



Organization of
American States

SUMMITS OF THE AMERICAS VIRTUAL COMMUNITY
Washington, DC



OEA/Ser.E
CVC/FV-9/13rev.1
15 March 2013
Original: Spanish

CONNECTING THE AMERICAS: ADVANCING PARTNERSHIPS FOR ACTION ON ENERGY, THE ENVIRONMENT, AND INFRASTRUCTURE

(Report on the Virtual Forum, held from March 5 to 15, 2013)

1. INTRODUCTION

This summary sets out the principal observations and recommendations emanating from the virtual consultation, **Connecting the Americas: Advancing Partnerships for Action on Energy, the Environment, and Infrastructure**, conducted by the Summit of the Americas Secretariat and the OAS Department of Sustainable Development, with support from the OAS Department of International Affairs from March 5 to 15, 2013. This virtual consultation made up part of the follow-up program, “Connecting the Americas: Advancing Partnerships for Action,” launched by the Secretariat, the objective of which is to move towards implementation of the commitments made at the Sixth Summit of the Americas.

The virtual consultation had participants from 18 countries, 15 of whom were from OAS member states and who made more than 175 comments, proposals and contributions to this topic. There was also active participation by representatives of civil society organizations, multilateral institutions, the private sector, and academia.

The forum shed light, through first-hand experiences, on situations encountered by many people in the region in the areas of energy, the environment, and infrastructure. Through an exchange of experiences and opinions, it was able to underscore the major challenges still confronting the Americas in those areas, and to propose some solutions.

2. PARTICIPANTS' PRINCIPAL OBSERVATIONS AND CONCERNS

Among other issues, during the forum the participants emphasized that it was essential to promote in society environmental responsibility and knowledge of renewable energies. The Americas have a vast wealth of natural resources that can be used sustainably to generate energy. A cultural change through education and promoting knowledge of renewable energies, shifts people's mentality about the environment. Strategies must be promoted within communities on efficient energy use and utilization of renewable sources. Without such actions to foster this cultural change, the sustainability goals to which we all aspire cannot be met. Change needs to come from the top down (from government leaders to citizens), but also from the bottom up, as a demand of the people for their government. Policies impose a change in behavior and foster cultural change. Government leaders are also guided, or at least should be, by the demands of the electorate, and citizens therefore play an essential role in setting any policy. Civil society must require the government to encourage and promote the sustainable use of renewable resources. Through those efforts, future generations will

gain greater awareness of these issues and act accordingly. Participants also said that intersectoral and public-private partnership are essential for bringing about cultural and policy change aimed at sustainable use of energy resources.

Participants discussed technological advances that offer opportunities for more effective resource use. For example, application of nanotechnology makes the use of photovoltaic panels more efficient, and so private investment in such technologies should be encouraged. Use of wind power requires the physical space to erect wind turbines. Hydroelectric works should be implemented so as to minimize the impact of their dams, etc. These are a few ideas related to the level of investment required to develop and establish nonconventional sources of energy. Technological advances can be made through financial and fiscal incentives for research and development.

Some obstacles to the expansion of decentralized microgeneration projects using renewable sources were also mentioned. For example, large-scale power generation projects to supply large cities tend to be favored over smaller projects that would benefit the small communities that need them most. Economic interests in such projects work against decentralized expansion of renewable sources.

Economic interests and financial needs related to developing a new, more sustainable energy infrastructure are clear obstacles to the advancement of new energy sources. A dialogue needs to be established with the owners of conventional power generation sources and with the entities that will finance the development of nonconventional sources. Moreover, citizens, as sovereigns and taxpayers, should not only be at the table in the dialogue, but should be guiding it.

Government policies on renewable energy were also on the agenda. Participants said that implementation of policies and standards promoting sustainability and energy efficiency should address the social, economic, and environmental dimensions. A segmented vision of the reality is ineffective when setting policy and establishing guidelines for action. Moreover, energy is a crosscutting issue that affects the economy, growth, industry, employment, the environment, national security, etc. These are all different aspects or facets of the three dimensions mentioned earlier. An energy policy that does not have a holistic vision and focuses on a single dimension, ignoring the others, is doomed to fail.

A unified state policy promoting use of renewable energies should be long-term and requires a framework of institutional and financial stability to achieve the stated goals. Through laws that strengthen the deployment of renewable energies and studies to determine the viability and potential of different sources, governments build confidence among investors interested in developing them. Government policies on renewable energy also create new sources of jobs and enhance the energy security of countries. One final aspect of this effort is interconnection both of national and supranational or regional electrical systems. This not only strengthens the energy security of each country and its interconnected systems, but also creates greater stability in the flow of electricity which, in the case of renewables, can be intermittent given the nature of those sources, with the exception of geothermal sources.

The importance of having a complete regional dialogue on the availability of renewable energy sources was underscored, noting that it should project medium and long-term demand. Such a diagnostic assessment would also be a way of promoting best practices on renewable energy, energy efficiency, and climate change.

One key issue raised by several participants was energy development and its relationship with indigenous communities and native peoples. The relationship that native communities have with the earth runs very deep. For these communities, this is not a simple equation in which the earth has an economic value that can be tapped—the earth is a valuable spiritual root system. It is very difficult to align the spiritual and economic conceptions of earth. Indigenous communities and native peoples have much to contribute to the debate on the innate value of the earth, respect for the environment, and appreciation of nature. To a certain extent, the modern concept of “sustainable development” responds to some of those concerns, but not all.

Lastly, participants mentioned the global benefits of energy matrices based on renewable resources. Oil combustion generates carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas that is causing global warming to a greater extent. A country, by reducing its carbon footprint, not only generates an environmental benefit for itself, but also for the entire planet.

3. PRINCIPAL RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSALS

- a. Hold awareness-raising campaigns on renewable energy, energy efficiency, and the importance of a healthy environment for lasting social and economic development.
- b. Promote intersectoral and public-private partnerships as a tool for bringing about cultural and policy change aimed at sustainable use of energy resources.
- c. Promote financial and fiscal incentives for research and development on renewable energy.
- d. Strengthen dialogue between the owners of conventional and nonconventional sources of energy, financing institutions, and civil society, with a view to establishing programs for the development and use of renewable energy.
- e. Implement unified, long-term policies and standards that promote sustainability and energy efficiency, by addressing the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of energy.
- f. Strengthen the institutional and financial frameworks geared towards economic and social growth with low carbon emissions.
- g. Expand the markets for renewable energy as a means for job creation and stimulating the economy in the region and its countries.
- h. Establish interconnections of national and supranational or regional electrical systems as a way to consolidate energy security in the region and make the flow of electricity which, in the case of renewables, can be intermittent given the nature of its sources, more stable.
- i. Promote the participation of indigenous communities and native peoples in the debate on the use of energy resources.
- j. Appraise the global benefits of energy matrices based on renewable resources as a way to fight global warming.