

**Renewable Energy – Bridging the Caribbean Divide - An EU perspective**  
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In a few days I will attend the Caribbean Renewable Energy Forum and speak on a panel which will discuss donor harmonisation and absorption capacities of Caribbean countries. I think it is therefore highly relevant to present some of the thinking of the European Union on the Caribbean's transition to a higher proportion of renewable energy in the energy mix. It is said that for one to be fully conversant in a foreign language one must think in that language; and I believe the same holds true for Renewable Energy (RE). Renewable Energy pertains to energy sourced directly from the sun, wind, marine or geothermal – to name a few. If the Caribbean is to fully integrate Renewable Energy into its development path so that it impacts on its economy, then it must adjust its mind-set to do so. In short, the Caribbean must adopt an RE mentality! This is no doubt easier said than done, I do acknowledge that. But with the high education levels of the region, relatively robust governance systems, proximity to and extensive exchanges with very developed economies and the substantial amounts of investments offered by both donor agencies and the private sector, a very sound basis exists on which to achieve the goals of the region.

Currently, access to Renewable Energy in the region is much skewed. Only a few Caribbean citizens have had the opportunity to educate themselves on the benefits, and even fewer have actually implemented various Renewable Energy systems with attendant benefits, despite the affordability of the technology, financing opportunities and very impressive "payback" periods. Renewable Energy seems to be perceived as being for the "elites", while in many countries in the region the fuel adjustment clause still hits the most vulnerable harder than the rest of the population.

The Caribbean realities of; low penetration of Renewable Energy into the energy mix; insufficient Renewable Energy specialists and technicians; energy monopolies – with varying degrees of commitment to Renewable Energy; in many cases outdated grid systems; "non-implementation" of policies, legislation and regulations; education systems lacking in Renewable Energy curriculum; relatively low public awareness; lifestyle and business practices which do not acknowledge the cost of energy nor reflect the rich and available Renewable Energy resources within the region, are well known and documented.

Each of the above factors warrants extensive discussion and debate. However, the purpose of this article is only to propose a few ideas for "first steps" as to how these impediments can be overcome. Subsequently, actions, project implementation and strong regional leadership should serve to realise "the bridge" to fully integrate Renewable Energy into the economies and the national development agenda.

I will propose ideas in just three areas; education; lifestyle changes; policy, legislation and regulation.

Education is fundamental. Similar to the efforts in the hospitality sector, the Renewable Energy sector must ensure that all aspects of the sector are captured at various levels of the school

curriculum. The curriculum at the primary, secondary and tertiary level should all feature aspects of the Renewable Energy subject matter. In this regard, it is vital that a gender balanced approach is adopted. On a general level too public education should inform citizens of the region on making energy choices when purchasing appliances and the affordability and financing options for installing Renewable Energy equipment in their homes. Part of the "education" approach must also be supported by the private sector, where the larger firms and companies can take the lead to purchase electric vehicles (EV), as one example, and hence catalyse an electric vehicle transformation. An important part of the education spectrum must also be research and development (R&D), and innovation. These are important variables in the development equation as there needs to be a more deliberate, concerted and innovative effort by Caribbean countries to invest in the creation of new knowledge and attract financing for R&D.

In a state of conflict persons are required to make lifestyle changes. Essentially the Caribbean is fighting an undeclared conflict on high energy prices and energy insecurity, both of which have significantly adverse effects on the development of the region. At the same time, the Caribbean will cement its already strong moral case in international climate change negotiations by a radical adoption of Renewable Energy and Energy Efficient measures. So one could expect the countries to be on a "red alert" – are they? Have Ministries of Energy in the region been adequately staffed and procedures reviewed to drive and monitor the change? Have rigorous consultation processes been established to discuss what needs to be done, why, how, by whom and when? Are individuals and businesses constantly reviewing their energy behaviour and consumption? Are standards being set and enforced for building, appliance and vehicle consumption levels? When the answers to these questions can all be answered in the affirmative, the region will be well set on its path to "thinking in the Renewable Energy language".

Volumes have been written on the importance of legislation, policy and regulation for establishing sound investment climates and general sector development frameworks. However, it is not sufficient merely to enact these. They must be implemented, regularly updated and reviewed by all stakeholders in a country to reflect changing technologies, changing times and to encourage, mandate and inform the Renewable Energy development strategy. These are pre-requisites for bridging the divide. It may be claimed that in many countries of the region, these already exist. This is well, but are they then also translated into action? If this is not the case, stakeholders must collectively find out why not. Policies, legislation and regulation should not be seen as passive documents but must be actively reworked to deliver and reflect changing times, technologies and circumstances.

There are countless examples of countries, cities, utilities and organisations that have taken ambitious strides in renewable energy and energy efficiency, it is time that the Caribbean shows its strength and joins this group – sooner rather than later.

Diane Moss of the Renewables 100 Policy Institute notes that “Places like Germany succeed in part because of good government policy. But they also think a little bit more long term. They recognise the local "value added" brought by renewables; not sending money elsewhere for fuel, creating jobs, boosting the tax base, even attracting tourists”. Would it not be great if one day she referred to the Caribbean in this manner instead? I believe it is entirely possible and, fully

recognising our obligations and partnership, the EU stands ready to support this "change of mind-set" to share the benefits of Renewable Energy for all the citizens of the Caribbean.