



In 2017, the Energy Unit of the CARICOM Secretariat organised a **Youth Essay Competition** as part of its activities marking the CARICOM Energy Month. Wishing to involve the younger



generation in energy-related issues and their fallout and thereby transform it into a channel for promoting awareness of clean energy solutions, and with a view to giving a voice to Caribbean youth regarding their dreams of their future in a changing world,

the CARICOM Secretariat invited participants to submit an essay about the need to advance the region's sustainable energy transition and their vision of how their country could support this move.

In this feature we present the Secondary Education laureate of the younger section (corresponding to Forms 1-3 / Grade 7-9): fourteen-year old **Ariel Albert of St. Joseph's Convent in Saint Lucia**, who proved that one can present structured arguments in favour of the transition to sustainable energy effectively, while also respecting the 700-word limit of the competition's rules!

In her native Saint Lucia, Ariel Albert is already making a name for herself as an academic achiever, as she was her year's top Common Entrance performer with a score of 96.67 percent and has since won awards in essay competitions about vocational training and the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court's role. Ms Albert's seriousness towards her studies, as well as a commitment to doing her best in everything she undertakes, are inspired by her parents, and especially by her mother whom she admires for her hard work and dedication.

In fact, it was her mother who informed her of the essay competition and who also motivated her to take part in it. This said, excellence does not mean she is swollen headed, as her reaction to the CARICOM Award proves: *"I think of it as an honour that I was able to write the winning essay against competitors from throughout the region,"* she says, before adding *"I am also pleased that I am able to present something to my school through my work"* referring to the prize of a multimedia projector offered by the CARICOM Secretariat to her school to celebrate and share her achievement.



When asked whether her approach to renewable energy also reflects an interest in working in the energy sector in the future, Ms Albert is candid: *"A lot of research went into the writing of this essay and so I was able to learn numerous things about conserving energy. I believe that it is indeed beneficial to any country to practice the use of alternative energy sources. Although I would not consider working in this field, I am interested in the topic, as through my classes and research I have learnt that it plays a role in protecting the environment."* After all the research to familiarise herself with the subject, what advice would she have for Caribbean governments and

for her own country? *“I would urge governments to start saving/generating money, as I am aware that it is expensive to set up the equipment needed to start the alternative energy programmes. Revenue can be generated through fund raisers and many other means. Although it would be dear at first, in the long run the island will surely benefit.”*

“If people cannot write well, they cannot think well, and if they cannot think well, others will do their thinking for them,” George Orwell (1903-1950) is credited with saying. Ms Albert is obviously someone who thinks, as one can see from her essay, reproduced in its integrity below.



### **The Importance of Practicing Sustainable Energy Production Amongst CARICOM Nations**

Sustainable energy is energy produced through the use of renewable energy sources. These energy sources include, but are not limited to: solar energy, geothermic energy, hydroelectric energy and wind generated energy. The use of these alternative fuel sources prevents the exhaustion of the world’s resources and ultimately helps to preserve the environment. Regional organisations like the Caribbean Sustainable Energy Program (CSEP), a joint initiative between CARICOM and other worldwide organisations, have spearheaded a project to change the means of energy production in several Caribbean countries. This initiative encourages nations to switch from deriving energy from fossil fuels to deriving it through sustainable energy. Sustainable energy production has various benefits and as such endeavours should be encouraged.

Energy is normally obtained through the burning of fossil fuels. When this burning occurs, harmful gases are emitted into the atmosphere and these in turn have a negative effect on the climate by contributing to global warming. The effects of climate change have been of particular interest to the Caribbean region, as hurricanes have gained intensity and major storms are more frequent. Only this year, 2017, some islands in the region were devastated by hurricanes Irma and Maria. There are many other signs that the climate is changing drastically and this is largely due to the way we obtain energy. Indeed, the Caribbean has become hotter, dryer and eventually the beaches that so many island states depend on for tourism may eventually disappear. The more CARICOM countries, and the rest of the world, depend on fossil fuels, the more we damage the earth.

Another reason to engage in sustainable energy production is that fossil fuels are non-renewable resources. This means that it takes a long period of time for them to be replenished. If we continue to use fossil fuels, then future generations will not be able to benefit from their use. Whereas, sustainable energy utilizes renewable resources. This ensures that future generations will not be left without a means of energy production whether we are referring to their lack of resources to continue the usual means of energy production, or their ignorance on ways to conserve energy due to a lack of exposure to the matter.

Crude oil is expensive not only because it is a non-renewable resource, but also because fossil fuels undergo a long process to be converted to oil. Not only this, but fossil fuels are difficult to obtain as a lot of drilling is required. Since most Caribbean nations do not engage in oil production, the region needs to import oil from other nations, which in turn increases the import bill. High fuel prices on the world market in turn have a serious impact on our fragile economies. On the other hand, sustainable energy utilizes resources that are readily available and in abundance. Therefore, by switching to sustainable energy production, countries will be able to

save a lot of money that would have been spent on imported oil. By investing in solar energy, for instance, the Caribbean can enjoy a lower energy bill as sunshine is in abundance here.

One may argue that it would be expensive for countries to shift to an entirely new system; however, the long term benefits outweigh the costs. Countries can seek to source funding through grants and loans and government can use cost savings to repay the loans and to eventually invest in other much needed social infrastructure. The transition would need to be gradual, but the benefits of such investments would be worth the initial sacrifice.

In conclusion, investing in sustainable energy would be extremely beneficial not only to the environment, but would also benefit the various countries who make the necessary investments as this effort will not only help the current generation, but will also save the planet for future generations. Investing in sustainable energy can save the Caribbean region but we need to work together, as CARICOM will have a greater voice than individual islands in the international arena. CARICOM and the rest of the world need to join forces and make the necessary investments to mainstream sustainable energy production.