

2009 ECCU COMPETITION



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Topic: ECCU governments need to develop and implement, as a matter of urgency, a regional energy policy, which would over time reduce the dependence of the regional economies on oil.

Richard N. Nixon, former President of the United States, in responding to the energy crisis in 1974 said “At the end of this decade, the United States will not be dependent on any country for the energy we need to provide our jobs....and to keep our country going”. These words must resound across the member states of the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union and should be the basis of any energy policy that we develop as we seek to strengthen and stabilize our economies. For many decades, our major source of energy has been oil. The result has been a total dependence on oil producing countries which indirectly dictate our economic policies and hold our economies hostage. This dependence, coupled with the current global financial crisis and its associated negative impact on our island economies, highlights the urgent need of the ECCU member states to aggressively pursue measures that would in the future make our economies less susceptible to external shocks. Christopher Flavin, President of World Watch Institute noted that, “The dominant economies of the 21st Century will be those that are in the forefront of a new energy system.” Clearly, much is at stake and we must act now!

The exploration of alternative energy sources is the first step to overcoming these challenges. Although lacking in the natural resource of oil, the islands of the ECCU are naturally blessed with renewable energy sources of wind, solar, water and geothermal energy. For too long with a few exceptions we have been blindfolded to the fact that we have in our possession the means of making our economies more energy independent. In the Caribbean, the sun shines daily, and deep within our volcanoes lies great wealth in geothermal energy. The Trade Winds blow daily. Modern technology makes it possible to turn sunlight, wind, geothermal power and even ocean currents into useful energy forms. With the abundance of these renewable resources the governments of the region must therefore hasten to develop a unified policy to utilize them and to lessen our dependence on oil.

Unlike many parts of the world, the Caribbean is fortunate to experience the benefits of year-round sunshine. As a result, the construction and use of solar panels and residential water heaters would be most advantageous to the ECCU. Therefore, there is a need for the governments of the ECCU to begin encouraging the growth of energy efficient businesses by subsidizing the cost of land and building material, or even granting tax benefits for businesses in the solar energy market. While the cost of these panels may be considerably expensive, the benefits of a reliable energy source with unlimited, year-round supply would prove to be

more cost efficient in the long run. For example, Barbados has been recently at the forefront in providing and encouraging the use of solar energy. As a result, the country now boasts a more cost-effective and efficient way of providing energy to its residents. It is estimated by geologists that in the Caribbean, each square meter of surface area receives about 7 kWh of solar energy on a clear day during the dry season. As a result, a 430 square kilometer island like Barbados receives 3 billion kWh on such a day, the energy equivalent of about 1.87 million barrels of oil. An abstract written by Oliver Headley, professor at the University of West Indies, Cave Hill, entitled “Barbados Renewable Energy Scenario Current Status and Projections to 2010”, stated that “For the year 2000 with about 32,000 solar water heaters installed in Barbados, if each one saves 4,000kWh per year, the total electricity saving is 128 million kWh and at 154US/kWh, the financial savings to the consumers is \$19.2 million US/year.” If this represents the amount of savings that Barbados could have in a year due to the use of solar efficient techniques, one can only imagine the overall savings of the ECCU.

There is also the need for the ECCU to invest in geothermal energy. In Nevis, there have been significant strides made to harness this resource. The government is working assiduously to bring to completion a project which will allow Nevis to become 100% self-sufficient in renewable geothermal energy and to be able to export to other islands. Antigua, BVI, and St. Kitts are already showing

keen interest in the development of this project. However, if larger Caribbean territories such as Dominica and St. Lucia (where the geothermal potential is greatest) would adopt geothermal policies, the overall impact of this project would be much more beneficial to the ECCU. Therefore, these countries should begin seeking the necessary funding needed to construct geothermal plants that would provide sufficient energy domestically and exportation to other countries, thereby reducing their oil dependence and increasing their foreign revenue.

Energy efficiency and renewable energy are said to be the “twin pillars” of a sustainable energy policy. The governments of the islands, while attempting to increase the use of renewable energy must at the same time develop and promote energy conservation. Industrial and commercial users must be encouraged to reduce energy cost through efficient energy use. Consumers should be encouraged to use energy efficient appliances, buy energy efficient vehicles such as hybrid cars and use energy efficient bulbs. The government should introduce a rigorous enforcement of vehicle emission standards, along with tax incentives for energy efficient, low emission vehicles. Furthermore, the use of energy efficient light bulbs should be mandatory for all industrial/commercial businesses enforcing the need for businesses to conform to energy efficiency policies. Policies should also be adopted to enforce the mandatory use of solar water heating systems and the use of energy efficient vehicles for all government departments and agencies to

encourage the use of these commodities. There is also the need for regional energy auditors, approved by ECCU governments, who would be mandated to conduct audits to ensure that the major industries and businesses conform to the policies of energy efficiency. Each island should have an appointed board responsible for ensuring that all major businesses (existing and potential) are aware of these policies and are fined for failure to comply with these regulations. To accomplish this, governments must pursue a rigorous program geared towards raising the level of awareness of the benefits of conserving energy and provide incentives for such conservation. Such incentives would include the provision of tax concessions to those consumers and businesses that invest and embrace energy saving initiatives. As a means of raising awareness, the energy efficiency of consumer products should be identified wherever possible by product labeling and verification through a local and regional standards agency, i.e. each product should be graded according to how energy efficient it is. This would make it easier for our people to understand and embrace the entire concept of energy efficiency and conservation.

The production of renewable energy requires considerable input of time and technology. With limited resources and lack of skills, the ECCU must establish important linkages with other nations which have already become energy self-sufficient e.g. Japan and Iceland. The establishment of such partnerships will assist the transition from a fossil fuel economy to a clean energy economy. Linkages

could be established whereby full scholarships are offered by these countries to members of the ECCU for study in various renewable energy fields. This education could lead to increased possibilities for ensuring the longevity and efficiency of our regional energy policy, as the development of the human resource base would strengthen the capacity of ECCU governments to make appropriate renewable energy choices and implement pragmatic energy policies.

The energy challenges that we face today send a clear message to the governments and citizens of the ECCU that now is the time for action! Our countries must embrace wholeheartedly, the concept of sustainable energy development which is no longer just an environmental necessity but also, an economic and social imperative in shaping the future of the ECCU. With a vigorous pursuit of all the goals outlined in this ambitious energy agenda, we can all be the beneficiaries of a brighter future - One that is predicated on energy independence!