



In this feature, we present **Adrian Thomas**, Nominee, Energy Personality Award

In 2017, as part of CARICOM Energy Month, the CARICOM Secretariat organised three regional competitions:

- the **Energy Personality Award**, to recognize someone who has made, or is making, an exceptional contribution to a sustainable energy future in the Region;
- the **Young Energy Artist Competition**, for children aged 12 and under;
- the **Energy Month Youth Essay Competition**, for students in three categories: tertiary (ages 16-30), secondary (Forms 1-3/ Grade 7-9) and secondary (Forms 4-6/ Grade 10-13).

A petroleum geo-scientist and renewable energy engineer, Adrian Thomas is responsible for launching RE-New Caribe, an initiative targeted at driving a “green energy revolution” throughout the Caribbean by working closely with schools and communities. Established recently as a non-governmental organisation with Mr Thomas at its helm, RE-New Caribe has already initiated activities about sustainable energy and recycling in schools on Tobago, with community projects in rural electrification also taking off in Guyana. The objective Mr Thomas has set himself is audacious, but his willingness to put his knowledge and expertise at the service of civil society is bearing fruit, not least because he dedicates part of the profits he makes through consultancies for corporate clients and from his import business of LED light bulbs to ensure RE-New Caribe’s funding. His experience shows how one can make a real difference when combining a responsible business activity with dedicated, generous volunteer work at the community level.

“I have always been into earth science,” says Adrian Thomas, “since I was 4 or 5 years old I have been interested in nature, and this is what has taken me to the field of energy.” Trained as an engineer, he began his career in the oil industry but “I was then presented with the opportunity of a Chevening scholarship to study renewable energy, and I jumped at it”. He is now one of the region’s pioneers in the promotion of solar and other renewable sources of energy.

So, what could have motivated him to make this professional transition from the dominant petroleum industry in his native country to this new field of renewable energy, and to working with schools and communities to demonstrate the benefits of alternative sources? “Yes,” he says, “Trinidad has oil, we have it for now, but it’s not sustainable. We must also realise that the average household consumption of energy in Trinidad and Tobago is three times higher than the region’s average. We need to be much more efficient, and we need to diversify.”

His motivation also comes from his concern for sustainability at a broader level. “A few years ago,” says his colleague who nominated Adrian Thomas for the Energy Personality Award, “he realised that while all countries in the Caribbean have agreed to the Paris Global Climate Change Agreement of 10% installed renewable energy power generation by 2021, to date many countries have achieved less than 1%, with little to no policy or agenda to accelerate action. With passion and tenacity, Mr Thomas took personal responsibility to do his part as a citizen of this great region, and so devised a plan to pursue urgent action towards combatting climate change and its impact. “

Therefore, while remaining professionally involved as a development geologist and as a consultant providing services in energy auditing, in the design and installation of PV solar systems and solar water heaters, in the design of megawatt-scale solar farms and in project management, Adrian Thomas and several like-minded colleagues started the Re-New Caribe Initiative. With a focus on education and community development, this young non-governmental organisation currently has two main programmes: the Re-new School Based Initiative (RSBI) and the Re-New Community Based Initiative (RCBI).

The RSBI started with pupils at the Signal Hill Secondary School in Tobago, with three complementary activities:

- training in energy management and auditing, with 70 pupils introduced to energy management and carbon mitigation techniques;
- the installation of a 3.6 kw PV solar system (resulting in the mitigation of 7 metric tons of CO₂ annually), simultaneously educating the pupils on the science behind solar technologies as well as in the installation processes of these systems;
- educating pupils about recycling and collecting recyclable materials.



*PV system installed
at Tobago’s Signal Hill Secondary School*

Based on the achievements in this pilot project, which also resulted in the development of an unofficial curriculum in renewable energy, energy management and conservation, the organisation has decided to scale up the project to complete all 10 secondary schools on the island of Tobago by the end of the 2019/2020 school year. Re-New Caribe actually sees this project as a model that can be used and replicated regionally.

With this and their other initiatives, the ambition of Adrian Thomas and of the other members of the organisation is to “drive the Green Energy Revolution to schools and communities throughout the Caribbean”. While it has been in existence for only two years, the NGO is already running

successful projects in Trinidad and Tobago and in Guyana, where a solar energy powered water pump system is being installed in an indigenous Amerindian village on the Mahaica River in the Demerara-Mahaica region, which will serve to provide water to all 1800 residents of the village.

At the same time, Adrian Thomas' business involvement in Haiti (where he is already contributing to four projects) and in Grenada may lead to other school and community-based projects in those countries. In each case, Adrian Thomas wants to ensure that his approach is tailored to local realities and needs of the country. "Solar energy has a lot of potential in Haiti," he says, but one of the challenges there, is that the introduction of PV technology "is still largely grant-based; we need to find ways to stimulate private sector involvement".

Adrian Thomas is positive about the progress made in the region, but also very well aware of what is needed to accelerate the transition to sustainable, affordable and reliable energy for all in the Caribbean. "First, we all need to work with common goals," he points out and he highlights the value of an integrated regional policy as well as the importance of activities, such as the CARICOM Energy Month, that raise public awareness.

"I want to see the Caribbean as energy resilient," he says, "and to achieve that we need to grow our energy mix. We also need to invest in innovation, in all aspects of innovation. It's easy to get the Chinese PV panels, but we need to reward the real innovators in the region. Sure, we benefit from imported technology and there are useful lessons to learn from other parts of the world, but we need research and development, and governments must adopt policies that promote innovation, including incentives."

As a consultant and businessperson, Adrian Thomas is well aware of the market forces that shape the nascent renewable energy sector. For example, "too many of the bids for solar farms in the region go to foreign contractors," he laments, and this is largely because "there are not many regional private sector players" that are able to handle large investments. He also sees a role for financial institutions, including the commercial and development banks, which need to be prepared to support regional businesses capable of working on a large scale.

So, why would a qualified professional with a successful business spend a significant amount of time, energy and money to create and support a non-governmental organisation? "I wanted to find a way whereby I could influence the younger generation and help them to think differently," says Adrian Thomas.

Indeed, this is an innovative and powerful model, where businesspeople working in renewable energy contribute not only their time, but also part of their income to education and community development. When Adrian Thomas provides consulting services in renewable energy, he donates 20% of the profits from his renewable energy ventures to on-going projects. He also imports and sells LED bulbs, donating 10% of the profit to the organisation.

"I don't want to see profit as my priority," he declares and, by his own admission, "I am really enjoying the school-based teaching and learning". Perhaps it is his early passion for nature and science that he now enjoys sharing with students and communities, a passion that is helping to make the Caribbean – and therefore the planet as a whole – a more liveable place, for ourselves and for the generations coming after us.



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