

East timor solar energy storage

Access to energy remains a concerning challenge for many in Timor-Leste. The centralised nature of the local electricity supply chain has traditionally kept consumers reliant on the national grid to overcome chronic energy shortages. While more than 200,000 households have access to electricity, the distribution network is in poor condition, with excessive voltage drops and persistent service outages. The cost of electricity is also higher than in neighbouring countries, and Timor-Leste has been slow to transition from expensive diesel generation to renewables.

With the new UN reforms, the United Nations in Timor-Leste, under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator has now started lighting the way with its solar-powered grid which has begun to give maximum dividends.

"A project like this goes beyond providing energy. It showcases a value addition to the Government, partners, and stakeholders as to how such initiatives can help create other socio-economic benefits, including employment, greener environment, cheaper energy, and sustainable lifestyles. So, the more we implement such projects, the more we empower our communities and bring impact.

The project also evidences the skillset and expertise to support the country to transition to a more sustainable energy future and supporting the deployment of renewable energy technologies," said UNDP Resident Representative Munkhtuya Altangerel, who is also chair of the UN Operations Management Team. Based on this successful experience, the UN Operations Management Team is now working on upscaling the project and making the UN House, a 100 per cent solar-energy-run compound.

Dan Lee learns about energy poverty, and some of the unique challenges of the transition during a trip to Timor-Leste as part of a delegation of eight students from the University of Queensland's Master of Sustainable Energy program.

On Australia's doorstep, a distinct energy narrative is unfolding. The wide-spread destruction of infrastructure by Indonesian militias in 1999 and prior has severely impeded Timor-Leste's human and economic development for more than two decades.

Despite progress, a significant proportion of the country's population continues to live in abject poverty. A lack of access to proper nutrition, basic sanitation, health services, safe drinking water, and reliable energy are still evident throughout the country.

Meanwhile, the country's fledgling economy relies heavily on fleeting offshore oil and gas reserves; with one large untapped field in the Timor Sea at the centre of an international tug-of-war. Aware of the current climate of climate (pun intended), the country's President and former Nobel Peace Prize

recipient, Jose Ramos-Horta has publicly stated that he would happily leave their fossil fuels under the seafloor if high-income nations increased foreign aid to support the country's development.

Over seven days in the country our group met with 15 different stakeholders – from the president of the country's petroleum authority, to the villagers who walk hours to load \$5 on to their electricity accounts. We did this in order to understand the dynamics of how the energy transition is affecting one of our closest neighbours.

Timor-Leste (also known as East Timor) sits just an 80-minute flight from Darwin. Once a Portuguese colony in the 16th century, the territory remained under Portuguese rule until 1975, when it was occupied by Indonesian forces. The East Timorese resistance, led by the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (FRETILIN), fought against Indonesian rule for 24 years, during which time as many as 200,000 East Timorese were killed.

In 1999, a UN-supervised referendum was held in which its people voted overwhelmingly for independence. After the announcement of the results, pro-Indonesian militias engaged in a campaign of violence and mass destruction, resulting in the deaths of thousands, and the displacement of hundreds of thousands more. Some estimate that more than 80% of the country's infrastructure was destroyed during this final act of carnage – including hospitals, water facilities and large parts of the country's electricity network.

The eventual intervention of an international peacekeeping force helped restore order and pave the way for Timor-Leste's independence. In 2002, the country officially declared independence and remains Asia's newest sovereign state.

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