

ENERGY POLICY: TIME FOR COHERENCE AND ACTION

Dr Khalil Elahee
Faculty of Engineering
The University of Mauritius

Background

The Republic of Mauritius was the first country to ratify the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992. Prior to that, the National Energy Conference held in 1980 at the University of Mauritius in collaboration with the former Ministry of Energy already highlighted the potential of Energy Efficiency and Energy Conservation.¹ While in the 80's considerable emphasis was laid on Energy Planning and Policy for economic reasons², the last decade has witnessed the rising importance of environmental considerations. The National Long Term Perspective Study of 1997 proposed a vision of a country self-sufficient in energy and making high use of clean energy around 2020, relying on 'sensible conservation measures'.³ The National Environmental Strategies (1999) specifically refer to the need 'to encourage energy conservation'⁴. The Initial National Communication under UNFCCC published in 1999 provided a directory of GHG emissions and directed towards measures to curb CO₂ emissions.⁵ A soft-loan programme to promote the use of solar water heaters is currently run by the Development Bank of Mauritius. Although no specific reference has been made to the issue, the consistent adherence to the concept of sustainable development to be found in more recent legislations, action plans and official statements, implies that the time is appropriate for stepping up measures towards better Energy Management.⁶

Since 1999, the Republic of Mauritius has passed the psychological barrier of importing more than one million tonnes of oil equivalent of fossil fuel. This amount is expected to increase between 4 and 7 % annually, weighing significantly on the trade deficit, representing about 5 % of imports.⁷ Currently, less than 25 % of the energy requirements of the country are derived from non-fossil fuel sources (mostly hydro and bagasse) with such a reliance unlikely to change unless a holistic approach is adopted to management of energy resources.

¹ National Energy Conference, J. Baguant et al, The University of Mauritius, 1980.

² Energy Demand Policy and Planning for Mauritius, J. Baguant et al, University of Mauritius, 1990. See also Energy Sector Report No. 1, Ministry of Energy and Internal Communication, 1986.

³ VISION 2020, National Long Term Perspective Study, Ministry of Economic Development, Planning and Regional Cooperation, 1997.

⁴ National Environmental Strategies for the Republic of Mauritius, Government of Mauritius, 1999, p36.

⁵ Up to 9 % of CO₂ emissions were from commercial and residential sectors with as much as 36 % of electricity produced, mostly from fossil fuel, also used in households. Initial National Communication under UNFCCC, Republic of Mauritius, April 1999, p34.

⁶ Examples include the Central Electricity Board Corporate Strategy document, the proposed Reform on Local Government, the Town and Country Planning Act and the Environmental Protection Act.

⁷ Central Statistical Office, all data are sourced from the <http://ncb.intnet.mu/cso> website, unless otherwise stated.

The Republic of Mauritius is an 'islands-state' with the different islands separated by large distances, all situated far away from the continents. Mauritius, Rodrigues and the outer-islands are all vulnerable to climatic disturbances as they are also affected by disruption in the trade and air travel routes as a result of conflicts. However, the Republic of Mauritius – devoid of many natural resources and depending on the import of several needs, including energy – can assume the role of a regional leader in Energy Management. The latter concept can prove to be a tool for sustainable development and the working example of the Republic can be replicated elsewhere with proper adaptation.

Barriers

In spite of the political will expressed through the declaration of national priorities and the adoption of a number of measures, several barriers stand in the way of Energy Management:

- A coherent, comprehensive and effective institutional framework, including legal aspects, is lacking for the implementation and monitoring of Energy Management activities.
- The awareness and knowledge of key stakeholders, including decision-makers, architects, technicians and engineers, in relation to Energy Management is insufficient. Clients and the lay-people have not been sensitized yet with the scope of measures that can be adopted. Lack of information is a severe barrier.
- Private sector - public sector interaction is not fully developed to ensure that projects are cost-feasible. Technology and know-how transfer barriers, insufficient small-scale entrepreneurship and difficulties in promoting indigenous techniques or technologies, research and innovation are major obstacles.
- National and cross-sectoral policies on Energy and Environment, including investment-related policies, have to be fully harmonized along with the major reforms or programmes being introduced in different sectors (Energy including Electricity Generation, National Physical Development, Local Government, Environment, Taxation, International and Regional Cooperation, etc).
- Lack of standards on Energy Usage with respect to buildings, building materials and appliances that affect the energy consumption is another barrier. The local market for such items is scarce under current conditions. The energy services sector is also yet to flourish in the country. Access to capital to invest in Energy Efficiency and Energy Conservation, whether at entrepreneur level or at consumer level, is another serious barrier.

Recommendations

It is recommended to adopt the following policy measures IMMEDIATELY:

- Develop a holistic approach relating 'horizontally' the following dimensions of Energy Management in the Republic of Mauritius: Energy, Engineering, Economics, Environment and Ethics .

- ‘Vertically’ integrate national and cross-sectoral policies in view of ensuring greater coherence and effective implementation. Emphasis should be placed on the facilitatory role than can be played by an enhanced institutional set-up to promote the wider concept of Energy Management.
- Promote capacity-building at various levels, from public awareness programmes to research and development, in order to remain in phase with new developments in Energy Management techniques and technology. Local creativity and innovation should also be encouraged.

The Government should also prepare a White Paper on Energy leading to the adoption of clear national long-term policies and strategies. Industry and other stakeholders need clear signals of the intentions of the Government in order to take initiatives. The following issues should be addressed:

- The importance of Energy Management.
- The strategic choice of energy sources for Mauritius.
- Energy, economy and environment interactions.
- The pricing policy for different sectors of the economy.

In the Third Millennium, Energy Management should prove to be vital for sustainable development. Mauritius is in a strategic position and satisfies the social and politico-economic conditions to emerge as a leading promoter of Energy Management in neighbouring African and Asian countries. The future of Mauritius lies in its assuming a responsible leadership in relation to Energy, Environment, Economy and Engineering (E4) issues affecting itself and its African and Asian neighbours.

Dr Khalil ELAHEE
Lecturer, Faculty of Engineering, The University of Mauritius
Réduit, MAURITIUS
Tel 230 454 1041
Fax 230 465 7144
Email: elahee@uom.ac.mu

Author holds a PhD in Energy Management (Mauritius) and an M.A from Cambridge(UK). He specializes in Energy Management; Energy Engineering; Energy & Environment; Applications of Thermodynamics and Thermal Sciences including Steam Engineering; Energy Policy; Environmental Monitoring & Control with emphasis on Energy issue and on

Energy in Africa and in the Indian Ocean region. He has acted as consultant for international organizations including the UN and the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie.

