



ENERGY/RENEWABLE ENERGY **in the Caribbean**

Interview
with

HON. GREGORY RUSLAND
Minister of Natural Resources
Suriname

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INTRODUCTION

The Caribbean Renewable Energy Development Programme (CREDP) 2004 -2009 is financed by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) with additional support provided by the Government of Germany through its aid agency the GTZ. The UNDP is the GEF Implementing Agency and the CARICOM Secretariat is the Executing Agency.

Participating countries: The Bahamas; Barbados; Belize; Cuba; Dominica; Grenada; Guyana; Jamaica; St. Kitts and Nevis; St. Lucia; St Vincent and the Grenadines; Suriname; Trinidad and Tobago. Most are Small Island Developing States or low-lying coastal states, and net importers of energy, almost entirely in the form of petroleum. Energy imports are a critical element in the countries of the Region's balance of payments management.

The main objective of this project is to remove the existing barriers to developing renewable energy technologies in the Caribbean through various coordinated interventions at the national and regional level.

As CREDP comes to a close and the CARICOM Secretariat develops an Energy Programme, it was seen as critical to consult with Ministries responsible for Energy within the CREDP countries to capture their commitment to facilitate renewable initiatives in the project network: the region in general.

In an interactive approach, the CARICOM Secretariat embarked on face-to-face consultations with the Energy/Renewable Energy Constituency in Member States; Ministers, Ministries and Departments of Energy, Utilities, and universities in the Region in 2009.

This series of transcripts of interviews conducted by Carlton James, Advocacy and Communications Adviser, CARICOM Secretariat, is an output of those consultations.

INTERVIEW

CJ: How would you describe the situation in Suriname in relation to Energy and Renewable Energy?

Minister:

Indeed I think as a country we are in a good position in terms of availability of energy resources. If we look at the Suriname situation at the moment we find that 100% of energy provided to the capital and the surrounding areas is provided through hydro-power. We have a hydro-power dam with the capacity to produce 189 megawatts of energy but at the moment we utilize about 140 megawatts. There is enough to provide the majority of our population with energy.



Gregory Rusland
Environment Minister, Suriname

We have had top level consultations in Suriname where I invited the management of all major companies, institutions, energy entities, and some key experts; for three days last year June, to discuss the situation and to plan for the next 15 years.

What we have found is that to meet the demands of energy over the next 15 years, we would have to go from 150-170 megawatts at the moment to 325 megawatts in the year 2023. That means we would have to find solutions.

The Government of Suriname has made it clear in its policy statement that energy issues or scarcity would never be a limiting factor in Suriname's development.

So what we have done is to look at the different possibilities starting even with nuclear energy, but that we feel is not an option for Suriname at the moment. Although we follow options very closely, clearly the interesting one of our renewable energy resources is primarily water. We feel that that is the opportunity and possibility which Suriname has to utilize to the fullest.

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We also have already, plans in place, but of course need some further evaluation in terms of environmental issues, in terms of social issues that have to be resolved, but we will be able to increase the capacity near the current hydro facility more than 300 megawatts.

We also have another possibility in the western part of Suriname, which is a little bit independent from the regular social and economic development. That's an opportunity for major industrial development in the western part of Suriname, which could provide another 400 megawatts of energy. It would be a major project which is related to smelters in the alumina sectors that we are considering at the moment.

In the short run we have to provide energy to the population and we will make use of the possibilities that we have. We have our own small State Oil Company. Through that company we have to make the maximum use of products like heavy fuel oil and we are thinking of putting generators or creating more generators. We already have reasonable capacity in terms of generators but we will increase that and utilize our heavy fuel oil potential to produce enough energy to support the different activities in Suriname.

As to renewable energy resources, we are looking at, for instance, solar energy possibilities, wind energy possibilities. We have our structures in place through the University of Suriname to keep a close eye on those developments. And of course where opportunities exist we will make use of those possibilities in order to support our energy needs.

CJ: Let us look at human resource development and your own connection with the university. Is there a programme at the university or any other secondary or tertiary institutions to develop and maintain a technical capacity in the area of energy:

Minister:

We are proud that the majority of those in charge of our Energy sector are from the University of Suriname. At the University of Suriname we have the Faculty of Technology with its Department of Electrical Energy. So I feel also in that sense, we are doing reasonably well.

CJ: There seems to be a unique arrangement between the Government of Suriname; your ministry, and industry. Do you see industry as part of the national resource for energy?

Minister:

As I mentioned earlier, one of the problems that I faced when I became the Minister of Natural Resources in 2005 was a lack of highly qualified personnel; in the area of energy for instance. We had to come up with

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strategies and policies in the energy area. The way we have done it is that we have mobilized the different institutions like the state energy company of Suriname and the power company, and we got management of those companies involved in what we are doing in our communities and to support the ministry,

For instance in the bio-energy area we have involved Statsolie company because Statsolie has the manpower, the human resources, the finances, and the structure to be able to set up projects in a reasonable time and what we have indicated to them is that once projects start running they can count on the involvement of the University of Suriname.



Hydro-power facility at Brokopondo

We also encourage University faculty to mobilize students so that after graduation they could deliver on-the-job activities which are needed in the country; maybe even in the Caribbean and beyond. So I think by doing that we have found the strategy to go around the human resource problems that we have within the government because of fewer facilities, less salaries, and so on, within the government, and make use of the people within the industry who are much better paid.

It is working up to now.

CJ: How do you see the relationship between energy and development?

There is an obvious correlation. I know that there are numerous studies which prove there is a direct relationship between the availability of energy and the economics, and also the developing countries, and the different regions. I think we should do, as we have mentioned in the multi-annual development plan of Suriname; make sure that energy would not be a limiting factor. We will always need to make sure that we have enough energy to support our economic and social development.

We have a situation in Suriname where we had on average 2,700 new connections on a yearly basis of the households in Suriname. The Government of Suriname provided some assistance; funds to our power company in 2006-2007 to make sure that we have enough electrical facilities to make the connections and so on. We had the lucky situation whereby we had enough hydro-energy and what we see is there was a

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jump from 2,700 to about 6,000 new connections on a yearly basis since 2007.

That demonstrates that once you provide the energy to the population and to the society, you will see directly the development, because if people know that they can count on the availability of energy it will give them incentives to build their houses, create industries and so on. So again, in our small country we have seen the direct link between the two practices.



CJ: Is there any documentation that came out of your consultation with the private sector which could perhaps be used as a template for other Caribbean countries in articulating their vision?

Minister:

I asked the IDB since 2007 for their support in updating the energy situation and to come up with clear guidelines on what to do in the next 15 years.

We reached an agreement and IDB financed a study of the energy sector. When the study started, we created and helped top-level energy consultants from the IDB to set out the guidelines for the study and that information is fully worked out in a document presented by some of the consultants from the IDB.

We now have a documented report and I am going to hire some consultants to set out the actions that have to be taken in order to fulfill the role that we have set out in that document. That's where we are and indeed there is a document already produced in cooperation with us and the IDB.

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CJ: Role of the CARICOM Secretariat. What should the Secretariat be doing in the area of Energy and Renewable Energy?

Minister:

I think what the CARICOM Secretariat has to look for, is to see where you have the major expertise within the region, and not try to re-invent the wheel, but try to make use of the expertise that exists in Suriname, in Trinidad and other areas of the region. Try also to make use of those structures in order to support the countries that are in lesser position than say the larger Caribbean countries where energy is concern.



A Briefing for the CARICOM/UNDP Team by Faculty of Anton de Kom - University of Suriname

So, the Caribbean Community Secretariat should play more of a facilitating role in the area of energy as far as the structure is concern and again the support to the smaller nations so that they also have the developments that they need.

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