

Attzs: T&T needs to reimagine its economic model



Economist Dr Marlene Attzs

GEISHA KOWLESSAR-ALONZO GEISHA.KOWLESSAR@GUARDIAN.CO.TT

With the US government revoking the licences for the Dragon gas project, developmental economist Dr Marlene Attzs is strongly advising that rather than simply mourn the loss of the initiative, T&T must use this moment to rethink its economic future.

She told Guardian Media that the decision by the US presents an opportunity for T&T to build resilience, to accelerate energy diversification and to reimagine the economic model that has long been hinged on fossil fuel exports.

“There is an urgent need to invest in local energy assets, especially within our own exclusive economic zone. Fields such as Manatee, Mento, Coconut, and Ginger could provide critical buffers,

but more importantly, they represent steps toward energy independence and security,” she explained.

Attzs, however, acknowledged that the revocation of US licences for the long-anticipated Dragon and Cocuina-Manakin gas projects marked a major setback for T&T’s energy ambitions. She outlined that these projects were meant to deliver much-needed natural gas from Venezuela and help stabilise T&T’s declining gas production.

Now shelved indefinitely following a “not-unexpected” shift in US policy, the collapse of these deals leaves a significant gap in this country’s energy strategy at a time of mounting economic pressure, Attzs said.

Noting that while the immediate impact is sobering—unrealised revenue and continued production decline— Attzs urged that this crisis must also be seen as a catalyst for transformation.

Warning that the road ahead will not be easy, the senior economist further stated that the collapse of the Dragon gas deal is just one symptom of a rapidly evolving global economy, marked by geopolitical shifts, uncertainty and intensified competition among large countries.

“These changing conditions will test the world, especially developing countries such as T&T and our Caribbean neighbours.

As a nation, we must begin preparing ourselves psychologically and socially for what lies ahead. This includes managing public expectations and fostering a new, deep economic consciousness among citizens,” Attzs said.

Ultimately, she added the end of the deal can signal the transition from one chapter in T&T’s history that focused heavily on fossil fuels to a new chapter that embraces innovation, sustainability and human capital development.

Meanwhile, the T&T Chamber of Industry and Commerce, which also provided comments on the failed Dragon gas deal said it supported the government’s ongoing efforts to engage legal counsel in Washington, DC and to pursue the appropriate channels to either reverse or amend the decision.

Noting that this situation is “a complex challenge that requires steady diplomacy, consistent engagement, and above all, a country-first approach,” the chamber said it continues to welcome ongoing investment in deepwater exploration, support efforts and encourage further work in this area to bolster the country’s energy portfolio.

The chamber said it also continues to advocate for a diverse economy particularly in services, agro-processing, cultural and creative industries, as it emphasised that these are critical steps to ensuring resilience and competitiveness in an increasingly dynamic global environment.

Further, it called on the private and public sectors to work collaboratively to deepen economic diversification, unlock new opportunities and chart a path forward.

“The chamber remains focused on doing just that—partnering with our members, government, and international allies to drive sustainable economic transformation,” it added.

Despite the collapse of the Dragon gas deal, the government has maintained that Venezuela cross-border gas is not the only source of gas for this country, noting that this is evidenced by numerous investments currently being carried out in T&T, including a new frontier in deepwater gas.