THE KNOWN AND POTENTIAL RESOURCE BASE FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE CENTRAL AMERICAN-CARIBBEAN REGION

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ABSTRACT

The endeavors of local governments, of foreign and international institutions, as well as those efforts of private companies to evaluate the energy and mineral resources of the Central American and Caribbean countries, reveal a wide divergence in the results obtained for each individual country. These differences are due to factors or situations that have conditioned, stimulated, or limited the endeavors. Among these factors are the differences in the customs that characterize the Latin American countries, particularly those in Central America and the Caribbean, and also the negative attitudes of some governments toward the efforts of outsiders to study their resources. Of particular concern are those governments which have been unable to understand the importance of obtaining a potential resource base as a key factor in the economic development of their countries. Also pertinent to this problem has been the lack of native professional people and trained personnel able to carry out and give continuity to those programs that have been devised to evaluate the energy and mineral potential of the country. Of great significance to the success of such programs is the need for establishing and properly financing the governmental institutions that are to produce and eventually publish the data base required for planning the economic development of a country. Efforts to obtain an adequate data base for economic development in the countries of Central America, the area with which the author is familiar, are here considered.

Bilateral cooperation and international programs, especially those of a regional nature, recently completed or in progress in Central America as well as in the Caribbean, are now more likely to succeed than in the past. This optimistic viewpoint is based on the fact that most of these countries now have available native professionals capable of implementing the programs directed toward establishing the resource base for economic development and are able to lend continuity to the studies.

PROBLEMS OF THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

The economic development of the vast region covering Central America and the Caribbean has been very different for each country. This divergence derives from the varied customs that characterize every one of these countries and especially those that bear on the educational standards for each. Also important is the attitude of the governments that should be concerned with the programs that are designed to evaluate the potential resource base for each country. This attitude may be lacking in the necessary zeal.

For this paper, I shall rely mostly on my personal experience, especially that which I have gained from many years work as a geologist, particularly in Central America. I would like to narrate some anecdotes which I believe point out problems that, in many instances, have hampered some programs implemented by governmental or international institutions, and which were designed to properly evaluate the national resources. I also hope in this paper to be able to point out various factors or measures which should be considered by governments and international agencies so as to get the most value out of the efforts to establish the resource base for economic development of the countries of the Central American-Caribbean region.

From a personal point of view, I think that there are three conditions that have greatly limited the efforts of the countries to establish an adequate resource base for economic development. These conditions are:

1. The little importance and low priority that some governments have assigned to the study of a resource base for economic development, especially to those resources that involve the energy and minerals potential of the countries.
2. The scarcity of qualified personnel who are capable of understanding the true value of the information and who possess the necessary skills to properly catalog and use the information.