

Caracas energy efficiency

CARACAS, Nov 13 (IPS) - The Latin American and Caribbean region is a student with good grades in renewable energy, but not in energy efficiency, and has a long way to go in contributing to global climate action and overcoming the vulnerability of its population and economies.

The recent energy crises in Ecuador and Cuba, with power outages ranging from 14 hours a day to days at a time, and the threats posed by droughts - which this year hit Bogotá and the Brazilian Amazon, for example - to the hydroelectric systems that power the region, are proof of this.

Among the 660 million Latin Americans and Caribbeans enduring the various impacts of climate change, there are at least 17 million people, some four million households, who still lack access to electricity.

That scenario comes under new scrutiny at the 29th Conference of the Parties (COP29) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which began its two-week run on Monday 11 in Baku, capital of oil-rich Azerbaijan.

The annual conference of 196 states parties has climate action financing as its main theme and will also review the global commitment made a year ago to triple renewable energy capacity and double energy efficiency.

The COP28 in Dubai proposed a global installed capacity of 11,000 gigawatts (Gw, equivalent to 1,000 megawatts, Mw) of energy from renewable sources by 2030, 7,000 Gw more than today. This is unlikely, judging by the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

The NDCs serve as commitments by states to adopt measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions so that global warming does not exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial averages, as stated in the 2015 Paris Agreement, which concluded the COP21.

In the case of Latin America and the Caribbean, "the installed capacity for electricity generation is already 58% renewable energy, and in 11 countries it exceeds 80%," Uruguayan expert Alfonso Blanco, director of energy transition and climate at the Washington-based think tank Inter-American Dialogue, told IPS.

According to the Latin American Energy Organisation (Olae), the region's installed electricity generation capacity was 480,605 megawatts (MW) in 2022, with about 300,000 MW produced from renewable sources - 200,000 MW from dams - and the rest from non-renewable sources, mainly fossil fuels.

The International Renewable Energy Agency (Irena) put the region's installed electricity generation capacity at 342,000 MW last year, with advances in solar energy installations, with a capacity of 64,513 MW, and wind power, which reached 49,337 MW, as the hydroelectric source remains stable at 202,000 MW.

The Latin American and Caribbean region "can increase its capacity to generate electricity from sources such as solar or wind, but it can't triple its hydroelectric capacity," said Blanco, who was executive secretary of Olade in the period 2017-2023.

Diana Barba, coordinator of energy diplomacy at the Colombian think tank Transforma, also believes that "tripling renewable energy capacity by 2030 does not apply to Latin America and the Caribbean".

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