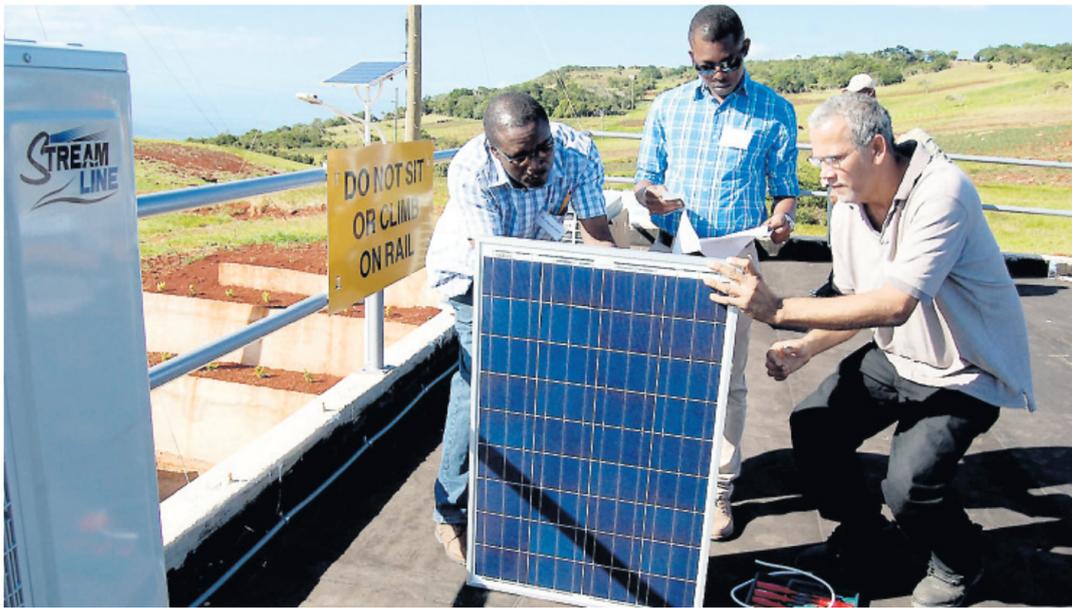


EARTH DAY

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FILE

Hands-on training is a key element of Wigton courses. Here (from left) Renford Smith, Marcus Grant and Alan Searchwell connect the electrical components of a solar panel at the Wigton Renewable Energy Training Lab in Rose Hill, Manchester, recently.

Recollections from a devastating tsunami

Amitabh Sharma
Contributor

MATSUSHIMA, Japan: MARCH 11, 2011 is clearly etched in Yuasa Tsunoda's mind: she was on a cruise boat on the seas off Matsushima Bay, eastern Japan, sharing with visitors the beauty of the islands in the bay area, when the crew received information that an earthquake had struck and a tsunami warning issued.

"My instinct was to stay calm. Passenger safety was important," Tsunoda, a tour guide, said. "We returned to the shore and evacuated all the passengers to the third floor of the building of the port."

And the tsunami struck; a wall of water rose and inundated Matsushima Bay. But the passengers and the crew from the cruise boat were safe.

"It is the power of Jizo (Buddhist deity, who is protector of the vulnerable, especially children, travellers, and expectant mothers) and the god of Shiyogama that saved us," Tsunoda said.

The tsunami surge stopped just outside the gate of Zuiganji, one of Buddhism's holy temples in Japan; a wooden marker bears testament.

Sensei (teacher or master) Yoichi Chiba, a monk at Zuiganji, was one of the first responders.

"We had people coming into the temple, locals and tourists, and we immediately moved them to the hills behind the temple," Chiba, general affairs director at Zuiganji, informed. "It was very cold and also started to snow, and the conditions were not good, so we moved the people to the temple after the tsunami had passed."

CALM COMPOSURE

Chiba was in constant touch with the authorities and got updates from the radio broadcasts. After the waters had subsided, he went to the local government offices and arranged for a bus to evacuate the tourists.

"It was the blessings of Date Masamune (samurai warrior and ruler of Matsushima) that we were able to avert a major disaster," Chiba, attired in a black robe, with a calm composure, said, referring to the decision on where to build the historic temple.

Meanwhile, six years on, Richard Halberstadt, director of Ishnomaki Community and Info Center, cannot control his emotions as he recalls one of his closest friends who was swept away in the tsunami surge.

"I don't understand why him, as he was into the scout movement, and trained people on disaster preparedness," Halberstadt said, tears brimming in his eyes and voice choking. It is a day, he says, which was out of a biblical prophecy.

Still, on most days at least, Halberstadt, like others in this coastal fishing town, find a reason to smile as they rebuild, rising above the rubble.



PHOTO BY AMITABH SHARMA

Sensei (teacher or master) Yoichi Chiba, a monk at Zuiganji temple at Matsushima. He was one of the first responders when the tsunami struck on March 11, 2011.

Wigton could stimulate renewables revolution

Petre Williams-Raynor
Contributing Editor

"BY BEING natural and sincere, one often can create revolutions without having sought them."

The Wigton Wind Farm team could be drawing inspiration from these words by French fashion designer Christian Dior, as it rolls out a training programme designed to fuel interest and inspire further action on renewable energy in Jamaica.

"It is open to anybody who has an interest. It is open to the general public," said Sanja Simmonds, engineer and training coordinator at the wind farm, which is located at Rose Hill in Manchester where they began the renewable energy training courses this year.

In January, the farm trained 20 people from across sectors — private and public, and including students as young as 19 years old — in photovoltaics.

"Once you have an interest, it just goes from there," Simmonds noted. "(The training) is how we can stimulate that interest and have greater interest for the technologies."

The first training course ran for three days, as will the next one looking at solar thermal energy to be held in April.

The third training course, which will focus on wind energy and hydro, will be held in July. The final one for the year will be held in November and focus on bio-energy.

Up to now, Simmonds said they had been careful to avoid over-saturation, with each course having a cap of 15 participants, with provisions for no more than an additional five.

"We don't want anyone lost. If you have too many people, you may have persons sitting around and not paying attention. What we want is for participants to be fully engaged and hands-on," he said.

"The delivery of the first course was extremely effective, based on the feedback we got. The training courses are not for you to only come and sit down before a

PowerPoint. It is 50 per cent theory and 50 per cent practical. So we had participants (from the first training course) actually doing, for example, photovoltaic installation, sizing wires, sizing panels, etc.," Simmonds added. The training coordinator explained further the thinking behind Wigton's efforts.

"Previously, Wigton's tag line was 'Making renewables a breeze'. Now our tag line is 'securing Jamaica's energy future'. To secure the energy future, you could do it in multiple ways. You could do it from a commercial point of view, which is what Wigton is. So we harness clean energy from the wind," he explained.

"You could also do it from a technical standpoint, which is where we train. So we are trying to create interest in renewable energy and ensure that people have a better

appreciation for it. So it is twofold — the commercial side and the technical side," the engineer added.

MINIMAL SCALE

The plan, he said, is to have the programme be annual.

"The courses will develop as time goes on. We didn't want to start it five days and then people wanted three. So we started it on a minimal scale to see what the feedback would be like, and the feedback was really exceptional," Simmonds said.

"So now we will look at expanding the courses. Maybe in the future we will have five days of courses or even two weeks," he said. They also have their sights set on having the courses accredited.

"Currently, it is just a certificate of participation (that participants receive), but as we go along, we are trying to figure out how we can get the courses certified," Simmonds noted.

He was, however, quick to emphasise: "We are not trying to compete against the other institutions providing the training. What we are trying to do is stimulate the interest among the general public and then grow that interest."

"When we talk about the energy policy, one of the core parts of it is to increase renewable energy penetration into the grid. If you are to do so, you have to make people aware of the type of technologies that you are pushing," he added.

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Wigton engineer urges energy efficiency

WITH AN increase in oil prices an ever clear and present danger and climate change realities a threat to, in particular, small island states, such as Jamaica, improving energy efficiency is now more important than ever.

This reminder has come from Sanja Simmonds, an engineer at Wigton Wind Farm, who specialises in wind energy and hydroelectric power.

Also important, he said, is the move to have renewables form a greater percentage of Jamaica and the Caribbean's energy mix.

In the case of Jamaica, the energy policy aims for 20 per cent while the goal for the Caribbean Community is 47 per cent by 2027.

"Jamaica, take a look around and see what is happening. Currently, the price of oil is a low price, which is around US\$50 a barrel. But it was also cheap in the 1970s and in the 2000s before the crisis happened. So it is important to understand that the push and drive in renewables is something we should take seriously," Simmonds told *The Gleaner*.

Wigton, he noted, is doing its part — beyond even the most recent and now year-old expansion that sees it supply



Training coordinator-engineer at Wigton Wind farm, Sanja Simmonds (left), tells the Minister of Science, Technology and Energy Dr Andrew Wheatley and Wigton Wind farm's chairman, Dwayne Smith, about the Educational Hydroelectric Micro-Station, one of the many instruments at the Renewable Energy Training Laboratory at Wigton Wind farm.

ing 62.7 megawatts of electricity to the national grid.

"If you look at our training facility at Rose Hill, our roof is 50/50 — half of it collects rainwater and we use that water in the building for all purposes because we treat it. The other half aids in powering the building (as) it is a photovoltaic roof," he said.

"We also recycle our old plastic bottles. We push renewables and sustainable energy as far as possible. It is one of the ways you can secure your country's energy future," Simmonds added.

For him, improving energy efficiency comes first — before the installation of technology such as photovoltaics.

"A lot of times companies are not energy efficient. Before you have the technology, you have to have energy efficiency," he said, pointing to the need for energy audits — some of which have been carried out by the Petroleum Corporation of Jamaica in some schools islandwide.

"It is pointless you put in any type of renewable energy system and you are not energy efficient. So do your energy audits and see what you can fix first. After you are efficient, then you look at

the technology and see what is feasible or suitable," noted Simmonds, who is also the training coordinator at Wigton.

Phase one of the Wigton Wind Farm was commissioned in 2004 when 20.7 megawatts of electricity was brought online. Phase two followed later with an additional 18 megawatts and then, only last year, another 24 megawatts.

The farm currently extracts energy from wind using three types of wind turbines — the Neg Micon (NM52-900 KW) out of the Netherlands, the V80-2.0MW developed by Danish manufacturers Vestas and the other — G80-2.0MW — developed by Spanish manufacturers Gamesa, who handled the third phase of the most recent expansion.

Climate change, meanwhile, presents a variety of threats, among them warmer global temperatures fuelled by increasing greenhouse gas emissions from human consumption of fossil fuels such as oil.

Regionally, as globally, actors from the scientific community have urged a move to renewables as one essential response measure.

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