

Op-Ed: Virgin Islands Must Seize the Global Economic Wave or Risk Being Left Behind

The Virgin Islands has thrived when aligning with global shifts, from tourism to industry. Today, renewable energy, AI, and the blue economy offer the next wave of opportunity — but only bold action will prevent missed chances and economic stagnation.

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The Virgin Islands has never grown in isolation. Our greatest progress has always come when we aligned with larger global shifts. Today, we face another such moment — one that will determine whether future generations inherit opportunity or decline.

Lessons From Our Past

In the 1950s, when Cuba closed to U.S. tourists, St. Thomas and St. John quickly became premier destinations. Tourism flourished, creating jobs and establishing a cornerstone of our economy.

In the 1960s and 70s, Harvey Alumina and Hess Oil recognized the islands' strategic location as a bridge between South America and U.S. markets. The refinery created thousands of high-paying jobs and injected billions into the economy.

These examples prove a simple truth: when the Virgin Islands positions itself within global trends, we thrive.

The Crossroads Today

The world is now racing into renewable energy, artificial intelligence, and the blue economy. Small nations that move quickly are already emerging as leaders. The Virgin Islands can do the same — but only with vision and urgency.

The risks of standing still are clear. During the Internet boom of the 1990s, we largely sat on the sidelines, while Silicon Valley created entire industries. The cost to us was missed opportunity, stagnant growth, and a “brain drain” of talent. If we repeat that mistake, we face deepening inequality, underfunded services, and an economy too dependent on vulnerable industries like tourism.

Seizing the Opportunity

To capture today's wave of change, we must invest deliberately in:

- **Infrastructure:** Territory-wide broadband, modern ports, and a renewable energy system capable of 300–500 megawatts to support data centers and advanced industries.
- **Education:** Schools that integrate STEM and AI, vocational training in coding and green technologies, and partnerships with U.S. universities.
- **Entrepreneurship:** Tax credits, startup financing, and streamlined permitting to empower local innovators.
- **Diversification:** Expanding beyond tourism into clean energy hubs, AI and fintech startups, biotech labs, and blue economy ventures such as marine innovation and eco-tourism.

These steps are not abstract—they are practical pathways to new jobs, higher incomes, and reasons for our youth to stay and build their futures here.

A Call to Action

This opportunity is too great to ignore. Success requires unity across government, private sector, diaspora, and community. Public-private partnerships can attract capital while strengthening local entrepreneurship. Our diaspora, with its expertise and networks, must be central. And every Virgin Islander has a role—whether supporting startups, advocating bold policies, or investing in our future.

The future of the Virgin Islands will not arrive by chance. It will be defined by the decisions we make today. We can remain on the sidelines, or we can act boldly to build a diversified, resilient, and globally connected economy.

Virgin Islanders, our future is in our hands. Let's build it—together.

Submitted on Sunday by: *By Bernard Dyer Technologist & Virgin Islander in Diaspora*

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