

Leading Sustainability
Change (BMSP7004D)

Leading By Example -- GreenVI Inspires Recycling Revolution



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Not-for-profit organization GreenVI is leading the change it wants to see in the British Virgin Islands! It is doing so by organizing and spearheading initiatives that are not only geared at preserving the Territory's environment, but at ensuring that the globally endorsed green philosophy is broadly embraced; and becomes a way of life in this tiny Caribbean jurisdiction.

By no means is it a simple feat. In fact, the organization admits that it has been a delicate task of nudging a community to embrace concepts such as recycling and caring about the natural components and resources of the Territory. Nonetheless, after ten years on the mission the organization can boast success. This essay will explain how GreenVI through effective leadership has, and continues to make a positive contribution to the concept of sustainability in the British Virgin Islands. This piece will also show how the organization became the authority and official voice of sustainability in this Territory; through inspirational leadership.

Organizational Make Up

The organization comprises of a Board of Directors, and a Team that includes its Executive Director, the membership which is referred to as the 'GreenVI Team' and the Glass Studio Team. A birds-eye examination of the organization would further reveal a leadership style that is transformational; which is evident by the organization's success that mainly comes from its ability to foster sustainable changes through inspirational interventions.

It should not be downplayed that the feats and accomplishment of GreenVI to among other things successfully introduce recycling to the British Virgin Islands was a yeoman task. This task required the organization to accept the transition challenge that such an undertaking brings and persevere until the community, public and private sector were convinced of the cause. Effective marketing which included the strategic use of social media, outdoor signage, website content and an efficient mobile app helped to net rapid conversion.

What Is So Special About GreenVI

As a not-for-profit organization; GreenVI was established in 2009 with the aim of leading change in the Territory. From the onset this change was driven by the organization's vision for "a green, clean, healthy, and prosperous BVI, where the well-being of the people is of primary importance and a balance is maintained between conservation of the natural environment and development," (*Fact Sheet, 2020*).

GreenVI commenced its effort to spearhead the BVI's sustainability transformation by pledging to work on four areas: Waste reduction, showcase the need and importance of switching to alternative energy; promote sustainable, living practices; advocate for water conservation.

However, of all of the areas that the organization has pledged to work on GreenVI has been most focus on waste reduction. This is because the waste management situation in the Territory has reached a critical level where it even became hazardous.

The Waste Management Crisis

One of the charms and appeals of the British Virgin Islands is driving along the western route side by side with the sea, and the traversing boats. However, at some unscheduled periods of the year the picturesque scenery is affected by the fog and gloomy hovering of smoke from the Territory's main garbage dump site. The situation is an illustration of a sad tale of what improper waste disposal looks like. This grim situation is further compounded by the soundtrack of residents complaining that it is hard to breathe when the dump combusts and the noxious fumes permeates the air. All of which adds to the dire nature of the problem.

This garbage situation is most certainly not a new problem as successive governments over the last 15 years have pledged to fix the issue but with no luck. The issue was explained plain and simple – the dump or the incinerator had become inundated with the amount of garbage that is being disposed of daily. This situation was exasperated because the BVI was not a culture that embraced recycling so everything was just taken to the dump.

The smoke from the dump at one time wafted as far as St John United States Virgin Islands and resulted in concerns being raised by that Territory. It was a situation that was truly at a critical stage.

GreenVI to The Rescue

The Handbook of Recycling for State-of-the-art for Practitioners explained that in the case of waste management crisis, recycling has been found to be the best weapon. The book stated, "recycling enables waste to become a resource...recycling is the reprocessing of recovered materials at the end of product life returning them into the supply chain," (*Reuter, 2014*)

Therefore, it is admirable that GreenVI was able to take this globally endorsed sustainability method to create immeasurable change in the British Virgin Islands. A change that took more than a decade, but netted result that indeed shows that a small entity can prevail in its effort to change cultural norm and social practices thereby bringing about change that will be appreciated for generations to come.

The origin of GreenVI's push for a better approach to waste disposal in the Territory was aptly summarized in the organization's (Annual Report 2018-2019, 2019) where it was stated: "BVI Waste Management is at a critical juncture. Waste volumes continue to increase - as does territory-wide open burning - and 2017 storm debris is still a concern. Additionally, a disabling incinerator explosion, issues with private recyclers and no significant government waste management budget increases, have exacerbated these

problems. Despite these difficulties, we remain optimistic that, through collaboration and innovation, solutions can be found, and the BVI can become a centre of excellence in Materials Management.”

The seriousness and motivation behind this initiative was outlined by Charlotte McDevitt the Executive Director of GreenVI in the (Annual Report 2014-2016, 2016). In that document the Executive Director said, “GreenVI continues to demonstrate the concept that waste is a resource and should be managed in a sustainable way that improves the quality of life. Redefining and setting up systems to manage the valuable resources inherent in waste, provides a wonderful opportunity to protect the islands of the BVI as ‘Nature’s Little Secrets’ and preserve the gifts they offer to islanders and visitors alike.”

The report further declared, “The ultimate aim is zero waste to landfill or incineration.” A more extensive explanation into the zero waste quest was provided in the sustainability report where it was explained that the British Virgin Islands can become a zero waste society is the slogan: rethink, reduce, reuse, recycle.”

On the community transformational side of its recycling adaptation journey GreenVI not only pushed for better garbage disposing, but also advocated for residents of the Territory to only import healthy, biodegradable, non-toxic and high quality materials. The organization also call for the use 100% of the Territory’s glass and organic waste for on-island applications

As the leader of GreenVI McDevitt has demonstrated that she is personally vested in the waste management cause that the organization has taken on. Her conviction and by extension GreenVI’s motivation is supported by the fact that McDevitt completed her Master’s thesis on waste management in the BVI in 2008. In both her studies and her work with the organization McDevitt has looked at the problem and considered solutions that would serve to redefine how the Territory handle’s its waste.

From the beginning of its undertaking GreenVI has shown that it values collaboration and has used this tool to amplify its message. Towards this end GreenVI partnered with four organizations to present a programme aimed at mobilizing sustainability initiatives in the BVI. The organizations were: **The Conservation and Fisheries Department** which is the Unit within government that is tasked with protecting the natural environmental resources of the British Virgin Islands.

The H. Lavity Stoutt community College (HLSCC) which is the only tertiary institution within the Territory. **The Natural Step** which is an international not-for-profit organization that aims to propel the message and works that supports sustainability; and **the BVI National Commission for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)**, which is the local arm of a vital UN organization that works towards sustainable development.

The scope of that programme was to educate an initial group (35 persons) who were representing various sectors within the Territory. The programme featured webinars,

intense workshops and knowledge sharing through group activities. The overall aim was to increase the knowledge of sustainability within the Territory and ensure that participants will be able to apply what they learnt to assist the Territory's push to become more sustainable.

That programme was a resounding success as coming out from the event there was the establishment of a local sustainability leader's network. The success was demonstrated by the participants' transition into integral parts of the sustainability movement. From their respective sectors they became beacons for change and championed various sustainability initiatives. In fact, the message trickled into the community via speaking engagements at churches, schools and other organizations within the Territory.

Notably in its push to ensure that the entire Territory adopts green principles GreenVI in 2012 published its Sustainability Capacity Building Program Report which chronicled how it commenced its effort to get buy-in and told how its message triggered Territory-wide change. (*The Natural Step, 2012*).

Continuing the journey the organization keeps the message of recycling relevant by organizing and hosting numerous events, and activities annually. These events thrive on creativity and have been successful in maintaining the interests of the population. One such effort was the hosting of the GreenVI Compost Workshops which wowed students as they learnt among other things how they can turn 'Egg Shells into Earth.'

That memorable GreenVI event was held in collaboration with the Departments of Agriculture and Waste Management and was also geared at showcasing the importance of composting – which previously was a new concept to the Territory. The message at that event was presented by visiting experts from Cornell University was well received by local growers

As a small private organization that was started by like-minded community leaders who are committed to the ushering in of sustainable living in the British Virgin Islands the response and success of GreenVI's work is laudible. The organization has no doubt met its goal and was able to even influence the government in more than one instance to adopt recommended sustainability initiatives. The first instance involved efforts to ban the use of Styrofoam products and single use straws in the Territory.

The organization agitated and used various forums to call for the banning of these items and was able to convince the government by following up on a request for recommendations on how the matter should be dealt with.

The submission of the recommendation resulted in the Cabinet of the British Virgin Islands on 8th November 2018 agreeing on a policy that was geared towards reducing plastic waste within the Territory. The aim of the policy was to prohibit the use of food and beverage containers that are made of Styrofoam, (*BVI Beacon, 2018*).

The other instance was noted on 12th April 2019 when the organization reaped one of the biggest rewards of its hard work – a public private partnership with the Government of the

British Virgin Islands. This partnership was solidified when Minister for Health and Social Development Honourable Carvin Malone on behalf of the Government of the British Virgin Islands signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Green V.I. The aim of the Memorandum of Understanding was to facilitate the implementation of a recycling system throughout the Territory.

Under that agreement GreenVI agreed to place recycling bins on the three major islands of the British Virgin Islands -- Virgin Gorda, Tortola and Jost Van Dyke. The agreement also made provision for two recycling trucks. Additionally, both entities agreed that in order to ensure the success of the recycling initiative in the Territory supplementary funds will be made available; and recycling data will be given to GreenVI to be used for the refining and implementation of innovative ways to boost the efficiency of the recycling process, (Government of the Virgin Islands, 2019)

It should be noted that as a thought leader, GreenVI has had great success in finding ways and means to make the message of environmental stewardship appealing to a Caribbean public that is now awakening to the whole notion of going green. The issue with the newness of the Going Green movement in the Caribbean is that it conflicts with certain cultural norm. Nonetheless, GreenVI has been able to balance this delicate matter by presenting its message in a palatable way.

Another example of the interesting ways the organization has been able to keep the sustainability message alive within the Territory can be observed annually in the Earth Day celebrations that are championed by GreenVI. Each year this globally recognized day is used to reinforce the various messages of the organization.

For instance, in observance of Earth Day 2017 which was celebrated on 22nd April that year GreenVI organized an extravagant beach fun day at Cane Garden Bay on the main island of Tortola.

During that year the Territory was battling the invasive Lion Fish which is a destructive specie that disrupts the marine environment. At that time the Territory viewed the presence of the Lion Fish as a great threat to the viability of the fishing sector. In its usual effort to protect the Territory's environment GreenVI jumped to the rescue by adding a Lion Fish Hunt to its Earth Day celebration.

Earth Day 2017 was sustainability focused as also saw activities such as underwater and beach clean ups as part of the fun.

For its signature project of recycling, GreenVI appeals to residents of the Territory through its annual Youth CHAIR-ity event; and one of the most memorable staging of that event was in 2015; which was also the event's fifth year. At that event there were representation from nine schools within the Territory. The entries were judged according to individual and group categories; and the main aim of the activity was to showcase how fun and exciting repurposing items can be.

At the end of the 2015 competition the winner of the group chair category was the Francis Lettsome Primary with their entry of a throne chair that was constructed using tyres. Another impressive entry was the Valley Day Primary school's beaded chair. The beads were made using old magazines. Other chairs were made from discarded pallets, and old barrels among other things.

It cannot be overstated that the success of GreenVI's infusion of its sustainability message and the change that the organization has inspired and continues to lead in the community is fostered by creativity. This is evident by the fact that the organization continues to top each doing with one motivational activity after another. This has been recorded over the years as in addition to annual events such as the ChAIR-ity auction GreenVI has held standalone events such as the "Fragile Tings" multimedia art exhibit. This exhibition which of course was aimed at selling recycling to the public; dazzled patrons with "Framed photos by renowned local photographer Hezekiah Maddox and various recycled glass art.

To say that the organization has also had success with the private sector would be an understatement as the fullness is evident in the numerous collaborations and partnerships that have been inspired over the years. One such partnership has been with the BVI Spring Regatta; which is the British Virgin Islands' premier sailing event and is the first Caribbean regatta to be awarded Gold Level Certification.

The organizers of this event were so moved with the message and various undertakings of GreenVI that they ventured into greening the entire regatta. Further, the organizers also signed a contract with GreenVI for the production of its awards. Now each year at the conclusion of the regatta the participating sailors that gather from all over the world are presented with awards that were crafted in the GreenVI studio using glass that has been collected and recycled from past regatta beverage containers!

These awards that end up on display in far-away lands are sculpted in the reheating chamber that is fueled by used vegetable oil that was collected restaurants around the Territory, and are packaged in repurposed cardboard boxes and recycled padding.

This repurposing skill of the GreenVI team is not only visible in its delivering of the regatta awards; or crafted art. Nonetheless, the organization announced that it intends to go largescale with its repurposing agenda through the creation of an eco-park featuring repurposed items.

The winning of private sector support is further evident in the sponsorship that has come from close to 50 of the Territory's most popular businesses. These sponsorships have made various GreenVI undertakings possible.

One of the greatest showing of private sector support for the work that GreenVI does can be seen in the organization's waste management improvement initiative. This initiative features the creation of the Green Pledge certification; which is a programme that was developed by GreenVI in collaboration with the Ministry of Natural Resources.

The organization in its 2018-2019 report bragged that 37 BVI companies participated in the certification programme, “In signing the Green Certification Commitment, members accept their “corporate environmental responsibility” and pledge to take these actions: Reduce, reuse and recycle waste materials; mandate best green practices for their operations.”

GreenVI Maintains High Standard of Leadership

In the area of sustainability leadership in the British Virgin Islands GreenVI wears the crown. As a great leader the organization has remained ahead of the curve by keeping pace of strides occurring within its industry. Towards this end GreenVI has been venturing outside of the Territory to attend, and make presentation at various international conferences. The organization in its 2016 report explained that the purpose of attending these events was to “explore partnerships”. It has been mentioned that the organization has attended multiple events in the United States Virgin Islands, various conferences in Puerto Rico Conference, the 2017 Zero Waste Ontario Conference, and the Clinton Foundation Conference in 2018; and many others.

It is a fact that in all manner of change –maintenance becomes an integral factor in the determination of the permanency of the move. This remains a great concern of GreenVI who have also acknowledged that the longevity of the recycling program requires longterm across-the-board leadership buy-in.

Towards this end the organization leans heavily on its local sustainability leaders network. Green VI explained that it harnesses the support of the Network to further its mandate and maintain the in-roads it has made. The Green VI team continues to coordinate the activities of this group through quarterly meetings which serve as check-ins, and provides an opportunity for both GreenVI and the Network to share projects, ideas and resources. In most instances synergies are identified during the meetings as well as greater opportunities for impact.

On the subject of impact a notable accomplishment of GreenVI has been the organization’s Green Fund which encouraged Green Certified corporate entities to commit to making consistent financial contributions to titled Green Fund which is geared towards “greening the BVI.”

According to GreenVI the goal of the Fund is to collect contributions from corporate partners that eventually equals \$500,000 per year. It was reported that from April 2019 six major BVI entities commenced making monthly contributions to the Green Fund.

All in all, GreenVI continues to hold the spot of most influential sustainability leader in the British Virgin Islands. The organization faced the leadership challenge of “Changing the System” and succeeded in ways that many other entities would not have been able to. Although the task was a daunting the organization has had to find creative and innovative ways to make the message appealing.

GreenVI has also had to don a new lobbying approach in order to persuade the government to make the policy changes that are necessary to propel the sustainability effort. Most amazing is that the organization has been able to do all of this with ease.

While the organization can boast of successfully implementing change in the Territory with the smooth running of the recycling programme; GreenVI chooses to see the glass as half full.

In its vision to fill the glass the organization explained that it intends to venture into the next phase of its waste control/waste management undertaking. The detail of this phases was mentioned in the organization's 2018-2019 report and will include the design, test and implementation of an Anaerobic Digester that can convert a mixture of organic waste into methane - a form of energy that is perfect for powering The Glass Studio furnace.

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