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ECON 301

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Applications of Sustainable Development

In this unit, I learned about what sustainable development is, its definition according to different organizations, and economic, environmental and social themes involved when discussing sustainable development. Each of the four videos that I watched touch on what I learned in this unit.

The El Bosque video connected with the topic of the unit in that it highlighted the different ways that sustainability of the environment and economic development can go hand in hand to make Costa Rica better. The video started by pointing out the growing effects of tourism on economic growth in Costa Rica. According to Cabeto, a biologist and Horizontes tour guide who spoke later in the video, tourism is good for Costa Rica’s economy, but if it grows the economy at an uncontrollable rate, it can be bad for Costa Rica’s environment and ecology. Cabeto also stated that ecotourism as a form of sustainable development should marry the two ideas of sustainability of the environment and development of the economy. I believe that by educating people, especially young, Costa Rican children, about the biodiversity of Costa Rica, the Horizontes tour company was able to combine sustainability and development very well. The company is able to sustain the natural park and all of its inhabitants while also boosting the economy as citizens and tourists visit the park.

The EcoViva video highlights an issue threatening the survival of the mangroves of El Salvador and the livelihood of the El Salvadorian fishermen. The mangroves are types of trees with deep roots that grow below the water. Because of serious deforestation, not many trees are left. Fishermen go out onto the water to catch fish and often use dangerous methods such as making bombs to catch the fish. These methods can do more harm to the mangroves all in the name of more fish and revenue for the fishermen. Toward the end of the video, EcoViva pointed out how they wish to show the fishermen less harmful ways to catch the fish that will both save the mangroves and continue to provide the fishermen with income. EcoViva’s initiatives are what sustainable development is all about because they provide sustainability to the mangroves while keeping the economic development going for the local fishermen.

The Gold or Green video highlights the Costa Rican government’s struggle to advance the economy through gold mining while facing backlash from Costa Rican environmentalists. Different parties are interested in mining in Costa Rica, but mining can often have grave effects on the environment in Costa Rica, to the dismay of Costa Rican citizens. In one instance, they had to halt mining because the party that was interested in mining was cutting down trees in order to mine. Costa Ricans pleaded with their government to stop the mining, but they persisted. This is an example of how sustainable development can be difficult because powers like the Costa Rican government would rather sacrifice sustainability just so their economy can flourish, failing to realize that sustainability and economic development can coexist.

Lastly, in her “Small Country, Big Ideas” TED Talk, Ms. Araya elaborates on sustainable developments by pointing out the many improvements Costa Rica has made ecologically and how the country must improve going forward. She walks the audience through how Costa Rica abolished the military in 1949 and how, in 2015, the country went 299 days without using fossil fuels so that they could power their electricity using 5 of the renewable resources. She praised how far Costa Rica has come, but urged her country to take a step further by abolishing fossil fuels as they did in 1949 with their military. She pointed out how other countries believe that a country cannot thrive without fossil fuels, but refuted that by again pointing out Costa Rica’s recent use of renewable energy. The biggest use of fossil fuels in Costa Rica comes from transportation and Araya stated her concerns and solution to that problem. She closed out by pointing out that abolishing fossil fuels is going to take everyone’s cooperation. All of what she said in her TED Talk is sustainable in that it utilized renewable resources that are good for the environment and developmental in that these methods are still able to boost the economy.