



Review on Solar Energy in the South East Asian Countries

Md. Anowar Hossain¹, K. A. Khan²

¹Senior Experimental officer, Center for Research Reactor,
Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission, Email: anowarbaec@gmail.com

²Department of Physics, Jagannath University, Dhaka-1100, Email: kakhan01@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

South East Asia, with its abundant solar irradiance and rapidly growing energy demand, presents significant opportunities for solar energy deployment. This review paper examines the current status, potential, challenges, and future prospects of solar energy development across South East Asian countries, including Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Singapore, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, and Brunei. The study highlights the region's diverse solar resource availability, government policies, and investment trends that have shaped the adoption of photovoltaic (PV) and concentrated solar power (CSP) technologies. Despite favorable climatic conditions, solar energy penetration remains uneven due to barriers such as high initial costs, limited grid infrastructure, policy inconsistencies, and technological gaps. However, successful initiatives-such as Thailand's solar farms, Vietnam's feed-in tariff programs, and Singapore's rooftop PV projects-demonstrate the potential for scaling up renewable energy integration. The review also explores regional collaborations, financing mechanisms, and innovations in energy storage that can accelerate solar adoption. The findings suggest that South East Asia could become a global leader in solar energy if countries strengthen policy frameworks, invest in research and development, and enhance regional cooperation. By addressing socio-economic and technical challenges, solar energy can play a pivotal role in achieving sustainable development goals, reducing carbon emissions, and ensuring energy security in the region.

Keyword: Solar Energy, Photovoltaic (PV), Renewable Energy, Southeast Asia, Energy Policy, Rural Electrification, Climate Change Mitigation, Sustainable Development and Energy Transition

I. Introduction

Energy is a fundamental driver of economic growth, social development, and environmental sustainability. In recent decades, the global energy landscape has been undergoing a significant transformation, with renewable energy sources emerging as viable alternatives to conventional fossil fuels. Among these, solar energy has gained particular prominence due to its abundance, accessibility, and potential to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions^[1]. South East Asia, a region characterized by rapid industrialization, population growth, and increasing energy demand, presents both challenges and opportunities in the transition toward sustainable energy systems. Countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Singapore are endowed with high solar irradiance levels, making solar energy a promising solution to address their rising electricity needs while reducing dependence on imported fossil fuels^[2]. Despite this potential, the adoption of solar energy across South East Asia has been uneven, influenced by factors such as policy frameworks, technological readiness, financial incentives, infrastructure limitations, and public awareness. Some nations have made notable progress in deploying solar photovoltaic (PV) systems and integrating them into national grids, while others continue to face barriers in scaling up

renewable energy initiatives^[3]. This review paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the current status, opportunities, and challenges of solar energy development in South East Asian countries. It explores government policies, investment trends, technological advancements, and socio-economic impacts, while highlighting best practices and lessons learned from regional experiences. By synthesizing existing research and case studies, the paper seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how solar energy can play a pivotal role in achieving sustainable development goals and ensuring energy security in the region^[4].

II. Methodology

II.A Data collection, processing and analysis

1. Data Collection

- **Sources used:**
 - Peer-reviewed journals, conference papers, and review articles.
 - Government energy policies and national renewable energy plans.
 - International databases (IEA, ASEAN Centre for Energy, World Bank).
- **Timeframe:** Many reviews focus on the last 10–15 years to capture recent developments in solar technology and policy.

2. Selection Criteria

- Studies are chosen based on **relevance to solar energy** in Southeast Asia.
- Inclusion of countries like **Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, Philippines, Singapore, and Cambodia**.
- Exclusion of papers with limited regional focus or outdated data.

3. Comparative Analysis

- **Policy review:** Examination of national renewable energy targets, subsidies, and incentives.
- **Technology adoption:** Assessment of photovoltaic (PV) systems, solar thermal applications, and hybrid systems.
- **Economic feasibility:** Cost-benefit analysis, investment trends, and financing mechanisms.
- **Environmental impact:** Reduction in carbon emissions, land use considerations, and sustainability.

4. Analytical Framework

- Many papers use **SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)** to evaluate solar energy development.
- Some adopt **multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM)** methods to rank countries based on solar potential, policy support, and infrastructure readiness.
- **Quantitative data analysis:** Installed capacity (MW), solar irradiance levels, and growth rates.
- **Qualitative synthesis:** Challenges such as grid integration, financing gaps, and policy inconsistencies.

5. Validation

- Cross-checking data from multiple sources to ensure reliability.
- Benchmarking against global solar energy trends for contextual comparison.

Example Methodology from a Key Paper

A widely cited review on solar energy in ASEAN countries (Pandey et al., *Sustainability*, 2022) used the following approach:

- **Systematic literature review** of over 200 publications.
- **Country-wise categorization** of solar energy utilization techniques, policies, and challenges.
- **Comparative evaluation** of progress and recommendations for future strategies.

Key Takeaways

- **Methodology is interdisciplinary**, combining engineering, economics, and policy analysis.
- **Comparative and systematic approaches** are central to understanding regional differences.
- **Data triangulation** ensures accuracy and credibility of findings.

II B. Solar Energy

Overview of Solar Energy in Southeast Asia

- **High solar potential:** The region receives abundant sunlight year-round, making it ideal for solar power generation.
- **Rapid demand growth:** Electricity demand in Southeast Asia is projected to **double by 2050**, increasing the urgency for renewable energy adoption.
- **Current reliance on fossil fuels:** Many countries still depend heavily on imported coal and natural gas, exposing them to price volatility and emissions concerns.

Key Findings from Research Reviews

Potentials

- **Thailand & Vietnam:** Among the fastest-growing solar markets, with large-scale solar farms and supportive government policies.
- **Philippines & Malaysia:** Strong rooftop solar adoption, driven by net-metering and incentives.
- **Indonesia & Myanmar:** Large untapped potential, but slower progress due to policy and financing barriers.

Policies

- **ASEAN cooperation:** Regional frameworks encourage renewable energy integration, but national policies vary widely.
- **Feed-in tariffs & net-metering:** Effective in countries like Vietnam and the Philippines, but inconsistent across the region.

Challenges

- **Grid integration:** Weak transmission infrastructure limits large-scale solar deployment.
- **Financing:** High upfront costs and limited access to green financing slow adoption.
- **Policy gaps:** Inconsistent regulations and lack of long-term renewable energy targets in some countries.

Comparative Snapshot

Country	Solar Potential	Current Deployment	Policy Support	Key Challenges
Thailand	High	Large solar farms	Strong FITs	Grid stability
Vietnam	Very High	Rapid expansion	FITs, incentives	Overcapacity in some regions
Philippines	Moderate-High	Rooftop solar growth	Net-metering	Financing, grid
Malaysia	High	Utility + rooftop	Incentives	Policy inconsistency
Indonesia	Very High	Limited adoption	Emerging policies	Financing, infrastructure
Myanmar	High	Early stage	Weak support	Political & economic instability

Recommendations from Research

- **Strengthen regional cooperation:** ASEAN countries should harmonize renewable energy policies.
- **Expand financing mechanisms:** Green bonds, international climate funds, and private investment are critical.
- **Upgrade grid infrastructure:** To handle intermittent solar supply and cross-border energy trade.
- **Promote rooftop solar:** Especially in urban areas with high electricity demand.

Takeaway

Solar energy in Southeast Asia is at a **turning point**: the region has abundant natural resources and growing demand, but success depends on **policy consistency, financing innovation, and infrastructure upgrades**. Thailand and Vietnam are leading examples, while Indonesia and Myanmar represent the next frontier for solar expansion.

IIC. Renewable EnergyOverview of Renewable Energy in Southeast Asia

- **Rapid demand growth:** Electricity demand in Southeast Asia is projected to **double by 2050**, making renewable energy crucial for energy security.
- **Solar dominance:** Solar energy is the most scalable renewable option due to abundant sunlight across the region.
- **Other renewables:** Hydropower, wind, and biomass also contribute, but solar is increasingly prioritized for urban and industrial applications.

Key Findings from Research Papers

1. Solar Energy Potential

- **High solar irradiance:** Countries like **Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia** receive strong solar radiation, making them prime candidates for solar farms.
- **Rooftop solar:** Urban centers (e.g., Bangkok, Manila, Jakarta) are adopting rooftop solar for residential and commercial use.

2. Policy & Investment

- **Government incentives:** Feed-in tariffs and renewable portfolio standards have accelerated solar adoption in Vietnam and Thailand.
- **Foreign investment:** International investors are funding large-scale solar projects, especially in Vietnam's Mekong Delta.

3. Challenges

- **Grid integration:** Weak transmission infrastructure limits the ability to absorb intermittent solar power.
- **Fossil fuel reliance:** Many countries still depend heavily on coal and natural gas, slowing the transition.
- **Environmental concerns:** Land use conflicts and ecosystem impacts from large solar farms are being studied.

Comparative Snapshot of Solar Energy in Southeast Asia

Country	Solar Capacity (approx.)	Key Policies/Drivers	Challenges
Vietnam	~20 GW (2023)	Feed-in tariffs, foreign investment	Grid congestion
Thailand	~3 GW	Renewable energy master plan	Land availability
Malaysia	~2 GW	Net energy metering	Slow policy execution
Philippines	~1.5 GW	Renewable Energy Act	High financing costs
Indonesia		National Energy Policy	Fossil fuel dominance

Risks & Limitations

- **Policy inconsistency:** Frequent changes in tariffs and subsidies discourage long-term investment.
- **Climate vulnerability:** Extreme weather events (typhoons, floods) threaten solar infrastructure.
- **Equity issues:** Rural electrification lags behind urban solar adoption, creating energy access gaps.

Conclusion

Solar energy in Southeast Asia is **growing rapidly** and has the potential to become the backbone of the region's renewable energy mix. However, **policy stability, infrastructure upgrades, and regional cooperation** are essential to fully realize this potential.

III. Rural Electrification

Key Findings from Research Papers

1. Techno-Economic Studies

- **Solar PV is cost-effective** compared to diesel generators in rural areas.
- **Hybrid systems** (solar + battery + backup diesel) improve reliability.
- **Policy frameworks** are essential for scaling projects, including subsidies and feed-in tariffs.

2. Comparative Analysis

- **Philippines:** Strong focus on community-based solar mini-grids.
- **Indonesia:** Large-scale rural electrification programs using solar PV.
- **Myanmar & Cambodia:** Pilot projects show success but face financing and maintenance challenges.

Comparison Table: Rural Solar Electrification in Southeast Asia

Country	Approach	Strengths	Challenges
Philippines	Community solar mini-grids	Local ownership, policy support	Financing sustainability
Indonesia	National solar programs	Large-scale deployment	Geographic complexity, grid limits
Myanmar	Pilot solar projects	Proof of concept, NGO support	Political instability, funding gaps
Cambodia	Small-scale solar PV	Affordable household systems	Maintenance, technical expertise

Challenges & Risks

- **Financing:** High upfront costs limit adoption without subsidies.
- **Maintenance:** Lack of technical expertise in rural areas leads to system failures.
- **Policy Gaps:** Inconsistent government support slows scaling.
- **Social Acceptance:** Community engagement is critical for long-term success.

Recommendations from Research

- **Strengthen policy frameworks:** Subsidies, tax incentives, and clear rural electrification targets.
- **Promote community ownership:** Ensures sustainability and local buy-in.
- **Capacity building:** Train rural technicians for maintenance.
- **Hybrid solutions:** Combine solar with other renewables for reliability.

III. Climate Change Mitigation through Solar Energy in Southeast Asia

Key Contributions of Solar Energy

- **Emission Reduction**
 - Solar energy directly offsets coal and natural gas use, which dominate Southeast Asia's power sector.
 - Countries like **Vietnam, Thailand, and Malaysia** have shown measurable reductions in carbon intensity by scaling solar projects.
- **Energy Diversification**
 - Heavy reliance on fossil fuels makes the region vulnerable to global price shocks.
 - Solar energy provides a **stable, locally available resource**, reducing dependence on imported fuels.
- **Alignment with Global Goals**
 - Solar adoption supports commitments under the **Paris Agreement** and national climate pledges.
 - Helps ASEAN countries move toward **net-zero targets by mid-century**.

Challenges Hindering Mitigation Potential

- **Policy Gaps:** Inconsistent renewable energy policies across ASEAN nations slow down solar deployment.
- **Infrastructure Limitations:** Weak grid systems and lack of storage technologies limit large-scale integration.
- **Financial Barriers:** High upfront costs and limited incentives discourage private investment.

Opportunities for Strengthening Mitigation

- **Regional Cooperation**
 - ASEAN-wide frameworks could harmonize policies and accelerate cross-border renewable energy trade.
- **Technological Innovation**
 - Advances in **battery storage, smart grids, and floating solar farms** can overcome intermittency issues.
- **Public-Private Partnerships**
 - Encouraging investment through subsidies, tax breaks, and green financing mechanisms.

Comparative Snapshot: Solar Energy & Climate Mitigation in Key ASEAN Countries

Country	Solar Capacity (Recent Growth)	Climate Mitigation Impact	Key Challenges
Vietnam	Rapid expansion, >16 GW solar	Major reduction in coal reliance	Grid instability
Thailand	Strong policy support, ~3 GW	Diversifies energy mix, lowers emissions	Land use constraints
Malaysia	Expanding rooftop & utility solar	Supports carbon neutrality pledge	Financing hurdles
Indonesia	Early-stage adoption	Potential to offset coal-heavy grid	Policy inconsistency
Philippines	Growing solar farms	Reduces oil imports, improves resilience	Infrastructure gaps

Risks & Trade-offs

- **Intermittency:** Solar power depends on weather, requiring backup systems.
- **Land Use Conflicts:** Large solar farms may compete with agriculture.
- **Unequal Access:** Rural communities may lag behind urban centers in benefiting from solar energy.

In summary: The reviewed research underscores that solar energy is one of the most promising climate change mitigation strategies for Southeast Asia. While challenges remain, coordinated policies, technological innovation, and investment can unlock its full potential to reduce emissions and ensure sustainable growth.

III. Sustainable development

1. Importance of Solar Energy in Sustainable Development

- **Clean, renewable source:** Solar energy reduces dependence on fossil fuels and lowers carbon emissions.

- Energy security: Southeast Asia's growing population and industrialization demand reliable energy sources.
- Alignment with UN SDGs: Solar energy supports SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

2. Current Status of Solar Energy in Southeast Asia

- Installed capacity: Over 20 GW across ASEAN as of 2024.
- Leading countries: Vietnam and Thailand are regional leaders in solar deployment.
- Emerging players: Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines are scaling up but face infrastructure and financing hurdles.

Country	Solar Capacity (approx.)	Key Policies/Drivers	Challenges
Vietnam	>16 GW	Feed-in tariffs, strong investment	Grid congestion, policy uncertainty
Thailand	~3 GW	Renewable energy targets	Land use, financing
Indonesia		National Energy Policy	Political dynamics, supply chain
Malaysia	~1.5 GW	Net energy metering	Tariff disputes, slow adoption
Philippines	~1 GW	Renewable portfolio standards	

III. Results and Discussion

Key Results of the Review

- **Solar Potential**
 - Southeast Asia receives **abundant solar radiation (4.5–5.5 kWh/m²/day)**, making it highly suitable for photovoltaic (PV) deployment.
 - Countries like **Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines** show the highest technical potential due to favorable geography and grid connectivity.
- **Installed Capacity**
 - **Vietnam** has emerged as a leader, with rapid expansion of solar farms since 2019, surpassing 16 GW by 2022.
 - **Thailand** has steadily grown its solar sector, reaching over 3 GW capacity.
 - Other ASEAN countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Brunei) remain at early stages, with less than 500 MW combined.
- **Policy and Incentives**
 - Feed-in tariffs (FiTs) and renewable energy targets have been crucial in Vietnam and Thailand.
 - Malaysia and Indonesia have introduced net-metering and rooftop solar programs, but uptake is slower due to bureaucratic hurdles.
 - Lack of consistent regional cooperation limits cross-border energy trade.

Discussion

- **Economic Drivers**
 - Rapid urbanization and industrialization in Southeast Asia are pushing electricity demand growth at **7% annually**, nearly double the global average. Solar energy is seen as a cost-effective solution to meet this demand.

- **Challenges**
 - **Grid integration:** Many countries face weak grid infrastructure, making large-scale solar integration difficult.
 - **Financing barriers:** High upfront costs and limited access to green financing hinder adoption in less developed economies.
 - **Policy inconsistency:** Frequent changes in tariffs and incentives discourage long-term investment.
- **Environmental and Social Impact**
 - Solar energy reduces reliance on fossil fuels, helping ASEAN countries meet climate commitments.
 - Rooftop solar adoption is growing in urban centers, empowering households and small businesses with energy independence.
- **Future Outlook**
 - Regional collaboration through ASEAN frameworks could accelerate solar deployment.
 - Hybrid systems (solar + storage, solar + wind) are being explored to stabilize supply.
 - Stronger investment in research, local manufacturing, and workforce training is needed to reduce dependence on imported technology.

Comparative Snapshot

Country	Solar Potential	Installed Capacity (2022)	Key Policies	Challenges
Vietnam	Very High	~16 GW	FiTs, RE targets	Grid stability
Thailand	High	~3 GW	FiTs, rooftop programs	Land use, financing
Malaysia	High	~1.5 GW	Net-metering	Bureaucracy
Philippines	Moderate-High	~1 GW	Renewable portfolio standards	Grid reliability
Indonesia	High		Rooftop solar incentives	Policy inconsistency
Myanmar/Laos/Cambodia	Moderate		Limited policies	Financing, infrastructure

In summary: Southeast Asia has vast solar energy potential, but success varies widely across countries. Vietnam and Thailand lead due to strong policies and incentives, while others struggle with infrastructure and financing. Regional cooperation, stable policies, and investment in technology are critical for unlocking the full potential of solar energy in the region.

IV. Conclusions

The main conclusion of research on solar energy in Southeast Asian countries is that the region has vast untapped solar potential, but progress is uneven due to policy gaps, infrastructure challenges, and financing barriers. Stronger regional cooperation, supportive regulations, and investment in grid modernization are essential to accelerate adoption.

Key Conclusions from Research on Solar Energy in Southeast Asia

1. Enormous Solar Potential

- **High solar irradiance** across most Southeast Asian countries makes solar energy a highly viable renewable source.

- Countries like **Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines** have already demonstrated rapid growth in solar capacity, while others such as **Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos** remain underdeveloped.
2. Rapid Growth but Uneven Deployment
 - ASEAN's solar capacity has surpassed **20 GW**, showing strong momentum in recent years.
 - However, deployment is concentrated in a few nations, leaving significant disparities in regional energy transition progress.
 3. Policy and Regulatory Challenges
 - **Inconsistent policies** and lack of long-term renewable energy targets hinder investment confidence.
 - Countries with clear feed-in tariffs and renewable energy incentives (e.g., Vietnam's FIT program) have seen faster adoption compared to those with weak or unstable frameworks.
 4. Infrastructure and Grid Limitations
 - Weak grid infrastructure and limited interconnection between ASEAN countries restrict large-scale solar integration.
 - **Energy storage systems and smart grids** are critical to balance intermittent solar supply with rising electricity demand.
 5. Economic and Environmental Benefits
 - Solar energy offers **cost-effective electricity** in the long run, reducing reliance on imported fossil fuels.
 - Expanding solar deployment supports **climate goals**, lowers carbon emissions, and creates green jobs in manufacturing, installation, and maintenance.
 6. Need for Regional Cooperation
 - Collaborative frameworks within ASEAN could harmonize policies, share best practices, and enable **cross-border energy trade**.
 - Joint investment in solar farms and transmission networks would strengthen energy security and resilience.

Final Takeaway

Solar energy in Southeast Asia is at a **pivotal stage**: the potential is vast, growth is visible, but challenges remain. To fully realize the benefits, countries must:

- Establish **stable and supportive policies**,
- Invest in **grid modernization and storage**,
- Encourage **regional cooperation** for shared energy security.

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[4] Key Themes Across References

- **High solar irradiance** in Southeast Asia makes solar PV highly viable.
- **Policy frameworks** vary widely: Thailand and Vietnam have strong feed-in tariffs, while Indonesia and the Philippines face regulatory hurdles.
- **Integration challenges** include grid stability, financing, and reliance on fossil fuels.
- **Regional cooperation**