

Vietnam off-grid solar

AN GIANG -- N?ang S?t, 29, lives on the side of a dirty road near the forest in a makeshift house erected from steel frames with her four children in An T?c Commune, southern An Giang Province.

In most parts of Vi?t Nam where reliable supply of electricity is taken for granted, people can charge their phone almost anywhere, anytime, whether at home, supermarkets or restaurants.

According to the state-owned Vietnam Power Group, the total installed capacity of solar power in Vi?t Nam has reached 19,400 MWp, accounting for about 25 per cent of the total installed capacity of the national power system.

The total solar power generation output in 2020 alone was 10.6 billion kWh, accounting for about 4.3 per cent of the total electricity output of the national power system.

The Ministry of Industry and Trade set the target to provide 21,000 households with electricity from renewable energy in 2016-2020, however, the target fell short with only 617 households having access to solar electricity under the ministry's scheme as of 2020.

"The investment for renewable energy is much lower than for grid and suitable for areas where locals use a small amount of electricity," said L?u T?ng Giang, deputy head of the Division of Grid and Rural Electricity under the Ministry of Industry and Trade.

However there are difficulties in managing the panels if these are installed in rural areas, using state funds, he said, adding that these will be treated as state property and managed by the local commune or district. Meanwhile, there isn't any policy related to this, he said.

While the authorities are still struggling with the management scheme, as many as 871,263 households in 2,197 communes across Vi?t Nam live either without electricity or with a disrupted, unstable source of power.

Aware that it will take a long time and an unaffordable sum of money to have the grid in this remote, sparsely populated area, S?t spent VN?1.5 million (\$65) to buy a solar panel last year.

She said: "Solar energy has made my life a lot easier. Before we could hardly do anything under the dim light of kerosene lamps at night, but now everything is more convenient with electricity,"

Now her family doesn't have to put up with the petroleum-like odour of kerosene and she can spend the night time playing with her kids, help the eldest daughter with homework, surf the Internet and have video calls with her husband.



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The initiative to bring solar energy panels to off-grid communities in An Giang is implemented by Green Innovation and Development Centre (GreenID), a Vietnamese non-for-profit organisation in cooperation with the province's Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

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