSERVE THE ENVIRONMENT TO DEVELOP THE ECONOMY AND THE NATION

Because of Dominica's unique natural environment, the essential formula for the way forward is the marriage of economic development and environmental conservation. Indeed, conservation of the natural environment must itself become an economic proposition, the sole purpose of which is the development of the people and the attainment of their happiness. Hand in hand, therefore, with environmental conservation must go the awakening of the national consciousness, solidarity among the people, a caring and sharing attitude and the concept of community support for individual effort and striving. The weakness of the microstate can become the strength of the tight-knit family haven in the Caribbean, seeking a new way forward, through reform of our constitution and institutions, blending the best of the old with the promise of the new.

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