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The Dominican Republic is an idyllic island with abundant sunshine. Yet it gets 80% of its energy from fossil fuels, which come from coal, natural gas, and fuel oil. But the government is committed to getting a quarter of its electricity from renewables in 2025 and 30% in 2030.

While visiting the island, national leaders explained that they are committed to reducing their CO2 emissions -- promises made under the Paris climate agreement. The focus is on decreasing their reliance on fossil fuels and increasing their use of green energy. It is necessary because oil and natural gas prices have risen dramatically -- a function of pent-up demand following the pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Emerging economies now must compete with the most developed nations for energy resources.

At the same time, the Dominican Republic's gross national product is 3% to 5% annually, driven in considerable measure by its tourism industry. But the country also has natural limitations in that it does not produce fossil fuels, and its distribution grid is isolated -- not interconnected with neighboring islands.

"The Dominican Republic's utility system will rely on natural gas for a long time," says Minister of Energy and Mines Antonio Almonte in a talk at his office just after Hurricane Fiona hit the island. "It is one of the primary fuels we have for electricity. But our goal is to get more than half of our energy from renewables by 2050. We are sure we can get to that -- as early as the 2030s if battery storage technology advances.

"Tourism is a pillar of our growth, and clean energy drives this," he says. "We must align the energy transition to the growth of tourism. Moreover, if we reduce exposure to geopolitics, we will obtain more independence and increase our energy security. Renewables help us reduce our exposure, especially to natural gas."

The Dominican Republic has a total of 5,000 megawatts of installed generation capacity. Coal is 30% and natural gas 39%, although this is variable because the power plants have the flexibility to use different fuels depending on the price. It started operating two coal-fired units in 2019 and 2020 because of its easy access to inexpensive and abundant Colombian coal, which it procures under long-term contracts.

Renewables comprise 17% of the country's electricity pie, primarily wind, solar, biomass, and hydro. Those fuels are expanding quickly to meet the 2025 goal: the government also bought last year 622 megawatts of solar power under power purchase agreements. Even more green energy facilities are on the drawing board -- at least 2,000 more megawatts. The country will easily exceed its 2030 aims if they all come to fruition, conditioned on affordable energy storage.

Moreover, its goal is to cut carbon emissions by a third by 2030, from 2010 levels, and to hit net zero by 2050. It is also expanding energy access to 300,000 residents near the Haitian border. Onsite solar panels using batteries and mini-grids are potential solutions.

The World Bank is supporting the Dominican Republic's pursuit of clean energy and high-quality jobs with \$1.8 billion over five years. The loans are contingent on increasing the sustainability of "landscape and natural resources" that include its water supplies.

"We have the potential to be one of the cleanest countries in the world," Edward Veras, executive director of the Dominican Republic's Energy National Commission, said in an interview at his office in Santo Domingo. Of the total fuel imports, "We import 25% of our electricity resources. Our energy transition will reduce this by at least 10% by making a sizable investment in renewables. We will create jobs by displacing coal and fuel oil and investing in renewables."

Foreign investors are incentivized to build clean energy plants in the Dominican Republic. A 2007 law provides a 100% tariff exemption on imported equipment and materials and tax relief for electricity produced from renewables. Veras says companies will invest at least \$2.5 billion in 2,000 MW -- more than 40 projects -- in the next three years.

Among the enterprises with a stake or an interest in the country: TotalEnergies, AES AES , Spain's Acciona Energia, Axpo Holding AG's Swiss-based UrbaSolar, France's Bas Corp. and Akuo Energy, Canadian Solar, Dominion Solar, and U.S.-based Polaris Energy Sources. And the Dominican Republic's Ege Haina and the InterEnergy Group are also buying in.

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