



UNION ISLAND DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

(Culture, Heritage and
Ecotourism Integrated framework)

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1. PURPOSE

This proposal presents strategic recommendations for the systematic rebuilding and comprehensive development of Union Island. It is grounded in an inclusive planning and consultative process that actively incorporates the perspectives of over 100 residents living on the island as well as residents living in the diaspora. The incorporation of community perspectives ensures that the proposed interventions are responsive to local needs and priorities, addressing a key deficiency often observed in traditional development planning and implementation frameworks. Moreover, it provides an example which can be used for and applied to other islands in the Grenadines and communities across St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

2. BACKGROUND & RATIONALE

Union Island possesses significant cultural, environmental, and marine assets, including distinctive heritage, established festivals, and ecotourism sites that remain largely underdeveloped and underutilized. Notably, cultural expressions originating from Union Island—particularly the Maroon dances—are frequently showcased at local, regional, and international levels as representative of the traditional culture of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Despite these assets, tourism activity on the island remains predominantly seasonal and concentrated within the yachting and transit segments, resulting in limited and uneven economic benefits for local communities.

As the recognized gateway to the Grenadines, Union Island is home to an estimated population of approximately 3,000 residents and provides essential educational services through two primary schools and one secondary school. The island also serves neighbouring communities, including Mayreau, whose students commute daily by sea to access secondary education. Union Island has a documented record of producing internationally recognized athletes, artistes, and professionals, and its population continues to maintain strong cross-boundary relationships—rooted in shared history, culture, and tradition—with islands to the south, including Grenada and its dependencies, as well as Trinidad. It is the same geography which has defined the island’s growth and relationships which makes it vulnerable to the effects of climate change and neglect.

This proposal further acknowledges the severe impact of Hurricane Beryl in 2024, which resulted in the serious damage or destruction of an estimated 95 per cent of the island’s housing stock. While the scale of destruction presents significant challenges, it also creates a critical opportunity to implement a structured “build back better” approach. Such an approach would be grounded in Union Island’s unique cultural and social identity and aligned with national priorities for sustainable development, economic productivity, resilience, and long-term independence.

3. KEY PILLARS AND THEIR ASSOCIATED MINISTRIES

- PRODUCTIVITY – Tourism, Fisheries, Agriculture, Culture & Sports
- INDEPENDENCE – Culture, National Security, Health, Social Security/Welfare
- CONTRIBUTE TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT – ICT
- CROSS CUTTING ISSUES – Education, Disaster Management

A. TOURISM & CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

a. The development and formalization of an Annual Union Island Cultural & Heritage Calendar. It would include:

- Conch Festival – Culinary tourism, sustainable harvesting education
- Food Festival - This would focus on traditional cuisine made from agricultural produce and sea food (corn, pumpkin, conch, sea moss, etc.)
- Easterval Festival - Display of culture and talents (Local, regional and international). Sporting events are also an integral part of the island's reality and should be included (basketball, football, triathlon etc.)
- Maroon Festival – African heritage, traditional foods and storytelling
- Model Boat Festival – Maritime heritage and boatbuilding legacy
- Fish Fry Festival – Regular beachfront seafood events supporting fishermen
- Emancipation Day, Mock Police & Courthouse – Historical re-enactments and education
- Fisherman’s Day – Recognition of fishing heritage and marine stewardship
- Union Island Relay-An annual four-leg multi-sporting event starting at Clifton on foot. The race then continues on bicycle and transitions to the water (kayak/swimming) before finishing at the Clifton Playing field beach.

These events will be coordinated through the corresponding ministry (Ministry of Tourism and Grenadines Affairs, Ministry of Sports and Culture, etc.) with support from the local Tourism Bureau and local committees.

b. Ecotourism & heritage site development

Phased development of the following ecotourism and heritage assets:

- i. Frigate Bridge Eco Heritage Site – Viewing platforms, interpretive signage
- ii. The Three Forts Heritage Trail – Restoration, guided tours, digital interpretation
- iii. Belmont Salt Pond – Wetlands education, bird watching infrastructure
- iv. Ashton Lagoon – Formal designation as a protected Bird Sanctuary with boardwalks and observation decks
- v. Big Hill & Mount Taboi Hiking Trails – Trail development, safety features, guided experiences
- vi. Bike Trails around the island
- vii. Union Island Gecko sanctuary: this would allow for species conservation alongside livelihood conservation in the form of a gift shop stocked with souvenirs made by some of the residents of the shared living facility for mature residents.
- viii. Restoration of manmade ponds at Linkin and Campbell- cleaning of ponds, setting up of viewing area, wattle & daub shelters
- ix. Richmond recreation site development- A multipurpose community and tourism space, supporting festivals, community cohesion, and visitor experiences
- x. Ecotourism mapping & interpretation (digital & hardcopy)
- xi. Proper hard court facilities

c. Island Hopping & Marine Experiences

a. Community-based island hopping and marine tours, including:

- ii. Union Island – Mayreau – Tobago Cays routes
- iii. Cultural village tours (Ashton & Clifton)

iv. Fishermen-led marine and heritage tours

b. **Restoration of the Ashton Waterfront.** This will have multiple benefits for tourism, the fishing industry and commerce.

These initiatives will be standardised to marine safety protocols, health & safety regulated & certified, price regulated and environmentally managed (waste management).

B. FISHERIES & AGRICULTURE

Fishing and agriculture goes more than just livelihoods on Union Island. They are an integral part of the cultural identity of residents.

- a. Mangrove restoration and protection
- b. Aquaculture
 - i. Establishing a sustainable, environmentally friendly fish (including shellfish) nursery
 - ii. Fish farming using cage culture
 - iii. Sea - moss cultivation education, expansion and distribution locally, regionally and internationally
- c. Focus on cultivation of traditional crops which allow for making of traditional cuisine and marketing of the same.
- d. Assigning a resident agricultural Extension officer assigned to the Grenadines to provide technical support to the local farmers and to teach younger farmers smart farming methods.
- e. Rental of agricultural machinery which permit easier land preparation.

C. NATIONAL SECURITY

- a. Improve conditions for police on-island starting with the construction/refurbishment of a government owned police barracks with adequate resources and police training i.e.: holding cells, restoring law and order on the island.

- b. Construction of a jetty for the coast guard (site to be determined by proper research & consultation) with protection of all borders. Would require tidal study data to ascertain the best site to prevent damage to moored vessels and allow for easy access.
- c. Maintenance of navigational lighting systems to identify reef area when approaching harbour.
- d. Introduction of a Harbour Master to patrol the sea front for security and to prevent harassment of tourists visiting the island by sea.
- e. Appropriate facilities for the Court house.

D. EDUCATION

- a. Reopening of a library but with updated/expanded mandate.
- b. Development of a Multi Trade Skills Training Centre to include youths from year 8 who are not academically inclined.
- c. **Use of Community Resource Centre as nucleus of community activities.**
 - i. This includes an after school program offering remediation classes, community cultural activities, adult education classes, cultural activities, etc.
 - ii. An operational Computer Lab at the Learning Resource Centre for the elderly during the day and students during the evening with access to free Wi-Fi
- d. Internship within business such as hotels, marine yards and mechanic shops.
 - i. Priority given to businesses assisted with rebuilding post-Beryl.
 - ii. Persons in the diaspora can be tapped to provide coaching in areas of interest to students.
- e. Expand the “YES” program to include other employment opportunities.
- f. Integration of school’s agricultural produce within local economic space.

E. HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT

- a. Radiology: Continue work on establishing radiology services on Union Island

- b. Pathology: To commission the mini pathology lab that is already onsite
- c. Specialists: To have specialist doctors, including mental health professionals, visit the Southern Grenadines on a quarterly basis for the benefit of the poor and vulnerable
- d. Medivac: The Medivac vessel acquired for use in the Southern Grenadines needs to be retro-fitted and used specifically for its purpose.
- e. Decompression chamber placed on Union Island for diving emergencies
- f. Garbage Disposal:
 - i. More public bins and at least one public restroom on the island.
 - ii. Possible relocation of the garbage dump currently located in Clifton.
 - iii. Official policy regarding the recycling of plastic bottles instead of landfill disposal. Incentives for garbage sorting and recycling should be considered.
- g. Targeted reforestation of Union Island with endemic species. This preserves current water table levels and will assist in the replenishing of the same.
- h. Setting up of an official gas station on the island which meets standards for safe storage and sale of gasoline and other petroleum-based products.

F. SOCIAL SECURITY/WELFARE

- a. **Assisted Home of the Aged for elderly and vulnerable population**, especially those who lost their homes in hurricane Beryl and/ or are unable to independently care for themselves
 - i. Include land space allowing for traditional activities (gardening and visits from family) and kitchen and laundry facilities.
 - ii. Include accommodations (upstairs) for caretakers.
 - iii. Structured care including visits from health care team, family members, church, involvement in community activities for the transmission of traditional cultural skills (cuisine, big drum, farming).
- b. **Livelihood restoration support** through provision of assistance to locally owned business with repairs post-Beryl
 - i. Tax exemption on business reconstruction supplies

ii. Tax holiday for first 6 months after reopening

c. Home rebuilding support for aged and vulnerable

i. Collaboration between government and home owners (*government rebuild holding deeds as collateral for a maximum 5-year cost repayment period by homeowner*)

ii. Thorough consultation, contractual assessment and legal agreements alongside effective management through necessary agency to allow for effective and efficient rebuilding.

iii. Insurance a requirement for participation in the program.

G. ICT

a. Phone lines that work without internet access in the event of a disaster.

b. Decentralisation of government offices with digital tie-ins to national databases. This would allow for faster processing of relevant documents, create redundancy in the national framework in the event of an emergency. Moreover, it would relieve financial burdens on users of the government services forced to travel to St. Vincent for basic activities.

H. DISASTER MANAGEMENT

a. Standardised training available to staff and local volunteers before disaster. This should include periodic drills (Tsunami, water emergency, fire, earthquake)

b. Pre-positioning of resources for various emergencies on the island (Ashton & Clifton) with public awareness

c. Official agreement with neighbouring island-state for assistance if the island is cut-off from St. Vincent or without resources to provide aid in the event of a disaster.

d. Development of a community disaster plan for each community alongside public education on proper preparedness procedures. (Ashton, Clifton).

4. IMPLEMENTATION & GOVERNANCE

a. Coordination of each sector through the establishment of a Union Island Tourism Development Committee:

- i. Committee should include:
 - Local Government representatives
 - Business and women
 - Local community
 - Fishermen and tour operators
 - Cultural practitioners
 - Youth and women's groups
 - Ministry of Tourism
 - Ministry of Culture and Sports
 - Ministry of Grenadines Affairs
- b. Two-prong phased implementation over the course of 3 years, dependent on availability of funds (governmental implementation alongside NGO-led projects based on outline).

5. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- a. Funding may be sourced through:
 - National budget allocations
 - Local community
 - Tourism development funds
 - Climate and conservation grants
 - Public-private partnerships
 - Diaspora and donor support

This document was prepared by Jepta Badenock-Garraway & Marva J. Wilson on behalf of other citizens of Union Island. Please contact Mrs. Badenock-Garraway or Ms. Wilson for further elaboration on the contents of the document.

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