

Thomas E. Lovejoy

## Lesson From a Small Country

Plainly it's a good thing when a developing nation embarks on raising its living standard. But the development often comes at a price. There may be some short-term benefits to be gained from depleting natural resources, but in the longer term it can leave the country worse off than before. Meanwhile, serious environmental damage may have occurred—with effects not only on the country where it was done but on a global scale—as in the case of deforestation and accompanying increases in "greenhouse" gases.

This is essentially a worldwide problem—sometimes seen even in the poorer areas of developed nations—and a complex one. But it is not a problem without solutions. One place where truly exciting progress has been made is in the small, progressive Central American country of Costa Rica.

Costa Rica has had an enviable history of democratic government ever since the legendary Don Pepe Figueres abolished the army shortly after taking office in 1948. It has a history of environmental concern and leadership, yet has had, and continues to have, its own share of environmental problems including a high deforestation rate. Since 1994, however, under the leadership of Don Pepe's son, Jose Maria Figueres, Costa Rica has launched an unparalleled effort to move toward sustainable development.

One area of major innovation is in energy consumption, the production of greenhouse gases and the problem of climate change. Costa Rica is at-

### *Little Costa Rica is leading the way on some big environmental issues.*

tempting to phase out fossil fuels for power generation by 2010. This is easier there than it might be in other countries, because Costa Rica has an abundance of other means of producing power: good hydroelectric sites, wind sources and the geothermal potential that goes with living atop a string of volcanoes.

The country has already reduced power demand through an aggressive campaign that depended in part on the classic approach of raising the price, through a 15 percent national fuel tax. (Contrast that with the reluctance of the U.S. Congress even to contemplate a more modest BTU tax not many years ago.) Some of the revenues are being recycled into reforestation, thus preserving or restoring the resource base while avoiding or reducing carbon emissions as only forests can.

The carbon tax is linked to a 1996 forest law that pioneers the concept of "payment" for environmental benefits such as watershed protection and absorption of greenhouse gases. Of the water for hydroelectric genera-

tion, 87 percent comes from protected forests, and it would cost \$104 million to replace it with fossil fuel generation. Thus the savings of environmental protection offset its costs.

Costa Rica's latest—and perhaps most exciting—endeavor is to set itself up as a kind of world carbon bank, which works as follows: An entity in another nation, say, a private power company (or maybe a public agency operating power plants) is required by law or pressed by international convention to cut its carbon emissions or at least keep them from increasing. If it is inconvenient or costly for the power company to do so in its own country, it may "purchase" reductions in some other country.

The power company (or public agency) might do this by building a non-emitting plant in Costa Rica, as the United States' Northeast Utilities has done with a 20-megawatt wind farm there. Or it might buy the equivalent of a conservation easement on a tract of Costa Rican forest, so that rather than being converted to pastureland or some other non-forested state, the land is maintained in its natural state as a capturer ("sequesterer") of carbon. Or it might simply pay for reforestation.

This system, known as "joint implementation" creates a "market in virtue" and, in theory at least, brings about pollution reductions at the lowest possible cost. Once the law requires countries and companies to reduce or limit emissions, they look

around for ways to minimize costs, and this is where Costa Rica comes into the picture by offering itself as a means of achieving the pollution cuts.

Recently it has created a financial instrument that allows one to invest in pollution reduction through a type of bond that will eventually be tradable on commodity markets. For now, it provides funds to small landholders for reforestation or forest protection. This approach also permits generation of multiple income streams from the same tract of forest by activities that don't affect carbon storage such as ecotourism or extraction of minor forest products. The combined revenues constitute a powerful alternative to deforestation.

In the other area of innovation, Costa Rica's "alliance with nature" has already produced nature-oriented tourism on the scale of \$700 million a year and more than 100 private conservation areas, including a rain forest canopy tram and several butterfly farms. The most sophisticated aspect, however is the National Institute for Biodiversity (INBio). Founded and led by Rodrigo Gamez, INBio is a hub of activity engaged in systematic inventory of the flora and fauna in the 24 percent of the nation designated for permanent protection. This is all fed into an enormous databank and used by such pharmaceutical firms as Merck & Co. in the search for new medicines.

The generation of wealth from molecules in nature, thanks to organized data and the ability to return to the

same individual tree that previously yielded a promising compound, already makes Costa Rica a country of choice at the dawn of the age of biotechnology.

This is not to say that all these initiatives have been without their problems or their critics. The carbon tax in particular has been unpopular, although polls indicate Costa Ricans are willing to pay more for water if guaranteed quality and quantity for their children and grandchildren. Figueres has, nevertheless, paid a price in abysmal popularity ratings for pursuing his visionary initiatives. He perseveres, however, convinced he should do the right thing for his country's economic growth and quality of life, and confident that this will in time be recognized.

The big issue is whether there will be continuity after the end of his constitutionally mandated single term in May 1998. It is unlikely that foreign supporters will walk away, because, as U.S. Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt observes, "The world needs a Costa Rica to show the way."

Critics often say Costa Rica is a special case, an anomaly among Third World nations. It probably is—and so is its brilliant, energetic and impulsive young president. But the entire world would do well to pay attention to the exciting experiments going on there, and take what it can from them.

*The writer is counselor for biodiversity and environmental affairs to the secretary of the Smithsonian Institution.*

Max/Paul/KM -  
Any way to do this here in U.S.?  
-BR

TUESDAY, APRIL 22, 1997

The Washington Post

lan

alists are in g 15-year jail years ago by Sen. Sani Abant to prison I by a military they represent appeal, I hap- se four journal- ed to share the I he's a close

joined the staff erian news mag- 1993. It was an country was in a long-running cy aimed at end- rs of continuous er Nigeria, politi- ampaing at a a great time to be

election, crowning ion, was scheduled at 10 days before ed from Lagos to to interview a run- of the presidential days later, on the bus he was riding in four people died. in the hospital with ries. He was there months. For much remained doubtful make it. back to work the ft the hospital in

### soldiers newsroom.

his only complaint: I out on the previ- ring which Nigeria ne election to the s results, to the the military ruler he cancellation, to his hand-picked ci- id nationwide tur- November, to the lame-duck civilian cha, who seized at reinstated full-

sometimes about was yet to fully effects of his inju- was just one of the colleagues began seemed to have restless and excit-

On May 5, 1995, barely 18 months after he came out of the hospital, George was arrested in the Lagos premises of Tell magazine by soldiers from the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI), one of the many arms of the sprawling security system that keeps the Nigerian armed forces in power. As they usually do when they come to Tell, the soldiers who arrested George had demanded to see the editor in chief. When told he was not in the office, the group, led by an army major, demanded to see "any of the editors."

Most editors, as they have to do during such "visits" by security agents, managed to escape from the compound. But George, an assistant editor, was taken away in an unmarked Jeep. Neither his wife nor any of his friends and colleagues have seen him since. Nor has Ebubechukwu Yemisi, his daughter, two months old at the time.

Numerous letters sent to the DMI and other agencies, seeking explanation for the arrest and appealing for his release, were ignored. When Rose, George's wife kept going to the Lagos headquarters of the DMI, the officers in charge threatened to arrest her, too. They refused to accept a fresh supply of his medication.

In the newsroom, the only clue anyone had as to the reason behind the arrest was that the officer who led the team was waving and complaining about a story that ran three weeks before in Dateline, a sister publication, concerning a coup plot the Abacha regime announced it had detected in February 1995. Many Nigerians doubted the regime's claim that there had been a plot, and many public figures openly expressed those doubts. Tell and Dateline duly reported them.

In August 1995, the regime announced that a secret military tribunal had convicted up to 40 soldiers and civilians in connection with the coup plot. Among them were four journalists who received 15-year jail terms for "complicity": George Mbah of Tell; Christine Anyanwu, publisher of the Sunday Magazine; Ben Charles Obi, editor of Classique weekly; and Kunle Ajibade, editor of The News magazine. Each of these publications had outspokenly reported on the widespread doubt about the authenticity of the regime's coup plot claim.

Over and above the sadness about his confinement in prison for two years now, George's wife and friends are afraid for his life. He was in fragile health even before his arrest. Prison conditions in Nigeria are very harsh. And there is much reason to fear that unless George is released soon he might not make it out alive.

*Josh Arinze, a Nigerian-born journalist, works in Washington.*

E. J. Dionne Jr.

# Choose Your Utopia

CAMBRIDGE, Mass.—It is commonplace to hear people complain about how the political debate isn't "real," isn't about "things that matter," and involves politicians who "posture" without "talking to each other."

Now, assume that this critique is right. The question is: Why?

Last week, I found a plausible answer in an article included in a packet of readings for a conference here about civic engagement. Written by Michael Walzer, a philosopher at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, N.J., it was entitled "The Idea of Civil Society" and was published in Dissent magazine.

Walzer argues that if you look at standard political arguments, they tend to be inspired by one of four all-inclusive, and utopian visions of the good life. Most of us understand each of them, and few of us agree with them in their entirety.

Two of these visions come from the left. The first sees the good life as defined by "the political community, the democratic state." We should be most engaged in our role as citizens who spend as much time as possible deliberating about the public good. If we're not being public and political—if we're distracted by such matters as, say, our family or our work—we're missing what matters.

The second leftist vision is the old Marxist idea that work matters most and that the imperative is to seize control of what we do from the employers who boss us around. If the democratic utopia emphasizes government, the worker utopia emphasizes the struggle in the workplace.

The right posits two other utopias. One sees freedom as defined by our roles as consumers in the marketplace. In this view, says Walzer, our freedom is defined by our ability to "choose among a maximum number of options." The stars of this story are the entrepreneurs, "heroes of autonomy, consumers of opportunity." Therefore, the more activities that are devolved from government to the realm of the market the better.

Finally, there is nationalism which stands as an alternative to "market amorality and disloyalty." Nationalism asserts that "to live well is to participate with other men and women in remembering, cultivating and passing on a national heritage."

Now, if you see how many of the usual political arguments fall into one or another

of these categories, you can see why we complain so much. I'm probably most partial to civic utopianism. But few of us live most of our lives in public—we literally don't live in "the government"—and we have good reason to return regularly to the spheres of work, culture and family.

A similar case can be made about the definition of us as "workers." If we're lucky, we love our work. But we usually rebel against the idea of our work defining us. And a Marxist account of human beings as producers doesn't work so well in a society where so many are in service occupations.

The flaws of what Walzer calls "market imperialism" are obvious. The market is immensely productive, but it provides little support for community—that's not its job. It also leaves people behind, and pretends a price can be put on everything. (Think of whether you'd put a market "value" on your kids.)

And, much as we all may love our own country, nationalism is flawed because it doesn't tell us a thing about how we should organize that country, how we should treat those who aren't part of it, and what rights its citizens should have.

This is where "civil society" comes in. The civil society view has honorable roots in the struggles for freedom against communism in Eastern Europe. Dissidents argued that governments may oppress citizens, but people still had the ability to form independent associations—churches, unions, sports clubs, neighborhood groups—that express their yearnings both for individual expression and for doing things together.

The power of this idea, says Walzer, is as "a corrective to the four ideological accounts of the good life." We don't live entirely in the political sphere. We don't live entirely through our work. We don't live entirely through the market. And we don't live entirely through the nation. We are individuals who value our freedom but also value our communities.

You can see the value of Walzer's argument as a critique of our politics. We rebel against Democrats when we think they're saying that salvation lies through government. We rebel against Republicans when we think they're saying that salvation lies through the market. We're looking for a balance, a synthesis, that we know we have not found.

## The Washington Post

TUESDAY, APRIL 22, 1997



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

OFFICE OF  
THE ADMINISTRATOR

TO:

Bruce Reed

456 - 7028

FROM:

Loretta Uelli

COMMENTS:

Number of Pages to follow: 1

Date: 2/11

Time:

Transmission Number: (202) 260-3684

Verification Number: (202) 260-7960 or 260-9828

Office of the Administrator  
401 M Street, S.W.  
Room 1204 West Tower  
Mail Code: 1101



Recycled/Recyclable  
Printed with Soy/Canola Ink on paper that  
contains at least 50% recycled fiber

February 11, 1997

MEMORANDUM FOR RON KLAIN, KATIE MCGINTY, LORRAINE VOLES AND  
KIM TILLEY

FROM: LORETTA UCELLI, EPA

SUBJECT: OPPORTUNITY TO HIGHLIGHT ADMINISTRATION ACTION ON  
COMMUNITY RIGHT-TO-KNOW

---

Delivering on President Clinton's commitment to ensure every citizen's right to know about local pollution, EPA is preparing to finalize an important step in the Administration's effort to expand the Community Right-to-Know program.

As you probably remember, at an event at the White House last June, the Vice President committed to expand the number of industrial facilities required to make public the levels of toxic chemicals they release into the air, water and land. Next month, EPA will make good on that commitment and finalize the regulatory proposal that the Vice President announced. This action will increase by 30 percent the number of industrial facilities that will report the levels of toxic chemicals they release into communities across America.

Community Right-to-Know is of high and growing interest to the news media. Several newspapers -- including the *Washington Post* -- have expressed interest in writing about this portion of the Administration's expansion of the Community Right-to-Know program. A Vice Presidential event announcing the Administration's action could provide a good news peg for those stories.

The announcement needs to be made during the first or second week of March. If you are interested in pursuing this idea, please call me or Melissa Bonney at 202/260-9828 to discuss event options.

CC: Don Baer  
Kris Balderston  
Sylvia Mathews  
Mike McCurry  
Bruce Reed  
Gene Sperling