

Development in Crisis!

Our planet is in crisis! There is no doubt that the over 7 BILLION people who call Earth home are running its resources down to zero! Our insatiable desire for wants, rather than meeting our basic needs, is compromising the ability of current and future generations to meet theirs. Do we even know HOW future generations will be able to meet their needs with what they will inherit from us? Do we even care?

In our quest for 'development' we have acted as though our actions have no effect on the environment. The physical environment and living organisms are not separate entities but are mutually dependent on each other. Have we ignored the wisdom of our indigenous ancestors who were conscious of the habitats and regeneration cycles of plants and animals in their use of Mother Nature's gifts? How many times have we considered tomorrow by not 'raiding' the mango and other fruit trees? Have we forgotten that we are dependents and caretakers of the environment and not entitled despots? It only gets worse with our consumer habits that are often dictated to us from outside forces capitalizing on our greed, jealousy and hatred. To boast of our level of prestige and class status, we drive fancy cars and wear expensive jewels unbothered that fertile agricultural land was destroyed to extract the gold, diamonds and oil fuelling our conceit. To boast of our prestige and class status, we crave the latest phones ignorant of the conflict wars in the Congo or Colombia where tantalum and tungsten are extracted using forced labour, often with poor desolate children as its sorest victims. Likewise, we have treated the atmosphere and the oceans as infinite dumpsites with devastating effects on marine and terrestrial ecosystems. Due to continuous pollution from human activities, our marine and terrestrial ecosystems have degraded to the point of creating zones that are no longer able to sustain life. Is this the 'development' we aspire for?

Since Belize is a small developing country there is much pressure on us to develop 'sustainably.' We too must pay the price for the development of large industrialised nations. That means that we must meet the needs of every one of our 398,050 residents without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. We must reduce extraction rates to what can be naturally replenished, use more of what can be naturally replenished and where the risk is too great, stop extracting certain resources entirely; i.e. offshore oil drilling. We must learn from the mistakes of developed countries by promoting equity between the environment and the needs of our nation. Everyone must have the opportunity to enjoy a high quality life. All we have is now and the future. Unfortunately, our now is marked by more intense storms, floods, droughts, rising sea levels, higher temperatures, and ocean acidification, which have all had devastating effects on the Caribbean. In a low-lying, coastal area like Belize, climate change, deforestation and pollution are already posing severe threats to people and the marine and coastal ecosystems that support our lifestyles and livelihoods. All of these are direct threats to our development from the development of other countries. We need to strike a balance between our needs and wants before it is too late; our future depends on it!

1. Describe 3 important messages from the article about the concept of 'development'.
2. Describe why it is important to be conscious of the habitats and regeneration cycles of plants and animals in our development policies and plans. How has Belize shown its 'consciousness' and in what areas is there room for improvement?
3. Explain why developing countries like Belize must now 'pay the price for the development of large industrialized countries'.
4. Waste disposal is the biggest hazard of development. We are guilty of disposing our waste in the air, on the land or in water-bodies; all these are linked to climate change. Discuss what needs to be done to both reduce the impact and adapt to change and recover from the toughest shocks of climate change.
5. As countries develop, the gap between the rich and the poor and the have and the have-nots often widens. Discuss the factors causing this to happen by exploring the concepts of greed, jealousy and hatred?