

# **Breaking Down Barriers Between Local and Diaspora**

By

Raglan Riviere, B.Sc.; M.H.A.

## **Introduction:**

For as long as I can remember, Dominicans at home and those overseas have had a love-hate relationship for each other for reasons that, I must admit, do not make any sense at all. Young Dominicans have been taught for ages to seek better fortunes and post-secondary education abroad, particularly in the United Kingdom where lies the foundation of our education system. Parents would gladly undertake severe sacrifice to secure admissions to universities for their sons and daughters because they believed post-secondary education was vital for personal advancement and to make a positive impact on the development of our country.

What has happened to these beliefs and aspirations? Why is it that today when a trained, post-secondary, educated Dominican returns home, no one but his/her immediate family greets him/her with open and welcoming arms? Are Dominicans at home no longer proud of their sons and daughters who have attained higher levels of education that they could not have achieved at home?

These questions need to be answered candidly if the barriers that exist between local and diaspora Dominicans are to be broken down so that

together we can get on with building of our nation. These barriers manifest against the diasporans, both in the private and public sectors of our economy, in terms of employment opportunities, financial support for new private ventures, and even government concessions that are offered freely to foreign *'investors'*.

Our economic ship is sinking fast and we need all hands to pull her to the safe shores of economic stability, get her securely anchored to the moorings of economic activity and repair the damage to her economic hull. If this isn't a good enough reason to acknowledge and embrace our overseas Dominicans who return to play their part, then our situation will remain hopeless.

Yet, in spite of this love-hate relationship, we acknowledge that overseas Dominicans continue to support their country substantially through what is now called the *'barrel economy'* and through Dominica Associations, individuals and groups. These send money and dry goods to families, medical and hospital equipment and supplies to the health services and educational software and hardware to libraries, schools and colleges.

But such assistance, though necessary and vital, makes only a temporary impact on the economy. Increased purchasing power, resulting from money to families, benefits only the merchant class who sell *imported* goods without investing their profits back into much-needed, lasting economic activity. So, it is quite obvious, we need much more.

With the virtual downfall of the banana industry Dominica has become a *'beggar nation'*. We survive on the hand-outs, soft loans and grants from

friendly countries, some of whom are self-seeking. We are not by any stretch of the imagination an independent nation, economically speaking. And, given this realization, political sovereignty becomes meaningless for all practical purposes.

So, what is the solution to our economic problem? Simply, Dominica must enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century! To do so, she needs:

1. To develop a technological base to support and maintain sustainable economic development,
2. To embrace the best of the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) to ensure goal-directed development,
3. To actively recruit her trained and qualified sons and daughters overseas who want to play their part in this development,
4. To lay aside party politics and work together for the immediate implementation of a short-to-medium term Economic Plan.

Time is of the essence. Dominica can no longer allow herself to be manipulated by donor nations, by so-called self-seeking friendly nations and by international financial institutions who, knowingly or unknowingly, do the bidding of the industrialized nations of the world, mainly the U.S.A. It is time we turned to our own resources - human, intellectual and God-given natural endowments.

### **Develop a Technological Base:**

There are Dominicans all over the world with the training and technical knowledge engaged in the maintenance and building of such technological bases for developed nations. We need only to visit the Directory of skilled and professional Dominicans on the online *Dominica Academy of Arts and Sciences (DAAS)* at <http://da-academy.org/directory.html> to appreciate the vast array of talent of our people overseas. To my mind, this is the first step towards sustainability, i.e., having the right people in the right places who know what they are doing.

Dominica has already been considered and approached, at the behest of a Dominican, for the implementation of an Information and Communications Technology (ICT) network that would facilitate this very base. Let us not procrastinate on this consideration. Such network would propel our socio-economic systems right into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Embrace the best of the IDP:**

The Final Report of the Integrated Development Plan is in the hands of the government. A decision has not yet been made, to my knowledge, as to its implementation, particularly as the 2003/2004 Budget is being prepared for June, 2003. Is there some sound reason for this delay? Should we not grasp the opportunity to frame the 2003/2004 Budget within some overall plan like the IDP?

Never before has Dominica prepared an Economic Plan of such magnitude involving all sectors of economy and society. A generous funding of over \$1M by the European Union (EU) ought not to be allowed to depreciate in value. The sooner we implement the best of the IDP, the better we will be prepared to set our eyes firmly on the future, knowing where we are headed with confidence.

**Recruit our trained and qualified Dominicans overseas:**

A substantial number of trained and highly qualified overseas Dominicans would gladly return to assist in the laying of this technological foundation mentioned above. But, the problem introduced in the opening paragraphs, which is the title of this paper, needs our urgent attention. It is clear, no one should expect such professionals to forgo their present employment and the welfare of their families to return to Dominica at their own expense in search of appropriate employment without guarantees. Anyone who entertains this expectation is truly against progress. Many have tried but the majority have failed only to return dis-heartened, frustrated and discouraged.

Development is an integrated and dynamic process that must be managed by knowledgeable people. It is not an administrative process as was the case in our colonial past. Having a technologically trained pool of human resource is the critical hub that will direct the cycle of development towards its goal. Therefore, it behooves us to find ways to attract our qualified sons and daughters so they can return home to serve Dominica rather than their adopted countries.

### **Lay Party Politics aside:**

Difficult as it may be to do, grown men and women, who call themselves politicians, ought to recognize and give priority to the good of the nation rather than their selfish political ends. This has been a plague on our Dominican society and will continue as such if greed and self-interest remain the standards by which we measure progress. The pledge to work together, signed by the three political parties now in parliament, will be an empty one if we fail to genuinely honour it.

All reasonable Dominicans accept and call for this noble act from politicians. Even politicians themselves concede that progress in such a small society of 70,000 plus is unachievable in a constant atmosphere of division and distrust. No one knows what it will take for politicians to embrace this absolute requirement for the advancement of our country. Surely, at this critical juncture in our economic demise, can our politicians who refuse to lay politics aside for the good of the country not realize they are courting social unrest and possibly social disintegration?

### **The Last Word:**

Nothing in the above paper is new. They have been said before in several ways and on many occasions. And, believe me; they need to be repeated so our leaders can act on them before it is too late. As some have rightly said, a general election and change of party in power will not change our economic situation. Britain has long gone and left us in the lurch. But, we must leave the

past in the past with all its abominable legacies. It is time for Dominicans to fashion our own distinctive way forward.

We've got the resources, human, intellectual and God-given natural endowments. Are we destined to remain a beggar nation?

Raglan Riviere,  
May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2003.