

# SUSTAINABLE BUSINESSES OF THE FUTURE NOW!

## GOING GREEN MAKES GOOD SENSE



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All businesses need to become more environmentally friendly; in their products, services and operations. This needs to be across the board and in each type of business both large and small. From hardware stores and the “shop down the road” to multinational enterprises and heavy industries; they all need to incorporate environmental practices. This environmental consciousness is the way for our future and what we need to invest in from now. I strongly believe in this statement and I believe many others would agree with me.

### Price of Progress versus the Environment

The current issue we face is the price of progress versus the environment. On one hand we want to develop and become a prosperous nation. We are already one of the wealthier nations in the Caribbean thanks to our precious commodities of oil and natural gas, the industrial nature of our small twin island state. On the other hand, as we progress our environment is destroyed, degraded or altered to the point that it cannot be repaired or be returned to its pristine condition. Daily commuters out of Diego Martin and environs have to endure the denuded hillside at Powder Magazine which has been sacrificed in the name of progress. Up to today, it was never “re-landscaped” and continues to remain as an insult to the eyes. The pristine hills surrounding the Asa Wright Nature Centre were recently threatened by activities at Scott’s Quarry in Verdant Vale. Here is an internationally appreciated ecological centre which was encroached upon in the name of progress. Fortunately, further damage was hindered by the timely intervention of the government.

The price of progress on the environment is a debate which is heavily argued on both sides. An example would be a large housing development on a hillside which is very much

needed in the area due to its proximity to Port of Spain, but the valley below is a flood-prone area. This scenario has repeated itself in several areas of Trinidad and Tobago (T&T). We cannot just drop all our lifestyles, economies and societies to return to the forests and live the “natural life.” On the flipside, countries cannot utilise all their resources uninhibitedly to ensure that their economies will prosper; this prosperity is not built on sustainability. Resources are needed constantly to produce products and services; which would eventually diminish. Water, air and land would become polluted which would make the process of cleaning it more expensive, complicated and become a further risk to our personal health and wellbeing.

What we, as young persons, can begin with is taking small steps in our daily lives to become more environmentally conscious. An item which could easily fit into the handbag is often put into a large plastic bag. Sanitation in our homes includes harmful chemicals. If inhaled, they can cause health hazards. There are better alternatives which would be just as effective. Then there is the recurring problem of littering on our streets; this can be solved by a collective discipline of disposing garbage into receptacles. Would you litter in your living room? Then why do you litter in the fish’s or the bird’s “living rooms”? I am met with the reply that it is the street cleaner’s job or that there were not any bins close by. These are very flimsy excuses which put the blame on someone else.

### What areas need to change?

What really needs to happen in Trinidad and Tobago is a marriage between progress and the environment; each contributing to a compromise. Progress at its current rapid rate needs to be structured and development needs to be built with the forecast of what the country would be like 50 years from now, 100 years or 200 years. The questions that need to be asked are:

Byline photograph by  
Alexander Johnson

- Whether this type of good or service is sustainable.
- How would the world be powered in the next 50 to 100 years?
- What would the lifestyle of our future society be like?

These are some of the questions that myself, my generation and the generations after me would need to ask themselves.

First and foremost, there need to be tax incentives for businesses that actively incorporate a green initiative, be it a sustained operational change or incorporating eco-friendly alternatives for their products. Another mechanism would be in the form of green business grants. Applicants can either be an established business that wants to incorporate environmental alternatives and technologies or a new business that wants to incorporate sustainable practices. The consumers should be rewarded with tax reductions when they implement major green technologies into their living spaces. Our Green Fund's purpose is to provide funding for only NGOs and CBOs who implement green practices. There are not yet any mechanisms for businesses who want to go green to get additional funding.

Another area of improvement is the reduction of plastic bags used in local supermarkets. Typically we are provided with an astonishing amount of plastic bags when purchasing groceries. Only such establishments as Price Smart are motivating their customers to either reuse provided carton boxes, sell reusable bags or bring their own bags; which their customers quite accepted. Other businesses should adapt this policy or create penalty charges for the request of plastic bags.

Excessive packaging increases the amount of waste for each product which ends up in the waste disposal system. Specifying the amount of required packaging needed and imposing fines on excess packaging would effectively reduce the amounts of wasted material. Government

issued seals should be used for using recycled materials, reducing the amount of packaging used, incorporating greener processing or natural materials. Packaging standards for each type of product should be developed with a strict set of guidelines. In the case of packaging electronics, inside the box should be the protective material for the product, all the required accessories and a manual. To take it a step further, use recycled materials as the protective casing, outer box and even print on recycled paper.

Recycling in Trinidad and Tobago has traditionally been for glass since recycled glass melts at lower temperatures, reduces the amount of fuel needed for production and thus saves money in the end without losing its quality. Recently there have been initiatives to collect other recyclable materials like plastic bottles, paper and ink cartridges. These materials are collected, sorted, shredded and shipped to foreign countries which have recycling plants. This is a good move in the right direction, but in T&T that recycling needs to become a popular method of disposing of our wastes. In my ideal scenario, Trinidad and Tobago should become the recycling capital of the Caribbean. This would be a good sector to invest in since recycling produces raw materials for producing packaging for the many products that are manufactured throughout the Caribbean. This sector would close the loop of production to consumption.

Collaboration between tertiary level institutions and businesses should help to develop each other. Tertiary institutions who conduct research can supply information on alternatives for the business sector. Then in return, educational institutions will be well informed about the Global Consumption Market for eco-friendly products. In Trinidad and Tobago, the typical consumer does not incorporate good environmental practices or may not even be aware of them. Various NGOs, CBOs and educational institutions like the Fondes

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Amandes Community Re-Forestation Project (FACRP), are doing their part to actively educate their community and the wider public about the importance of protecting the environment.

**Business and the protection of the Environment**

The public and private sector need to work in synergy. To solve environmental problems in many cases, products and services would need to be available. To solve the littering problem, make our waste more valuable so that it would be specifically collected rather than just cast away. Carib Brewery has collected its used bottles for years and has paid a return fee. For developments to have greener and cleaner alternatives, the environmental solutions need to be readily available. For example, it should be mandatory for a development that generates high levels of polluted waste water to operate a waste water treatment plant. To solve the issue of hazardous domestic waste water, provide less toxic cleaning products for domestic use for the consumer.

Entrepreneurs should be considered as problem solvers. They look at the current and future needs of the Market. Entrepreneurs are usually the individuals in society that are the innovators or the first to bring a needed commodity to the Market. The concept of an Eco-Entrepreneur is that these individuals not only look for the demands of the Market but also demands of the Environment. These entrepreneurs should look to the current research and introduce the inventions or innovations that would be profitable and beneficial to the environment.

As an example for a profitable eco-business, I would like to mention the annual recurrence of flooding of areas in Central Trinidad around the date of the Divali Celebrations. Traditionally families are refurbishing their households at that time and have to dispose of old mattresses, fridges and furniture. In the absence of the scheduled collection of “white waste” close to

those festivities, the households dispose of those items into the rivers. Additionally beautiful bamboo structures are erected for Divali which will be thrown into the rivers on the day after the festivities. This results in the inevitable flooding of the areas at the next occurrence of rain.

An eco-entrepreneur could contribute to the solution. His company would distribute a schedule for the collection of white waste in these areas. This would motivate the householders to place their white waste for collection in front of their properties at the appropriate date. His company will then prepare the white waste material for recycling and re-use. The same mechanisms apply for the day after Divali with the collection of all bamboo. This will reduce the exorbitant cost of flooding to the Nation while the eco-entrepreneur earns in the process. Of course his business will be needed year-round as all our rivers are used in the above described manner.

The German Environmental Management Association (whose German acronym, BAUM, also means TREE) has approximately 600 companies under its umbrella. Some famous members are Adidas, Bosch, Siemens Appliances and Faber Castell. These companies are part of Europe’s largest environmental initiative for industry which was founded in 1984 by a group of entrepreneurs based in Hamburg. BAUM has since then created several successful initiatives like ECO+, Ökoprotit, Solar – na klar! (“Going solar – that’s the way”). Such an association can be developed in either Trinidad and Tobago or to incorporate CARICOM into this initiative. The industrial sector, manufacturers, importers and retailers can each form a subgroup in the association. This association can create combined environmental initiatives as a form of corporate social responsibility, such as establishing research institutions, supporting environmental NGOs, CBOs and Foundations and developing pioneering environmental projects.

In the diagram opposite, I demonstrate with

the example of a product like toothpaste, how each sector can make changes to their operations and contribute to the environment. The industrial sector can provide low-impact raw materials or supply the manufacturers with recycled materials for production. Manufacturers should prevent or reduce the amount of harmful materials used in their products where possible. Importers should look to import more eco-friendly products and services into Trinidad and Tobago.

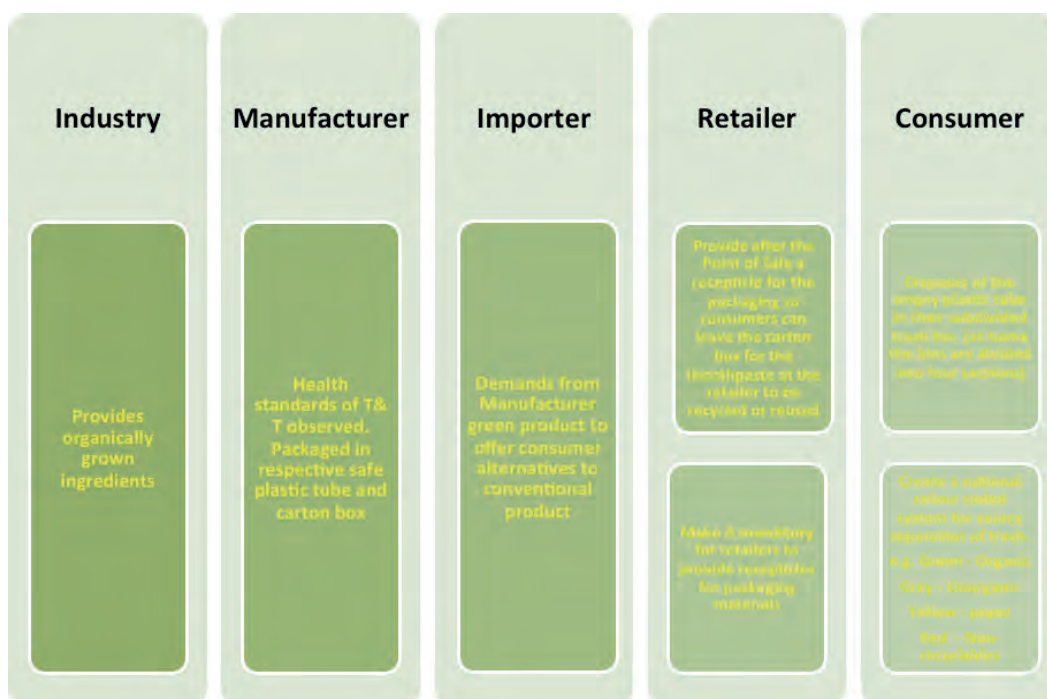
Retailers should collect excess packaging of their products which can be returned to the suppliers to either be reused or recycled. Finally, the consumers would properly dispose of their waste via source-separation to prepare for recycling.

Closer to home, Costa Rica has become renowned as an environmentally conscious

country and is often ranked between third and fifth of the top ten most environmentally friendly nations. The main reason why...? Despite its small size, Costa Rica has approximately 5 per cent of the world's biodiversity, which it protects fiercely. Costa Rica has 5 per cent of the land under the status of reserves, national parks and wildlife refuges. Also, Costa Rica compensates landowners who plant and maintain trees and other vegetation. This has led to an increase in forested areas from 24 per cent in 1985 to 46 per cent today. Finally there is a 5 per cent gas tax which directly funds environmental programmes. This is good thinking that we, as young Trinbagonians, want to see in our country as well. Instead, here gas is tax-subsidised, which means that everybody wastes it with impunity

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**Figure 1. The Toothpaste Producer to Consumer Cycle. This diagram illustrates the kind of change that is required and that could be made to a product in the various sectors**



The future we want for T&T should not only be one of economic stability but also one of ecological preservation

The only way forward is green

all under the mantle of stimulation for the economy. This is the fine line between progress and the environment that my generation will need to address.

**What we shall look to in the future**

The future we want for Trinidad and Tobago should not only be one of economic stability but also one of ecological preservation. Whichever developments and activities are initiated now should only have a positive impact on our environment. This will be the only way for our small, twin-island state to not only be prosperous but to become clean, low impact and eco-friendly. So that when we celebrate 100 years of Independence, businesses would have caused consumers to become educated on environmental protection while supporting the eco-friendly initiatives. The general public of Trinidad and Tobago would ensure their surroundings and public spaces are clean and well cared for. Citizens would utilise all the

green alternatives available to them to make a better lifestyle for themselves and their country. Because Trinidad and Tobago is such a small island state, whatever we do to our environment affects us first before it affects anyone else.

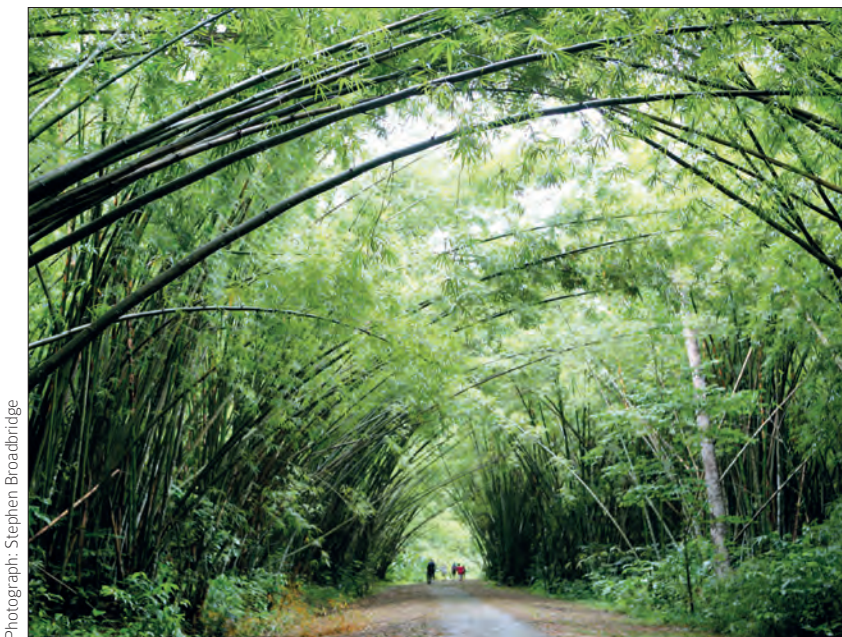
**Information about the Author**

From my beginnings in 1992, I have been living among many trees on a hill in St James. Many times I had to assist my parents to extinguish fires during the dry season, because somebody threw a burning cigarette butt out of the car window which ignited the very dry flora of our surroundings. I fought for the survival of every tree and the parrot babies which had their nest in the burnt down grou-grou boeuf palm. From early on I learnt that we have to dispose of our refuse properly, compost the organics and create new soil with the broken-down leaves.

I am used to sleeping with wide-open windows and the benefits of the fresh air with the negative ions which my green surroundings are providing. It was a natural progression that I wanted to know more; how I can help to sustain green living spaces for myself and fellow human beings in my beloved country of Trinidad and Tobago, in which we can live, create and utilise appropriately the technologies of the 21st century.

Recently, I completed my Associate Degree in Environmental Management and in September 2012 I will embark on my BSc in this field. This knowledge will enable me to help to green our cities, to sustain our resources and to assist in maintaining and further developing Trinidad and Tobago into this wonderful paradise, where its citizens can live and contribute meaningfully to our global existence in the 21st century.

My Passion lies with the fields of Urban Development, Landscape Architecture, but also to “green-up” homes and businesses. Since September 2010 I am appointed a Youth Ambassador of the EMA. Art is also a medium I use to convey my environmental message. ■



Photograph: Stephen Broadbridge