

Solar Energy Week Brings Message Down to Earth in Mexico

By Talli Nauman | October 10, 2006

National Solar Energy Week is like a breath of fresh air, set as it is against the backdrop of politicking over privatization of the Mexican petroleum industry in the upcoming presidential administration. The occasion fuels hope for clean alternatives to the dirty business of oil exploitation.

While the National Solar Energy Association (ANES) was holding its event October 2-6 in Veracruz, on the Gulf Coast of Mexico, the Group of Eight rich nations plus a dozen others were having their second G8 + 5 Ministerial Meeting on Climate Change, Clean Energy, and Sustainable Development October 3-5 in Monterrey, only a few hours from the border with the United States.

The association's agenda was the most recent addition to an ongoing 30-year effort to structure a national training program to help everyone from kids to scholars to decision-makers to end-users of electricity understand the utility of solar and wind power in cost effectiveness for health and the environment. Once the awareness is raised, great strides can be made in that realm.

ANES board member Eduardo Rincón Mejía, a professor at the Mexico State Autonomous University, speaks for many of Mexico's most brilliant minds when he notes that the country's abundance of sun and wind can provide for all its energy requirements for several centuries to come, if only we could somehow shift away from the current 90% dependence on fossil fuels.

Rincón says that Mexico has to get on the stick and move over to renewable energy sources within a 20-year time span if it expects any real development. "The advantages of such a change include the generation of hundreds of thousands of permanent jobs, a huge reduction in pollutant emissions, the reduction of deforestation and desertification, important savings on fossil resources, and the advancement of science and technology in the country," he says. It also would help decrease "the sense of urgency for the emigration of poor inhabitants from rural regions to other countries ... to diminish the import of fossil processed fuels, and to mend the water supply problem, among other economical, health, and social benefits," he adds.

Although some clean energy technologies are costly, many cheap, reliable, and efficient systems could be put to work immediately, with the spin-off of a boost for domestic industries. These systems include water and air heating and cooling, solar hot plates and ovens for cooking, wind generators, and photovoltaic applications.

For example, almost 30 million people nationwide consume food prepared using wood, which is bad for the forests and for people's lungs. Meanwhile, countless millions more use LP gas for cooking and water heating, which results in major emissions of carbon dioxide, hydrocarbons, and other pollutants. All the while, effective solar cookers and water heaters have been designed in Mexico. If only consumers could get them.

One project, partnering the Mexican Fund for the Conservation of Nature (FMCN), the World Health Organization, World Bank Development Marketplace, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the non-profit Solar Household Energy, Inc., has sponsored the manufacture and distribution of at least 500 passive solar crock pots in the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve of Querétaro state, in Oaxaca state and in Nuevo Leon state.

Now FMCN is working with Energía Portatil, S.A. and Lindblad Expeditions to encourage the latter's tour group members to donate toward subsidizing the cost of these hot pots for 1,000 families in the rural communities of the Gulf of California region in northwest Mexico.

Only the use of renewable energies can guarantee sustainable development for Mexico, but publicity and availability of more economical technologies are important to assure massive use here and in the rest of the world, concludes Rincón.



If the G8 + 5 got the message, the funding for that could flow. Their meeting was a follow up on the climate change mitigation plan they hashed out in Gleneagles, Scotland, last year. The drafters of the eight richest countries are from the United States, Canada, Russia, Germany, Italy, France, United Kingdom, and Japan. The + 5 are China, India, Brazil, South Africa, and Mexico.

As it stood, the Gleneagles Plan of Action failed to address short-term mechanisms for easing climate change woes and funding for same, especially in the more vulnerable countries, such as Mexico.

Environmentalists have called on the G8 + 5 to abandon illusive expectations for revitalizing the atomic industry to the benefit of the rich, nuclear equipped nations and focus instead on helping developing countries with renewable resource innovations in energy conservation.

This is really a matter of life and death, not to mention environmental justice and equitable distribution. The rich

countries emit 73 % of the CO2 greenhouse gas and use 61 % of the petroleum, while the poor ones feel the brunt of the climate change effects, which are already claiming 160,000 victims a year and are expected to claim double that by 2020.

It is imperative to bring the National Solar Energy Week message down to earth for the policymakers and purses-triang-pullers to get it.

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