

Dominica advises small island states about geothermal energy:

It can work... but it's expensive

By ABU DHABI/CMC

DOMINICA is urging small island developing states (SIDS) not to pursue geothermal energy development unless they have strong partners to help cover costs and provide technical expertise.

'I'm excited, but I'm also very nervous because I'm tempted to tell my colleagues from the small island developing states, 'Don't do this; it's too expensive', Energy Minister Dr Vince Henderson told a ministerial roundtable as part of the 16th Assembly of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA).

'But the good news is it can work. We can get it done, but it will require the support of all of us around the table, and I can see some partners here who've helped us along the way,' Henderson told the discussion, dubbed 'Geothermal Heat and Power-Building a Resilient Energy Backbone'.

After nearly 20 years of investment, including research, Dominica is preparing to begin commercial operations at a ten-megawatt geothermal power plant in the Roseau Valley in March this year.

'So, the lessons learned are: strong partnerships are important. We need partners,' Henderson said, adding that Dominica would not have started geothermal energy development without the support of the European Union.

Henderson, who also has ministerial responsibilities for foreign affairs, international business and trade, said that, through a grant from the European Union, Dominica partnered with the neighbouring French territories of Guadeloupe and Martinique to conduct the first test drilling in 2011.

Later, other partners, including the United Kingdom, Iceland, the World Bank, and New Zealand, provided technical assistance, with support from the Clinton Global Initiative. 'We were able to work together, and it was just a consortium of partners that were able to assist us to reduce the cost,' Henderson said.

'Get the right people around the room' 'And it's not just bringing the money, but bringing the support, the advocacy, getting the right people around the room. And secondly- and I'm saying this for the benefit of especially the smaller states that are seeking to pursue geothermal energy-the right teams, local as well as foreign advisers, as transactional supporters.'

Henderson said legislation was one of the biggest challenges that Dominica faced.

'Even in our case, where we did not have the legislation, we're able to work our way into the legislation, even while we were pursuing the geothermal development,' Henderson said, adding, 'all of that was helpful because of the partnership we had with the World Bank, especially, and to some extent, the Caribbean Development Bank. But more, in particular, the World Bank.'

Henderson noted that IRENA has taken a very active role in promoting the development of geothermal energy.