

Can't be left behind

By Janelle Riley-Thornhill

I HAVE long been of the firm belief that not enough emphasis has been placed on alternative energy in this country, in particular solar energy. I fear that if we are not careful, we will be left behind as more of the world moves in this direction.

I have no doubt that many persons in this country would agree that at both the private and public sector levels, we have not capitalised on alternative energy as we should and that even greater steps need to be taken in this direction, sooner rather than later. Indeed, Barbados was a pioneer in the solar water heater industry, but since that development a few decades ago, how much effort has been made to utilise and harness the power from the sun?

Certainly, the Barbados Light and Power (BL&P) should be commended for looking at alternative options to fossil fuels to provide electricity for the

thousands of households in this country. However, the reality is that as more and more houses come on stream, we will need to employ even more alternative energy options to power them as the demand may begin to far outstrip the supply.

Now while I appreciate and endorse the wind energy option that the BL&P has proposed, I support even more their solar energy pilot initiative, as in my opinion there are by far more environmental and economic benefits to be derived from that option. From my research, while it appears that photovoltaic cells will not generate power at a rate that is significantly cheaper for Barbadians who currently purchase it from the local electric company, those cells, if introduced and used on a wide scale, will save this country a significant amount of foreign exchange as it relates to the purchase and importation of oil, as well as reduce our contribution to the greenhouse gas

emissions.

I have heard our Prime Minister Freundel Stuart say that Barbados needs to make more effective use of solar energy. This could not have come from a more influential person and I think that as a country we need to take his words to heart. It is disheartening to see that while our island was once a leader in this area, we have become lackadaisical almost to the point now that we are asleep at the wheel.

I was pleased then when Government signed a loan agreement with the Inter-American Development Bank for \$10 million to establish a smart energy fund, intended to promote the use of renewable sources of energy and promote a consciousness among the Barbadian public of the need for energy conservation. What I want now is to see that energy fund in action. Additionally, the recent effort in the budget to help the agricultural sector by offering a rebate of up to

\$5 000 to livestock farmers who retrofit their structures with the use of solar energy is also a good endeavour. But that is not enough.

We need to put options in place across the board to assist companies and individuals alike to embrace the alternative energy idea, and in particular solar energy. I maintain that it is not enough that we simply use the sun to heat our water. The sun's power is infinite and we too should have an infinite number of possibilities to explore using that energy option. So it should be utilised to power the security lights on our office complexes and houses; it should be used to power our automatic gates; to run our air condition units and big electricity guzzling items in our homes like the refrigerators and washing machines, just to name a few.

Therefore, I hope that in the coming months and year ahead I see more initiatives being undertaken in this area.