

# A long ways from the Caribbean

Water magazine talks to Stormwater Conference delegate Nekelia Gregoire, who is in New Zealand studying water management at Lincoln University.

By Alan Titchall.



### **Where are you from Nekelia?**

I am from Dominica. This small tropical island, which is often mistaken for the Dominican Republic, is home to about 70,000 inhabitants whose official language is English, but who also speak Kweyol, which has its origins in French and West African languages.

Dominica is dubbed 'The Nature Isle' of the Caribbean and boasts of its lush evergreen rainforest, hot sulphur springs, boiling lake and 365 rivers – 'one for every day of the year'.

### **What did you do before coming here?**

Before moving to New Zealand to pursue my Masters degree, I worked for the Government of Dominica as an agricultural extension officer, where I provided training and other services to farmers in various parts of the island.

After this, I moved to Trinidad and Tobago where I worked as an agricultural research officer with the responsibility of overseeing the operations of the Extension and Dairy & Calf Unit at the Sugarcane Feeds Centre (SFC), which is an institution of applied research, demonstration, development and training in tropical livestock production.

### **Please explain the sponsorship that brought you to New Zealand.**

My postgraduate study is being sponsored by the Government of New Zealand under the New Zealand Development Scholarship (NZDS).

The NZDS give candidates from selected developing countries such as Dominica, the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills through the study of specific subject areas that will assist in the development of their home country.

The NZDS is funded by the New Zealand Aid Programme, the New Zealand Government's overseas aid and development programme, and is managed by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT).

### **What are you studying at Lincoln University?**

I am pursuing an MSc in Water Resource Management. It is a shared degree between Lincoln University and the University of Canterbury, and is spearheaded by the Waterways Centre for Freshwater Management.

I am in the second year of my studies, where I am undertaking the thesis component. I am looking at the treatment of dissolved zinc and copper from roof runoff, using natural materials such as limestone, zeolite and mussel shell in a downpipe filtration system.

I will have completed my studies in February 2018.

### **What drew you to this industry?**

I was drawn to the water industry because in the Caribbean we are faced with many water challenges.

Dominica is a tropical island that has a distinctive wet and dry season. We tend to experience very dry conditions in the first half of the year, and excessive rainfall and hurricanes in the second half of the year.

During the hurricane season, we experience severe flooding, which has been more frequent and intensive over recent years, as well as water quality problems. In addition to this, a large percentage of the workforce is farmers of whom more than 90 percent depend on rainfall as their source of water.

As a result, every year production is limited by insufficient rainfall during the dry season, which leads to scarcity of food on the market. Farmers also experience severe losses during the hurricane season.

Further to this, as a small developing island, we are faced with many social and economic problems that take priority over many of the water problems that we experience on a yearly basis. Having a background in agriculture and first-hand experience on the effects and losses incurred by the lack of and improper management of our water resources, I have endeavoured to increase my knowledge and skill in the area of water resource management to help increase awareness and alleviate some of these problems.

### **What do you plan to do after that?**

Upon completion, I hope to work with the Government of Dominica in either the Ministry of Agriculture or the Ministry of Water Resource Management, where I can use the knowledge and skill that I have developed here in New Zealand to help better manage and safeguard our water resources for the development of the island.

I hope to help increase awareness on the severity of the impacts that the lack of and improper management of our water resources is having on the economy of Dominica and the livelihood of its people. I also hope to help in developing strategies to include policies that will help us better manage and safeguard our water resources for future generations.

After fulfilling the two years mandatory return to my home country as highlighted under the scholarship conditions, I hope to pursue further studies at the PhD level so that I can contribute further to the management of the water resources in Dominica and the Caribbean region by extension.

### **What has been the best thing about studying in New Zealand?**

There are several things that I have enjoyed and will always cherish while studying here. However, the best thing about studying in New Zealand is that the working relationships with my lecturers, supervisors and various administrative staff both at Lincoln University and University of Canterbury has helped significantly, not only in the advancement of my academic career but also in my personal development.

### **What will you miss?**

I will definitely not miss the cold, however, I will miss the warm and welcoming nature of the people, the constant encouragement and support, and the beautiful breathtaking sights. **WNZ**