



**The G. Raymond Chang School of  
Continuing Education**

**Ryerson University**

**Virtual Sustainability Case Study<sup>©</sup>:  
*Very Sustainable Eco Tours*  
(VSET)**

**Developed for use by the  
*Certificate in Sustainability Management* and related  
programs**

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development, or sustainability, has been the overarching theme of many policy discussions at different levels of society for the past three decades and, due to the importance of the subject area, will continue to be so in the foreseeable future. Given its all-encompassing nature, any discourse on this subject inevitably addresses matters that reside in the realms of the environment, society and economy.

This virtual case study of Very Sustainable Eco Tours (VSET) in the imaginary Kalinago-Arawak-Taíno Isles (otherwise known as The KAT Isles, The KAT Islands, The KATIs, The Isles or The Islands), forms one in a series of Sustainability Case Studies being developed by the G. Raymond Chang School of Continuing Education at Ryerson University, with a view to enhancing teaching and learning in sustainability. By focusing on the concepts, principles and practices of sustainable development, it is hoped that the subject matter will be more comprehensible. Ultimately, the aim is to motivate learners to broaden their analytical horizons by engaging in creative, responsible, critical and “Systems” thinking and deeds, thereby integrating sustainability in to their personal lives, organisations, communities, regions, nations and other geographic spaces to first and foremost avert problems, and to secondarily find solutions to existing challenges.

The case study proceeds as follows: Succeeding this introductory section is a conceptual and analytical framework for incorporating sustainable development into planning and decision-making processes across the wide spectrum of disciplines, sectors and operational levels and scales. The methodology is then briefly described after which an outline of the scope and focus of the study is provided. Subsequently, the context within which VSET operates is presented, describing the political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal/regulatory forces influencing the enterprise. Immediately after, ecotourism is clarified with a brief history and definition of this phenomenon. In the subsequent section, the concept of “greenwashing” is explained, showing how it undermines sustainable development. Next, under the purview of VSET’s strategic management approach to sustainability, in addition to a brief history and background of the corporation, its vision, philosophy, mission, goals, objectives, governance structure and decision-making processes, policies, practices, and the results of the organisation’s *modus operandi* are examined. The findings and analysis of sustainability at VSET are then presented, emphasising strategies, challenges and lessons learned. In the penultimate section, on the basis of the analysis of the findings, conclusions are drawn as to how to further sustainable development in the tourism sector on The KAT Isles. Finally, questions are furnished with a view to guiding readers’ analyses of the case study, augmenting their understanding of sustainability.

## 2.0 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: CONCEPTUAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Sustainable development or sustainability is the state achieved when development meets the needs of both current and future generations (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, p.1). The interchangeable usage of the terms ‘sustainable development’ and ‘sustainability’ is reflected in the Brundtland Commission Report of 1987 entitled, “Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future” (Ibid.).

Sustainability is an all-embracing and integrating concept that encompasses three equal, interdependent and mutually reinforcing dimensions: environmental, social and economic. The Brundtland Commission defined sustainable development as “development which meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Ibid.). “This definition embraces all those activities which are ecologically sound, socially just and economically viable, and is embedded within an [intra- and] intergenerational underpinning” (Chengappa et al. 2012, p.2). Alternatively referred to as the “Triple Bottom Line” or the “3BL” (Norman and McDonald 2003, pp.1-19), the dimensions are also expressed as “planet, people and prosperity/profits”-the “Three Ps” or “3Ps” (Rodden 2011, p.1).

Through the lens of sustainable development/sustainability, Earth is an extremely complex ecosystem subdivided into many sub-ecosystems – dynamic entities which comprise great diversity of living organisms - plants, animals and microorganisms - interacting amongst themselves and with their non-living environments, of which we are all parts. Within this multitude of ecosystems are many human societies or social systems, in which in turn reside economies or economic systems. Therefore, the environment is the basis or foundation of our socio-economic development (Duraiappah 2004, p.10; McMichael *et al.* 2005, p.45). On the economic front, such development includes the use of scarce resources for the production and distribution of goods and services to satisfy human needs and wants, giving rise to the creation of decent jobs, wealth, and so on, to culminate in improved quality of life. On the social side, it includes us humans living in harmony with each other; improved health, education and housing; greater individual freedoms; empowering traditionally disempowered social groups; etc.

Integral to sustainable development is its imperative integration “across fields, sectors and scales” (Robinson 2004, p.378) of the various dimensions of our lives in order to find solutions to development challenges confronting us. Sustainability emphasises the fact that the environment, society and economy interact, interrelate and interconnect constantly. As such, “economic [and social] viability is enhanced by a non-degraded environment, while an economically [and socially] robust [entity is] one which will be able to afford a high level of environmental management and protection” Buultjens et al. 1996, p.7).

In addition, sustainable development is an ongoing process and a theoretical and practical imperative. An action-oriented discipline, sustainability requires understanding and practice of “Systems Thinking” whereby direct and indirect linkages among all things are recognised and acted upon; responsible, critical and creative thinking and action; democratic engagement, participatory (bottom-up) decision-making processes, transparency and inclusivity; as well as cooperation at and among the individual, local, national, regional and international levels.

Inherent in sustainable development is its emphasis on the recognition of the importance of intergenerational and intra-generational equity and the planet’s limits. It stresses the right of and vital importance for both future and current generations to fulfill their essential needs, particularly those of the poor, as well as their legitimate aspirations to improve their quality of life. In addition, sustainable development alerts us to the limits of the planet: that its non-renewable resources such as oil are finite (Richards 2008, p. 1), renewable resources such as plant and animal species can and have become threatened, endangered or extinct (US Fish and

Wildlife Service 2012, p.1); in some cases ecosystems have collapsed (Jackson *et al.* 2001, pp. 629-637) including human societies (Diamond 2005; Scheffer, 2009; Taylor, 2009); and Earth has a limited capacity to absorb and break down all the anthropogenic wastes generated (Beder 2006, p.12).

Being sustainable requires us to be: prudent in the use of resources; mindful of the quality and quantity of wastes we generate; more engaging and accommodative with others; proactive in recognising the dynamism of the changing patterns in our lives, environment and productive systems; and responding with responsible, creative, innovative and practical solutions to restore hope and promise to present and future generations.

Based on this paradigm, the “ultimate success or health” of a society or an organisational entity is determined by the “traditional financial bottom line” as well as “its social/ethical and environmental performance” (Norman and MacDonald 2003, p.1). By incorporating sustainable development/sustainability systems thinking in their practices and operations, societies and organisations enhance their value environmentally, socially and economically. Sustainable development concepts, principles and thinking can literally be applied to any area of work or study, whether it is located in business/industry, governmental/political/public service, or third/social economy/voluntary/community/non-profit/civic sectors of activity, engagement, and practice. Utilised in conjunction with other methods and analytical tools, sustainability approaches contribute to undertaking better evaluation and attaining improved overall outcomes.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

This case study was developed by combining a literature review with the creativity of the researchers and authors. A review of relevant literature was conducted for developing the conceptual and analytical framework, and the sections on international travel and tourism, ecotourism, greenwashing, and the management structure and decision-making processes, drawing on the works of academics and other professionals. The remainder of the study was produced by use of the authors’ imagination, resulting in an appropriate scope and focus of the study.

### **4.0 SCOPE AND FOCUS OF THE CASE STUDY**

The range of subjects covered in this case study includes sustainable development; greenwashing; international travel and tourism (with particular attention paid to the history, definition, principles, and positive and negative impacts of ecotourism) in the local political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal context of the fictitious Kalinago-Arawak-Taíno Isles. The primary focus of the study is on the policies of the unreal company, Very Sustainable Eco Tours (VSET), to illustrate that it is a “greenwasher” and the lessons that can be learnt from it to advance sustainability in the ecotourism subsector.

While this case study may evoke similarities with the operations, processes and deeds of other organisations, communities, nations and so forth, the conclusions drawn herein may not be

useful in their application and generalisability to or interpretation of any other entity, especially those existing in radically different contexts.

## **5.0 CONTEXT**

While individual organisations can impact their surroundings, it is almost always their circumstances that significantly influence them, as there are many macro-environmental factors that affect the decisions of managers of any entity. In this section, the political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal forces in the environment of VSET are examined.

Comprehending the political forces in The KATIs is extremely important, especially given the very complex traditional forms of governmental systems that exist in The Isles at different levels of governance. Knowledge of the structure of the differing governmental systems, ability to identify the real decision-makers, and the recognition of the dramatic differences in policy among and between the local and national governments should be acquired speedily.

### **5.1 Political**

The KAT Isles have enjoyed political stability throughout their entire history. This is the result of the long-standing agreement among the Kalinago, Arawak and Taíno peoples to coexist despite their cultural differences. National laws constitute a very complex *mélange* of the different cultures. At the local level, laws and regulations range from reflecting the culture of a particular ethnic group to a variety of combinations and permutations of legal traditions representing the various cultures.

The archaeological sites, places of historical importance, major support infrastructure like roads and airports, as well as health and education are all publicly owned and have been undergoing significant development in the past two decades. Privately owned services depend heavily on government support and cooperation; lately, there have been incidences of corruption, including bribery. A competitive tax system with specific tax exemptions exists in The Islands and Central Government support for new foreign investors include tax holidays. The national government has also made clear its intention to streamline the legal and financial processes. During the last quarter of this year, the tax system will be overhauled with the introduction of a 15% value added tax (VAT), replacing the current environmental levy and consumption tax.

Likewise, local governments have resolved to simplify their planning permission processes and have increased their provision of services to facilitate industry. Municipalities also facilitate contact between ecotourism project developers and third sector organisations to help secure technical resources. Additionally, they undertake consciousness-building initiatives among employees of the ecotourism sector and the local inhabitants, to ensure the sustainability of the sector on The KATIs.

Recently, a number of terrestrial and marine areas in the KAT Islands got designated as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Should those areas be properly managed, they could positively impact The Islands' economic indicators, translating into decreased risks and increased opportunities in ecotourism in the KAT Isles.

## 5.2 Economic

By virtue of the fact that tourism is the main industry on The Isles, it significantly impacts both the macroeconomic and microeconomic environments of the nation. The macroeconomic environment is positive despite a recent slight downward revision of the current fiscal year's GDP projection and a 2% increase in inflation in the last quarter. As the major economic sector by far, tourism is well structured. Since The Islands' currency is very stable, exchange rate volatility is not a significant concern. Labour is not highly expensive and its productivity is high. Interest rates increased a tad in the last year and they are not exorbitant. Unemployment remains low and income is increasing. This local economic situation is very much contingent upon the state of international travel and tourism and the global economy.

### 5.2.1 International Travel and Tourism in the Global Economy

International travel and tourism is the fourth largest global industry following "fuels, chemicals and automotive products", accounting for 6-7 % of the world's overall employment (UNEP 2011, p.414). Responsible for 30 % of global commercial services exports, or 6 % of all exports, the industry is among the top five export earners in more than 150 nations, including 60 in which it is the main export (Ibid.). In 33% and 50% of developing and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) respectively, it is the primary source of foreign exchange (Ibid.). For The Kalinago-Arawak-Taíno Isles, international travel and tourism is by far their principal export.

Despite numerous challenges, the industry was responsible for 255 million jobs and contributed 9% (US\$6 trillion) of the world's GDP in 2011 (World Travel & Tourism Council 2012, p.1). International tourist arrivals, which increased by a factor of almost forty from 25 million in 1950 to 980 million in 2011, is estimated to reach 1 billion in 2012 (UNWTO 2012, p.1) and 1.6 billion by 2020 (UNWTO 2001). The industry has been projected to expand – driven particularly by the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) countries, other Southeast Asian and Latin American nations -- to 10% (US\$10 trillion) of world GDP at the rate of 4% yearly during the next decade (UNWTO 2012, p.1), translating into increased business for tour operators. By then, it is expected to contribute 328 million jobs, or 10%, of all employment in the world economy (Ibid.).

The ecotourism subsector has the most rapid growth within the tourism industry. The International Ecotourism Society estimated annual increase of 20%--34% (cited by UNEP *et al* 2012, p.4).

In their effort to increase their share of the international ecotourism market, The Islands need to ensure they maintain their social integrity by avoiding the mistakes of other societies. Understanding the social dynamics of The KATIs enables VSET to more efficiently communicate with the natives, and successfully involving them in the industry.

## 5.3 Social

Poverty is not widespread on The Islands owing to the equitable distribution of income. The health of the population is very good due to a well-developed health care system. The Isles also possess a well-developed education system, providing an ample pool of qualified people in

a population that is very entrepreneurial within a participative citizenship culture. Additionally, they enjoy a diversity of cultures and rich heritage. Moreover, the people are very friendly, a quality which augurs well for the hospitality industry. Since creating a single economic space with its neighbouring countries last year, The KATIs have been receiving many visitors from those nations.

In addition to human capital, having the appropriate technology is important for sustainable tourism. The level of technological advancement in The KAT Isles positively affects the opportunities available for a tourism business.

#### **5.4 Technological**

The Islands are not lagging in terms of essential technology requirements of the hospitality sector. Recognising the value of state-of-the-art communication facilities to the tourism industry, high speed wireless internet; cable, satellite and digital TV; land and mobile telephone services; and electricity are available throughout The Isles, facilitating rapid services. Modern banking and other financial facilities are also present. Similarly, to keep increasing visitor arrivals to The KATIs, transportation facilities have been improved significantly in the last 15 years. An enhanced network of major, secondary and feeder roads have been established and accompanied by betterment of the taxi and bus systems. Likewise, the air and sea ports of The KAT Isles have undergone major upgrading, accommodating larger and more aircrafts and improvement in the processing of passengers, luggage and cargo.

In the light of heated discussions about global warming and recent disasters like the tsunamis in South East Asia, hurricanes in the Caribbean and the USA, the earthquake in Haiti, and severe floods in several regions of the world, an understanding of the natural environment of The KATIs has increased in importance.

#### **5.5 Environmental**

Located in the middle of the Pangaea Ocean, The KAT Islands consist of over 5,000 islands with a total area of 5,692,024 square kilometers; the major ones are inhabited and the smaller ones uninhabited by humans. They host many national parks, including several World Heritage Sites and a UNESCO People and the Biosphere Reserve. The Isles are home to an estimated hundreds of thousands of endemic species of flora and fauna.

The KATIs are among the most beautiful and pristine places on Earth Mother, with essentially excellent year-round tropical weather. That they are situated in the hurricane path translates into diminished tourists arrivals during the hurricane season (January--June). The increasing reality of major climate changes emanating from global warming raises the environmental awareness of The KAT Islands' citizens, leading to a growing commitment on their part to protect their environment. In that sense, there is a general move towards more environmentally friendly products and better waste management, especially reduction on The Isles.

Knowledge of the laws of the KAT Isles is vitally important to ensure that all laws and regulations are followed, especially since the legal environments change between the city,

district and national levels. By possessing this knowledge, unnecessary administrative, financial, etc. complexities can be avoided.

## **5.6 Legal**

In recent years, there have been several significant legal changes in The KAT Islands in the areas of employment, health and safety, and environmental law. To protect employees against the abuse of power by managers, laws governing redundancy, dismissal, working hours, age and disability discrimination, and increase in the minimum wage were enacted. To ensure the workplace is as safe as is reasonably practical, legislation covering issues such as training, reporting accidents and the appropriate provision of safety equipment also came into effect. In addition, greater requirements for firms to recycle were legislated. The Wildlife Protection Act 1987 and the Environment Act 2005 have been strengthened to ensure sustainable tourism, laying the foundation for a comprehensive Eco-Tourism Policy and Guidelines slated for completion by mid-2013. Legal changes also took effect in the attainment of local licences and planning permission.

However, there are challenges in the legal realm that breed some uncertainty. The existence of a lack of rule of law accompanied by abusive interpretation of labour, planning and land use laws coupled with the ensuing lack of clear regulations favour arbitrary decisions and slow rendering of justice. If these are not rectified as a matter of urgency, they will contribute to negative impacts on ecotourism on The KATIs.

## **6.0 ECOTOURISM**

How long have tourism aficionados been grappling with the concept of ecotourism and how has it changed during its history? Is there a universally accepted definition of this idea? Are there criteria by which an entity can be determined to be engaging in ecotourism? The answers to these questions are the foci of this section.

### **6.1 History of Ecotourism**

The concept of ecotourism has been in existence since the 1800s, when political pressure from interest groups and individuals forced the establishment of primary national parks and wilderness areas in Australia, New Zealand and the United States for example, in order to have “minimal impact recreation and tourism” (Mercer 1996, p.1). However, the popularisation of the term ‘ecotourism’ took effect in the early 1970s as an aspect of the principle of ‘eco-development’, which emphasised the necessity of continuously paying attention to the carrying capacity of local ecosystems while considering proposed land-use changes (Ibid.).

Exactly who coined the term ‘ecotourism’ has been a contentious matter. Some credit Claus-Dieter Hetzer with inventing the term in 1965 (Blamey 2001, p.5; Higham 2007, p.2), while others praise Hector Ceballos-Lascurain for the invention and its preliminary definition in 1983 (Mader 2005). By dint of the increase in global environmental awareness in the late 1960s and 1970s (McCormick, 1989), ‘ecotourism’ had been firmly entrenched in mainstream vernacular by the 1980s (Higham 2007, p.2) and led to the formation of ecotourism organisations, with the International Ecotourism Society (TIES) being only one of many possible examples.

Many people use the term “ecotourism” interchangeably with “green tourism”, “nature tourism,” “responsible tourism,” “ethical tourism,” and “adventure tourism”. While ecotourism is related to these segments of the tourism industry, it is not synonymous with them as it possesses its unique characteristics, differentiating it from the other segments, hence its definition.

## **6.2 Definition of Ecotourism**

The International Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people” (1990). According to the IUCN - The World Conservation Union:

“ecotourism is environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy, study and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features - both past and present), that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations” (Ceballos-Lascuráin 1996).

It should be noted that despite definitions by international organisations, ecotourism is defined variously in different countries to protect their tourism industry’s reputation.

The Mohonk Agreement (2000) concurs with the above definitions of ecotourism, categorically establishing it is a subset of sustainable tourism, and outlines minimum criteria to be fulfilled for sustainable ecotourism certification as follows:

- ✓ “Focus on personal experiences of nature to lead to greater understanding and appreciation
- ✓ Interpretation and environmental awareness of nature, local society, and culture
- ✓ Positive and active contributions to conservation of natural areas or biodiversity
- ✓ Economic, social, and cultural benefits for local communities
- ✓ Fostering of community involvement, where appropriate
- ✓ Locally appropriate scale and design for lodging, tours and attractions
- ✓ Minimal impact on and presentation of local (indigenous) culture”

Although these international standards are not mandatory, sustainable development enthusiasts would conclude that entities operating in the ecotourism subsector without adhering to these principles as a minimum are greenwashing.

## **7.0 GREENWASHING**

A relatively novel word, "greenwashing" has its roots in and is a synthesis of the concepts “green” (denoting environmental soundness) and “whitewashing” (to conceal wrongdoing). It describes deceptive marketing, public relations or packaging that offers false claims and commitments to sound environmental practice. It concerns people, organisations and products and promotes a misleading perception that an entity’s policies, practices, goods or services are environmentally friendly when in fact they are not.

Greenwashing officially became part of the English language when it gained entry in the Oxford Dictionary in 1999 as: “disinformation disseminated by an organization so as to present an environmentally responsible public image”. It is noteworthy that while this definition focuses on “obfuscation and diversion”, greenwashing is now applied to everything, including an ill-conceived sustainability project (Basile and Skierka 2008, p.1). While greenwashing is not new, its current scale is unprecedented (Futerra Sustainability Communications 2008, p.6). Despite this, organisations can thwart getting into or escape from the snare of greenwashing by formulating and implementing a strategic management plans for sustainable development.

## **8.0 MANAGING SUSTAINABILITY: STRATEGIC APPROACH AT VSET**

Whether an organisation is managed according to the principles of sustainable development or not is a function of several factors including: its history and background; its vision, philosophy, mission, goals and objectives; its governance structure and decision-making processes; and the policies and practices of the entity. How these are formulated, interpreted and utilised by the organisation determines the results that ensue. This section evaluates those forces with respect to VSET.

### **8.1 History and Background**

Very Sustainable Eco Tours is a KAT Isles-based in-bound tour operator with its headquarters in Wai'tukubuli, the capital of The KATIs, and offices in Cubanacan, Quisquea, Borinquen, Ayti, Xaymaca, Kairi Lele, Karukera, Madinina, Hiwanarau, Wadadli, Camerhogne and Ichirouganaim.

Originally named Gaia Rafting when it was founded in 1980, the company was renamed Jacquot Tours in 1995 after surviving the intense price-cutting rivalries of the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s. That name was kept until 2010, when the enterprise restructured, acquired Aloï Airways and rebranded as Very Sustainable Eco Tours in order to create a “powerbrand”. Earlier this year, the company took over Kayryouacou Ferries.

Essentially, VSET has evolved from a small rafting company to the premier tour operator in The Islands, with a fleet of 15 aircrafts, 6 ferries, 18 semi-cabin powerboat boats, 21 river boats and 50 air-conditioned vehicles, offering trips to all remote destinations in The KAT Islands. Its activities include “soft and easy ‘lime’ (walks)”, “super white-water rafting”, “botanical parks and garden exploration”, “‘horsing around’ (horseback riding)”, “‘jah jah ways’ (exotic cultures) appreciation”, “‘avian peeping’ (bird watching) tours”, “holiday ‘cool outs’ (homes)”, “‘becoming fishy’ (diving)”, “wildlife ‘checking’ (observation)”, “jungle ‘randonnée’ (trekking)”, “‘higher heights lime’ (mountaineering)”, “‘basking in the inferno’ (bathing in the Sulphur Springs)”, “‘cool and irie’ (enjoyable) rum and coconut tours and “‘ecstasy voyage’ (sky tram ride)” above the rainforest canopy. Its tour products brands include Best of The KATIs, Journey through The KAT Isles, Secrets of The Islands, The KAT Islands Safari Club and Higher Heights of The Isles. The company also operates many budget KATIs Backpackers (1999) and KATIs Rainforest Lodge (2009) throughout The Islands.

The corporation insists it has no plans to rebrand Very Sustainable Eco Tours. While the enterprise now does more of its business on the internet, it still conducts a high percentage of its activities from walk-in traffic.

Irrespective of the brand of the organisation or where it conducts business, VSET needs an appropriate vision, philosophy and mission as well as realistic goals and objectives to guide it successfully.

## **8.2 Vision, Philosophy, Mission, Goals and Objectives**

Since an entity's vision sets out its strategic course in preparing for the future, that intent informs its philosophy, or unique system of beliefs, values and principles that drive the entity in terms of its environmental, social and economic responsibilities, and, by extension, its operations. The mission, or reason for being, clarifying what it seeks to achieve, is in turn derived from the philosophy. As an action statement, the mission produces the goals, or general statements expressing the aims, which address what actions the entity proposes to take on its journey to realise its vision and mission. Emanating from the goals are objectives, or statements of how to achieve the goals, which represent quantification (if possible) or more precise statements of the goals. Because they are an organisation's performance targets – that is, the results and outcomes management strives to accomplish -- they function as yardsticks for measuring how well the organisation performs.

### **8.2.1 Vision**

The desired future state, or the aspiration of VSET of where it wants to be, is:

- To be the leading ecotourism and adventure operator in the Kalinago-Arawak-Taíno Isles.

### **8.2.2 Philosophy**

Very Sustainable Eco Tours' philosophy is:

- Connect people intimately with nature while doing our utmost best to ensure environmental protection and preservation and enhancement of people's socio-economic development.

The core values within this philosophy driving VSET are:

- Excellence in all undertakings.
- Responsibility and transparency.
- Inclusivity and diversity.
- Sustainable tourism at all cost.

Part of the company's philosophy is its stated combination of principles for effective, efficient, and enjoyable governance and decision-making as follows:

- **Consent** or absence of paramount and reasoned objections to ensure members' pleasure with organisational policies;
- **Circles** or semi-autonomous, self-organising entities;
- **Double Linking** or overlapping of hierarchical circles in the decision-making processes;
- **Selection by Consent** whereby people are chosen by agreement to functions, roles and tasks.

### 8.2.3 Mission

The overriding purpose for the existence of VSET is:

- To provide personalised travel adventures that offer an authentic lifetime experience while respecting the environment, communities and cultural heritage in the process of facilitating the social and economic progress of the KAT Islanders.

### 8.2.4 Goals

The stated goals of the corporation are:

- To create and to provide innovative, high-quality experiences for clients during their trip;
- To develop, promote and practise sustainable tourism, particularly ecotourism, to the greatest extent possible;
- To support nature conservation and the preservation of flora and fauna;
- To ensure excellent working conditions at VSET and enable the development of the staff;
- To be a catalyst, effecting necessary changes to ensure sustainable tourism in The KAT Isles; and
- To constantly explore areas of co-operation among the various ecotourism stakeholders in The KATIs.

### 8.2.5 Objectives

Although VSET has not finalised its "Triple Bottom Line" objectives, in an attempt to pacify its critics the company hastily posted the below sustainability objectives on its website:

#### Environmental

- Reduce the consumption of non-renewable energy by 20% of 2012 levels by 2014;
- Become "grid positive", generating more solar electricity than VSET consumes by 2017;
- Decrease water consumption by 15% within the next year;
- Achieve carbon neutrality by 2014;
- Effective early 2013, keep the number of visitors per tour to The KAT Isles National Parks ceiling of 20;
- Reduce solid and liquid waste generation by 60% of 2012 levels by 2015.

#### Social

- Beginning 01 January 2013, improve working conditions at VSET and allow all employees to participate in company decision-making as per Sociocracy principles;

- By the second quarter of next year, all VSET employees will be allowed half a day per month to perform voluntary activities in their communities;
- Allow all native KAT Islands communities to perform their cultural activities without dictates of VSET; and
- Commencing in the fiscal year 2013, allocate KAT100, 000 (KAT 1 = CAD 3) for scholarships for KAT Isles citizens and residents.

## **Economic**

- Starting in January 2013, pay all foreign workers at the same rate as native KAT Islanders;
- As of January 2013, pay all workers of VSET a 10% salary/wage increase per year until 2015;
- Commencing 01 April 2013, contribute 1.5% of net profit to environmental and social NGOs in The KAT Isles until 2023; and
- Enter into ecotourism and other business joint ventures with various communities of The KAT Isles.

To reach those objectives, the requisite governance structure and decision-making processes to motivate and guide the staff must be established and changed on an as-needed basis.

### **8.3 Governance Structure and Decision-Making Processes**

Based on published information by the company, Very Sustainable Eco Tours' governance structure is composed of a five-member Board of Directors, democratically elected by the members. It also states that the VSET's vision, philosophy, mission, goals and objectives are determined through extensive consultations with staff. Providing support to the Board to realise its objectives are the Managing Director and Assistant Managing Director, who monitor and evaluate overall organisational performance. Below them are the Human Resources and Training, Operations, Sales and Reservation, and Marketing Departments, each headed by a Manager answerable to the Assistant Managing Director within which VSET's staff compliment of 150 in the Atabey (Earth Mother) group of companies reside.

Very Sustainable Eco Tours publicises it has adopted Sociocracy -- "rule by the *socios*," people who have a social relationship with each other (Buck and Endenburg 2012, p.4), variously known as "dynamic governance, nonviolent governance, and green governance" (Ibid., p.3), as its system of management, since the business believes profoundly in efficient decision-making while respecting every member's contribution. This method is rooted in system dynamics, cybernetics and systems design, combining elements of these disciplines to create a comprehensive feedback system to guide governance and decision-making (The Sociocracy Consulting Group 2012). Sociocracy also optimises an organisation's ability to respond effectively and efficiently to internal and external pressures while maintaining security and stability (Ibid.).

The company professes that in keeping with its Sociocratic organisational culture, it is composed of circles of semi-autonomous groups (committees), each with its own goals and objectives and performing the functions of leading, operating, measuring and providing

feedback in the pursuit of those aims. At least two members (the leader and another elected representative) from one circle participate in the decision-making in the circle above it, forming a double link. The decision-making processes are undergirded by the principle of consent. As such, policies are formulated and implemented providing there are no reasoned and paramount objections to them. Similarly, members are elected exclusively by consent, following open discussions.

Like all other organisations, VSET's governance structure and decision-making processes provide the infrastructural foundation to facilitate its policies and practices. As such, the structure and processes of the company impacts its policies and practices.

## **8.4 Policies and Practices**

Notwithstanding VSET's name suggestive of sustainability, and its well-written vision, mission, philosophy, goals and objectives; it is upon the evaluation of its policies, and specially its practices, that it is determined whether the organisation is truly sustainable or greenwashing.

### **8.4.1 Policies**

The following are published policies of VSET:

- Create innovative and high-quality personal experiences for all clients and hosts, leading to greater understanding and appreciation of nature and cultures;
- Provide accurate interpretation and awareness of the natural environment, local society, and culture;
- Actively support the conservation and preservation of natural areas and/or biodiversity;
- Operate in ways that redound to the economic, social, and cultural benefits of local communities;
- Involve local communities in the planning and implementation of VSET's activities as necessary;
- Make certain the scale and plan for tours, lodging and attractions are consonant with local situations;
- Take all necessary measures to ensure minimal impact on and presentation of local (indigenous) culture; and
- Ensure excellent working conditions for all staff at VSET, enabling their personal and professional development.

The real value of policies lie in putting them into practice, for it is at that point it can be proven whether the policies are appropriate vis-à-vis the issues they are designed to address.

### **8.4.2 Practices**

Contrary to the information published on the company's website, several members have leaked documents revealing that the conduct of VSET's affairs is anything but democratic. From those documents, it can easily be concluded that the Board has always been hand-picked by the founder, Xavier Cassique. Further, the Board solely establishes the vision, philosophy, mission, goals and objectives in every respect, including sustainable development or lack of it. In that

sense, it is not surprising that the Board has not found it necessary to assign a unit or individual specific responsibility for sustainability.

Concerning the first principle of the Mohonk Agreement detailed in Section 6.2 above, which focuses on giving visitors to The KATIs first-hand experiences of nature with a view to enhancing understanding and appreciation of nature and other cultures, VSET frequently loses focus on providing such experiences. As such, many clients have complained about not enjoying every moment of their trip, especially as they were not able to interact with animals nor visit enough sites given the many fascinating areas that exist in The KAT Isles. In addition, their trips were not as unique, eco-friendly and carefully planned as they were made to believe. Due to breakdown in communication with suppliers, guests have also been left stranded at the airports or picked up late before and after their tours.

Regarding the second criterion of the Agreement, which requires imparting knowledge of the local environment, society and culture via correct interpretation leading to increased awareness of the clients, VSET's promise to furnish a comprehensive educational opportunity for its guests is wanting. There is very little information regarding the principles of ecotourism or the unique flora and fauna of The KAT Islands, and no advice for responsible travellers on the website. The information available on the history and culture of The Islands is replete with inaccuracies.

With respect to the third requirement that positive and active contributions be made to conservation of natural areas or biodiversity, the business contributes financially to The KATIs Environmental Organisation, a body that it founded, and like-minded organisations whose views on sustainability issues are in line with VSET's. The company makes no financial contribution to any of the other many environmental, social or economic development civil society organisations on The Islands.

In connection with supporting environmental preservation, while VSET does list some environmental policies on its website, its offices and field operations have no specific guidelines for protecting the environment. It does not strictly limit the number of visitors per tour or other activities nor does it always provide sufficient interpreters. In both respects the company violates the regulations of The KAT Isles National Parks, which restricts the number of visitors per activity and require tourists within the parks to be accompanied by tour operators at all times. In the last 18 months, the company has been fined and threatened by the Environmental Health Department with sanctions and court action for poorly maintained septic tanks on several of its premises, which have polluted surface and ground water at most of those sites. The business has also had problems with the Ministries of Sustainable Development and Forestry for oil and fuel spills causing soil and water pollution, and habitat disturbance and forest degradation resulting from trail erosion, especially on the islands of Cubanacan, Quisquea, Borinquen, Ayti, Xaymaca, Kairi Lele, Karukera, Madinina, Hiwanarau, Wadadli, Camerhogne, Borinquen, Ichirouganaim and Cannouan.

Despite VSET's carbon emissions, it purchases no carbon offsets nor engages in carbon neutral policies. The company's airlines take travellers to its ecotourism sites through both long haul and short flights. As the aircrafts are first generation Bash 20 models with very high fuel

consumption, this raises serious greenhouse gas emissions concerns. Its vehicles and boats are also not fuel-efficient and are usually not properly maintained.

As regards the fourth condition of the Mohonk Agreement, which calls for economic, social and cultural benefits for local communities, the business initially hired local employees, but after workers protested against poor working conditions and lack of concerns by the company to do more to protect their environment and cultural heritage, VSET has been replacing locals with non-unionised foreign workers. Consequently, most members of staff of the different VSET operations are non-natives who are poorly trained or have no training at all. Their wages and salaries range from 50% to 65% of what native KAT Islanders earn in addition to being abused by managers. In response, many of the workers do not live an eco-friendly life. Since they know the company's sustainable development practices are at variance with its policies, they show little or no regard for energy, water and other resource conservation and waste management, and reluctantly guide guests when they seek advice to be sustainable.

Rapid expansion by VSET on some of the islands has resulted in the closure of many small native-owned ecotourism businesses in the KATIs. Besides, utilising the classic divide and conquer tactic, the company has caused friction among the Kalinago, Arawak and Taíno peoples in an attempt to gain control of prime touristic lands that have been shared peacefully by members of the ethnic groups for thousands of years. Moreover, VSET does not provide health nor education benefits to its workers. Additionally, on many occasions the company has paid agents to use any means necessary to dissuade people from going out to vote on its proposed developments, preventing people's participation in the decision-making processes. More importantly, the corporation has yet to sponsor any form of health, education or sports activities on The KAT Islands.

In terms of the fifth rule to foster community involvement where appropriate, the management culture of VSET is currently not amenable to such an idea. The company sees no need to consult the local peoples and experts to ensure the people's cultural values, human rights and legitimate needs to depict/practise their various cultures as they deem fit are fully respected.

With regard to the sixth standard of the Agreement, to scale and design lodging, tours and attractions to suit local circumstances, VSET has yet to take any of these into consideration in establishing its facilities. As a matter of fact, a former senior level government planning official was recently dismissed after having been found guilty of accepting bribes from the company to approve a number of VSET's development proposals over the past five years that did not meet local requirements.

As for the need to minimise impact on and presentation of local (indigenous) culture, VSET is known to have requested communities to stage activities according to the corporation's dictates to "create special impressions" on visitors, thereby compromising the cultural integrity of the communities.

Very Sustainable Eco Tours also does business with all providers and fellow tour operators irrespective of their sustainable development policies. More importantly, it has no eco-certification through a performance-based audit and no credible certification either. In addition,

the company has no membership, affiliations or partnerships with reputable organisations such as the International Ecotourism Society (TIES) or the Rainforest Alliance.

Very Sustainable Eco Tours uses traditional media such as newsletters and newer media such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and podcasts to communicate with potential clients. Though by doing so it saves paper, and, by extension trees, overall the company is operating unsustainably.

By having recently installed solar panels for water heating at its various facilities, VSET claims that its operations are “planet friendly”. The company did not make public that the entire solar water systems were heavily subsidised by both national and municipal governments of The KATIs. Added to that, there is no water conservation programme at any of the company’s facilities, and it is depleting the water table of the communities where their businesses are located, making their tourism operations unsustainable in the long-run. By basing this claim on a single environmental attribute, VSET is guilty of engaging in hidden trade-off. While the corporation’s facilities are located in the tropics, where they can make maximum use of solar and wind energy, they have yet to meaningfully tap into any of those sources of energy.

The company also states that its restaurants and hotels serve only organic food, and its bathroom and bed linen re-use are “environmentally friendly” and “green” respectively. However, it provides no information about the source(s) of the food or how they determined that their linen re-use is good for the environment, especially as they have been known to be changed daily. It simply provides no proof to substantiate this claim.

The most recent VSET brochure promotes the islands of Wa’omoni, Tobago, Ichirouganaim, Becouya, Wai’tukubuli, Aichi, Touloukaera, Ocananmanrou, Alliouagana, Oualie, Ay Ay, Aloï, Siba Amonhana, Ouanalao, Soualiga Oualichi, Malliouhana and Ayti as “natural and pristine”. However, those islands are not adequately protected nor does VSET implement sufficient initiatives to mitigate the impact of the high volume of tourism it is engaged in on them.

Very Sustainable Eco Tours further asserts that the garden insecticides and the herbicides used on its lawns are “chemical-free”, all its members are “eco-conscious”, all paper used by the company has a “recycled content”, and the general purpose household cleaners used in its facilities are “non-toxic”, yet makes such claims without explanation or third-party substantiation. All of these vague terms are utterly meaningless without elaboration and they can be easily misunderstood.

To give the impression of third-party endorsement of its operations as “green”, the company has adopted several false global tourism eco-labels, certifications, accreditations, guidelines and code of ethics. However, no proper information is provided as to how they are achieved and audited. In one instance, VSET claims its semi-cabin powerboat boats to be “Energy Star” registered, but the official Energy Star website refutes this claim as false. Such out-right lying is a vivid misrepresentation of certification by an independent authority.

While VSET collects recyclables according to their recycling status: plastic, glass, organic matter, paper or batteries in its operations, since there are no efficacious recycling facilities on

many of the islands, the waste ends up in landfills. Such actions by the company give a false impression that it fully reduces its waste impact, as the final destination of the recycled materials is not stated. Through VSET's various activities, increasingly more waste is being brought into the wilderness of The KAT Isles. Furthermore, the company claims to be using a range of CFC-free products including insecticides, lubricants, oven cleaners, window cleaners and disinfectants. All of those claims are irrelevant as the production and use of CFCs were banned two decades ago.

Aware that some other businesses in the tourism industry have been reported by environmental organisations to be worse than it, VSET declares in its advertisement that it is "greener" than most of its competitors. As an example, it argues that the SUVs and boats it uses are more fuel-efficient than the Hummers used by others in the industry. To make that impression on its clients, the company in an advert depicts rose, margarita and calabash flowers blooming from the exhaust pipes of its boats and vehicles. The rose and margarita are the national flowers and the calabash is the national tree of the The KATIs. By portraying itself as the lesser of two evils, the corporation is essentially shifting focus away from the greater environmental impacts of the unsustainable practices within the industry.

The results of undertakings by the corporation are intricately connected to its policies and practices. As functions of VSET's actions, the results are reflective of its policies and practices.

## **8.5 Results**

The once well-organised and managed ecotourism of the Kalinago-Arawak-Taíno Isles has been compromised primarily due to greenwashing by Very Sustainable Eco Tours. This has resulted in the endangerment of the environment and biodiversity, and negative effects on the social and economic advancement of the people of The KAT Islands. Specifically, VSET's practices have given rise to the following impacts:

### **Environmental Impacts**

#### *Resource Usage*

Consequent upon the rapid expansion of tourism on and immigration to the Islands, coupled with its unsustainable management, the resources of The Isles are being utilised at an increasing rate.

#### *Alien and Invasive Species*

Due to failure by VSET to properly educate its guests and workers, some invasive plant and animal species have been brought to The KAT Isles on its ferries. Also, endemic species have been taken from one island to another on the company's boats with the same negative effects of the species foreign to The KATIs. On several of the islands, introduced species, now outnumber native species, threatening them with extinction.

#### *Other Environmental Impacts*

Unwanted by-products from VSET's irresponsible business activities include contamination from poorly maintained septic tanks, boat paint and engines; oil and fuel spills; air pollution from its

vehicles, boats and airplanes; overused sites; erosion along sensitive trails; plant and animal disturbance, all causing a general decline in the quality of the tourism experience.

## **Social Impacts**

### *Growing Human Population*

By employing people from outside The KAT Isles instead of native people, VSET is contributing to the growing human population on the Islands. This is translated into rapid growth of amenities, giving rise to increased fossil fuel consumption and wastes and their attendant adverse impacts.

### *Disturbed Friendliness and Peace*

In the pursuit of VSET's selfish and exploitative aims of controlling and developing prime touristic lands that have been shared peacefully by members of all the ethnic groups of The Isles for thousands of years, the corporation disturbed the long-standing harmonious relations among the country's ethnic groups by causing friction among them.

### *Cultural Bastardisation*

By causing KAT Islanders to deviate from their genuine cultural practices by showcasing what they purport to be their culture simply in response to the dictates of Very Sustainable Eco Tours, the culture of The KAT Isles was altered. Consequently, the natives felt divorced from the essence of their existence with some of them resorting to excessive alcohol consumption in an effort to handle their guilt.

### *Lack of Community Involvement*

There has been a total lack of community involvement by VSET in any of its activities. That is a demonstration of blatant disregard for the people's culture, human rights and legitimate needs to depict/practise their various cultures as they deem necessary. This dearth of community involvement also hinders capacity building among KAT Islanders.

### *Disenfranchisement*

In many cases, disenfranchisement of the people of many communities in The Isles resulted from the mode of operations of VSET. When the company wanted to force its proposed developments on the communities, it hired agents to deny the people their rights to take part in the decision-making processes.

### *Other Social Impacts*

More importantly, by not sponsoring any form of health, education or sports activities on The KAT Islands or providing workers health benefits or time to volunteer in their communities, social development in those communities has been slow. And violating workers' rights to join unions of their choice in addition to not involving them in the decision-making processes in the company have dampened their spirits.

## **Economic Impacts**

### *Employment Generation*

On the positive side of the economic ledger, VSET provides employment to 150 individuals in The Isles. The incomes earned from those jobs allow families to provide for themselves thus facilitating a modicum of community economic development.

#### *Replacement of Native Workers and Low Income*

While VSET generates employment, not remunerating workers adequately and replacing well-paid native Islanders with lower-paid foreign workers significantly discounts the jobs creation aspect. People work hard, but they do not earn enough to live comfortably.

#### *Closure of Native-Owned Businesses*

Due to VSET's dirty underhand *modus operandi*, the company forced the closure of native-owned ecotourism enterprises on many of the islands. The result of that has been decreased community economic development and increasing reliance on VSET.

In the final analysis, the combined negative economic effects of the replacement of local employees with foreign workers and the closure of native-owned businesses by far outweigh the positive impacts of the jobs created by the corporation.

Having carefully studied the strategic management approach of VSET to the "Triple Ps", the findings can now be revealed and analysed.

## **9.0 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF SUSTAINABILITY**

This section addresses VSET's strategies for sustainability, challenges confronting the company and lessons learned from this particular case.

### **9.1 Strategies**

During a recent interview with KATIs TV, the Chief Executive Officer of VSET delineated the sustainable development strategies employed by the company as follows:

- Review all operations to ensure visitor numbers conform with park established number of tourists per tour; efficient use, recycling and storage of water; renewable energy self-sufficiency; reduction, reuse, recycling and rethinking of waste.
- Enhance training and development of personnel to improve interpretive guiding and other educational opportunities for clients about The KAT Isles, its wildlife, history and culture. Also, critically review environmental guidelines for employees to follow in their day-to-day work.
- Become carbon neutral and achieve "grid positive" status.
- Give first priority to local employees in the hiring process and assist locals in establishing their own business in the industry.
- Strengthen VSET's environmental policy and provide financial support for local conservation, revegetation, etc. to protect native wildlife and flora and ensure a "leave no trace" on the trail practice.

- Strengthen cooperation with central and local governments, National Parks and Wildlife Service, local communities, civil society and other organisations, and help preserve the cultural integrity of The KAT Islands.
- Have independent party performance-based audits, acquire certification by TIES, the Rainforest Alliance and The Ecotourism Society of The KAT Isles, and be included on the TIES website.

It is important to note that should those strategies not be effectively implemented, in the final analysis they would not have been of any help to the corporation in confronting the challenges it has created through its unsustainable actions.

## **9.2 Challenges**

Now that it has been discovered that VSET has been greenwashing, the company faces two major challenges. One is to develop the conviction internally that what it has been doing is wrong, and to successfully develop a culture of sustainability within the organisation. This would require training in sustainable development at every echelon of the organisation.

The second is to regain the public trust that it has lost. This would involve measures such as hiring local people and furnishing them with much improved working conditions and partnering with communities to enhance their economic development. Also important in that regard is for VSET to be environmentally sustainable in its internal and external operations and support environmental, social and economic development NGOs in The Isles.

It is within VSET's means to overcome those challenges as well as to learn important lessons from them.

## **9.3 Lessons Learned**

Despite denoting sustainable tourism, the ecotourism industry can be awash with greenwashing. This can be easily extrapolated to any industry. Therefore, sustainable development conscious individuals and organisations must remain extra vigilant.

Ecotourism can have both positive and negative socio-economic and environmental impacts. While the positive are the preferred results, if ecotourism is not managed strictly in accordance with well-thought-of established standards, the environment, society and economy will inevitably be affected adversely.

So as to ensure their good intentions are not betrayed, ecotourists must be actively involved to thwart or minimise greenwashing in the industry. Towards that end, there are many tools available for their use. To differentiate between ecotourism and greenwashing, it is incumbent upon ecotourists to ask themselves and organisations in the ecotourism subsector critical and pertinent questions concerning environmental and socio-economic development practices, and to expect verifiable evidence of claims.

Likewise, businesses have a crucial role to play. Green marketing is a vast commercial opportunity, as well as a powerful tool to enhance the "planet, people and prosperity"

dimensions of development. As such, rather than indulging in greenwashing, marketers should utilise this instrument to foster the attainment of the “3BL”. One means by which this can be achieved is to incorporate sustainability concerns in their operations by establishing sustainable development performance as a point of competitive distinction, creating trust with their customers.

Through the processes of ecotourists and businesses playing their respective roles to engender sustainable development, they converge, developing a more efficacious dialogue and learning about the “Triple Bottom Line” together.

Above all, in assessing an organisation in the ecotourism subsector or any other entity to know if it is engaging in greenwashing, it is crucial to look beyond its impressive façade of credible name, vision, philosophy, mission, goals, objectives, governance structure and decision-making processes, policies and strategies on its website or in other corporate documentation to instead observe its actual practices against established standards to evaluate whether it is factually operating sustainably.

## **10.0 SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS**

Utilising the principles of ecotourism contained in the Mohonk Agreement, this case study has sought to determine whether the unreal enterprise, Very Sustainable Eco Tours, engages in greenwashing. On each criterion, VSET has been judged to be involved in significant deception. Despite its attempts to portray otherwise, an objective analysis of the facts reveals the company’s deceptions. As such, it has been concluded that in spite of the publication of credible name, vision, philosophy, mission, goals, objectives, governance structure and decision-making processes, policies and strategies on its website, across the board the corporation is operating very unsustainably. In fact, VSET is undoubtedly the greenwasher par excellence in The KAT Isles.

To provide personal experiences of nature and the cultures of The KAT Islands and the ensuing increased understanding and appreciation of those observations, VSET needs to concentrate on devising creative ways to bring these occurrences to fruition. The Isles have a wide array of unique flora, fauna and geologic features. Such flora includes many carnivorous and insectivorous plants, and particular genera and species of plants that co-evolve with corresponding humming birds, building unique partnerships as those plants can be pollinated only by those birds whose beaks are designed for fetching nectar solely from those plants. The unique fauna includes the mini Loch Ness reptiles, octa-headed pythons, Siamese agoutis, and the several creatures that possess plant, animal and fungi characteristics simultaneously. Cultural activities include La Rose and La Marguerite Festivals in August and October respectively. Careful planning of tours that include, for instance, safe interactions with endemic KATIs animals and witnessing the flower festivals can mesmerise visitors, resulting in their understanding and valuing of the natural and cultural uniqueness and beauty of The Islands. Improvement in communication with suppliers and a more professional approach by VSET will also contribute to more positive experiences to both guests and locals.

Given the rich diversity of fauna and flora in the KATIs and the long history and diverse cultures, past and present, of the Kalinago, Arawak and Taíno peoples, all tours should have at least one competent interpretive guide. Additionally, a range of educational opportunities, with an emphasis on correct interpretation, such as providing and recommending relevant literature and organised lectures should be offered to visitors and local people (employees and residents), particularly on the necessity of conservation.

In that regard, that the ecosystems of the KAT Islands are very unique and fragile, the corporation should provide financial support for the conservation and preservation of natural areas and the management of protected areas. As the principal eco tour operator in the very lucrative KAT Isles market, such support should be seen as compulsory investment by VSET to protect the very foundation of its financially successful ecotourism ventures.

Should the native Islanders be trained, employed and remunerated fairly by or become business partners of VSET and other ecotourism entities operating in The Isles, quite apart from the development that ensues, the indigenous peoples will protect and maintain the resources, resulting in sustainable tourism. Therefore, it is recommended that programmes be instituted to ensure the native peoples are prepared accordingly.

It is also incumbent upon the company to appropriately consult the local peoples and experts, thereby respecting the people's cultural values, human rights and legitimate needs to depict/practise their various cultures as they deem fit. Tourism can contribute to the socio-economic development of The KATIs through job creation, improvement of infrastructure and greater opportunities for local businesses, particularly when locals are instrumental in its management and operations, and partnerships are built with the communities.

Moreover, it should be ensured that the scale and design of all tourism facilities and activities conform with the carrying capacities of their locations. Adherence to this criterion would improve the "Triple Bottom Line" performance and product quality of all the organisation's branches, making it a good corporate citizen, while fostering overall sustainability in The Isles.

To ensure minimal impact on and presentation of the indigenous cultures of The KAT Islands, VSET's programmes would have to enhance the integrity of local cultures by involving people in matters pertaining to their natural and cultural systems and allowing them to practise their cultures in unadulterated ways. That way, the company will demonstrate utmost respect and sensitivity to the local peoples.

More importantly, it is strongly recommended that VSET immediately creates a Department of Sustainable Development (DSD) charged with specific responsibility for sustainability. It is further advised that the head of the DSD reports directly to the Managing Director and be empowered to work across departments within the corporation. By integrating the formulation and implementation of the company's "Triple Ps" policies and strategies, the Department will be in a position to effectively transform VSET into a truly sustainable business, achieving its corporate vision of becoming the leading ecotourism and adventure operator in the Kalinago-Arawak-Taíno Isles.

Above all, in order to seriously curb greenwashing in The KAT Islands, it is suggested that a national certification system for sustainable tourism, which is long overdue, be instituted as a matter of urgency in The Islands. This would address two major aspects, namely sustainable development performance of all entities in the industry and the quality of their products. By focusing on tourism suppliers, including accommodation, tour operators, restaurants, sport and leisure facilities, tourist attractions, destinations, (tourist) transport companies, taxi associations, tourist associations, vendors associations, etc., the adverse impacts of tourism on The Isles will thus be minimised.

## 10.0 QUESTIONS

1. From a sustainable development standpoint, what are the benefits and costs of ecotourism? Since tourism is the main industry in The KAT Islands, how can it, ecotourism in particular, be made more sustainable in The KAT Isles?
2. In your judgement, what are some of the practices or conditions that indicate an entity is greenwashing despite its best efforts to convince the public otherwise?
3. Why do you think entities, especially businesses, engage in greenwashing? What would you recommend to consumers and businesses in order to significantly reduce, or possibly eliminate, this scourge?
4. Who do you think should be held ultimately responsible for the failure of entities to practise sustainability – the organisations, the government, the society, etc.? Please give reasons.

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