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Vanuatu, Climate Volatility

The Tourism Crisis in Vanuatu

Vanuatu is a group of islands 2,251 miles off the North East coast of Australia. It is a country of vibrant coral reefs, tourist attractions, and countless sights to see. However, these vibrant islands are at risk. From the effects of climate change to the extreme loss of biodiversity, Vanuatu is struggling to maintain its beauty. The people of Vanuatu rely on the island for many things including food, business, and supplies. The main jobs are agriculture, fishing, and tourists, all of which rely on the island to be in top shape.

The average number of people in one family in Vanuatu is 5 per household (Vanuatu, 2012). To put that in perspective, the United States has an average of 2 people per household. That means that there are people to do work but that every family has more mouths to feed. In urban areas only the emerging middle class can afford government made houses; most people live in shacks made of iron pipes and waste materials. Most of these houses are traditional Melanesian houses, they have coral or earth floors, no glass windows, and palm, bamboo, or cane roofing (Admin, 2008).

Vanuatu has a parliamentary democracy with a written constitution. This constitution states that the head of the Republic shall be known as the President and shall symbolize the unity of the nation (Usman, 2017). The Prime Minister is head of the government and appoints the Council of Ministers. Together the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers make up the executive government.

All types of agriculture, from growing crops to raising animals, rely on the land being able to support them. Fishing requires the water to be clean and well taken care of so the fish won't die or move on to better grounds. Unlike other types of agriculture on Vanuatu, fishing is more for the locals than for exporting. Copra, cocoa, kava, and beef account for about 60% of the county's exports (Vanuatu, 2020) but is not the main way most Ni-Vanuatu, what locals are called, make

money. Tourism is one of the biggest, if not the biggest, source of income for Vanuatu. It is estimated that over 30% of the country's revenue comes from passports. With the number of people wishing to visit Vanuatu growing, it is important to keep the island in top shape. No one wants to visit a place that has trash everywhere, no vegetation, and no animals.

Tourism can be helpful and harmful depending on how it is done. It is important to know how to be responsible when deciding on how to make money by exploiting the environment. Healthy ecotourism should be focused on looking and not touching. Visitors should be encouraged to not disturb the environment and take pictures instead of taking things. It should also be focussed on teaching people so they realize why we need to protect and preserve the environment around them. Local companies and organizations can run the programs rather than outside companies so the money goes back to the community.

Although it isn't ideal to rely on only one type of industry for money, Vanuatu doesn't have many other options. Vanuatu is made of many islands so resources are somewhat limited and harder to get from other places. This also limits the jobs people can get other than in the tourism industry. If there were to be a push to change the main source of income in Vanuatu it would be difficult because so much of the country relies on it. Tourism also affects almost all other industries, from farmers making food for hotels to construction workers making new buildings, it's everywhere. Another negative is that if something goes wrong and there is less tourism, the economy, along with the community, will suffer.

A great example of this is the pandemic. There has been no tourism in Vanuatu for the past few months. Hotels and other tourist attractions have had to cut staff, leaving thousands unemployed. The Vanuatu government has rolled out a stimulus package of \$52 million dollars, though, to help those that have lost their jobs (Graue, 2020). Unfortunately, many people say they have yet to see any of the money. Recently, however, the government has issued a statement saying that they will be trying to focus more on agriculture and food security. This comes not long after Cyclone Herold, another disaster that devastated the country. Although the government is doing all they can, this shows how relying on one source of income can be dangerous.

Some positives, however, to relying on tourism is that it is one industry that, if done right, will benefit the land as well as the people. It will educate people on the environment and help them learn why we need to preserve it. There are also almost infinite possibilities for types of tourism.

It could be a wildlife preserve, a shop selling locally made goods, or tours around local towns; tourism can benefit all kinds of people.

The main problems facing Vanuatu are overexploitation of marine and natural resources, loss of biodiversity, and improper waste disposal. Many of these problems can be caused by improper tourism. Overexploitation of natural resources in Vanuatu results in a devastating loss in wildlife, fewer resources to utilize, and it can cause shortages of resources in the future. Loss of biodiversity has an impact on countless aspects of the country. If there is less diversity of animals it could hurt the country's economy from less tourism. Less biodiversity also hurts ecosystems because there is no balance or population control. If there are fewer herbivores, for example, there will be nothing for the animals who rely on them for food to eat. The vegetation will also be overgrown, which will limit the types of plants that can grow. Improper waste disposal hurts the environment and makes it harder for people to live. If the waste gets into people's or animal's water supply, they could start to get sick from drinking it. It also can affect air and soil quality harming wildlife and making it hard for people to make a living.

Vanuatu's forests have been exploited with little to no regulation or control. From 1991 to 1993, timber exports increased by over 300%. A new regulation in 1998 slowed the rate of deforestation by banning whole round logs from being exported and made it harder to have access to any forest resources (Weaver, 2007). The Code of Logging Practice and other regulations has helped increase the amount of replanting rates, but unfortunately, harvest rates are still exceeding planting rates by a wide margin. The traditional land tenure system is seen as a limitation on sustainable forest management, as there are still various disputes between customary owners and forestry leaseholders.

At first glance, Vanuatu seems to be responding well to the changes in environmental quality, with new laws and regulations to protect the environment. The government has started to work with communities to form new strategies and work to help both the government and the people. A closer look, however, shows a distinct lack of government involvement in the environment, with only a tiny amount of the national budget, goes towards environmental issues. Any programs created to help the environment are being moved around and find it hard to gain a foothold and make a difference. Because of this, the environmental officials in Vanuatu have had to access more funding for environmental projects, which makes it hard to focus on local problems. While Vanuatu has approved many environmental laws and regulations and participates in global discussions and meetings concerning small developing islands, there is still

not enough focus on these problems on a local level. Ni-Vanuatu trying to keep the focus on a more local level say that these agreements divert attention even further from where it is needed.

Some of the possible reasons that the government and companies are having problems getting involved is that it can be difficult to push for a change in a system that makes life easier at the expense of the environment. Oftentimes people would rather take the quickest and easiest route than the one that has more benefits and stability in the long run. That is why it is important to educate people and to give them a resource to get information from.

A summit, with important figures from the Vanuatu government, heads of large tourism corporations, representatives from Global Environment Facility (GEF), and other environmental organizations, should be held. The main goals would be to discuss ways to rely on eco-friendly tourism, why relying on companies outside of a local level should be avoided, and a proposition to create a Council within the government to assist in environmental issues.

One of the main objectives of the Council would be to ensure that Vanuatu commits to Agenda 21, which is a proposal by the United Nations regarding sustainable development (Agenda, 2010). Vanuatu's sector for the environmental field is not as active as it should be and few organizations recognize the benefits of supporting the environment. This Council would assist the environmental sector and help educate people on those benefits. For example, if a local tourist company wanted to move towards a more eco-friendly route, they could go to the Council for information about the best step forward that would help the environment.

In other countries, the same situation is playing out, the Government has had to address these issues to make business owners aware of rising environmental problems. They have stressed how important it is that the Government has the right tools to handle these problems and to ask for help from public volunteers so that they can find solutions that the local citizens support, which is preferred by the people. Instead of the government being responsible for these changes though, the Council would take on this responsibility. One reason for this change is so Ni-Vanuatu can assign and elect their own people for this task. Making sure they feel they are being represented how they want and so the focus is on the problems they want to be addressed first.

Countries such as Costa Rica and Bhutan have taken full advantage of their natural resources and strongly promoted their own environments. Eco-tourism and bio-prospecting are two industries that have been majorly benefited by national marketing. Vanuatu has an organic agriculture region that could offer unique benefits in its trade relationships with its neighbors, although additional help is needed in marketing. Vanuatu's similar advantages in setting up environmental industries would help to support a government support strategy to promote a range of possible environmental industries.

Getting money for new organizations is difficult if you don't know where to look. The new natural resource distribution design for the climate change and biodiversity areas of GEF and Pacific Alliance for Sustainability gives Vanuatu the opportunity to obtain more GEF funds. The Least Developed Countries Fund for climate change is designed to perform the projects stated in the national adaptation plan of action and the natural resource distribution design does not apply to this fund. Furthermore, the Clean Development Mechanism adaptation fund is predicted to increase to 44 million emission reductions by 2012. Vanuatu should be prepared to take full advantage of these opportunities, but that will require a more effective GEF team.

Although Vanuatu has many environmental problems it is important to be realistic with efforts that require significant change. Oftentimes, when new ideas are proposed to significantly help the environment, the steps required to make that change are so drastically different than what people are used to, that it is shut down immediately. Although that change might have been better in the long run, it was too sudden for people and didn't have enough benefits right away. It is important to not just consider the future but the present and past as well. By focusing on eco-friendly tourism, not only is it helping the environment but it is also benefiting local businesses and showing positive results almost immediately. It is also not excessively changing how they conduct their business that they might have run the same way for decades. Creating a Council that locals elect and that is focused on having their best interests in mind makes people feel they are being heard and therefore more likely to support it. It is critical that the people support these sorts of things because then it gives leverage to tackle bigger issues, such as helping the government make environmentally friendly decisions on a much larger scale than just tourism.

In conclusion, Vanuatu should have a summit to discuss how they need to create a Council that can help the government and Ni-Vanuatu in making decisions about environmental problems and the best way to move forward. This Council will keep the people's interests in mind and try to

make as many people heard as possible. Funding would come from organizations such as GEF and similar sources. They would help the Council and the government decide the best steps moving forward to help the country get back to where it was. Smaller islands and the ones with the ones that need the most help would have first access to those funds. Vanuatu should also look towards growing more local organizations and groups so that they are more focused on their own country. With the help of others, Vanuatu can return and maintain its original beauty.

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