



Stock photo of green growth from stockphotosecrets.com

## BUILDING PEOPLE TO PEOPLE TIES WITH THE SOUTH ASIA ENERGY SERIES

“Everything is Energy & that’s all there is to it” – Albert Einstein

South Asia, home to a quarter of the world’s population, is a major energy consumer, with some of the fastest growing economies in the world. South Asia’s size, diversity, immense growth and regional integration potential, with disruptive technological advancements, and investment opportunities in the energy sector can help the region move confidently into the future. However, with these opportunities, come distinct challenges that the region faces in energy access, energy resilience, and energy security.

The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified conversations around human health, economic, environmental and social development, with sustained discussions on sustainable development, especially, [Sustainable Development Goal 7](#) (SDG7) - access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all by 2030. While COVID-19 will leave scars on the region’s energy demand, prioritizing clean energy pathways and green stimulus packages will holistically address energy access gaps and accelerate economic recovery for a more dynamic and climate resilient South Asia.

### PEOPLE TO PEOPLE TIES FORGE LASTING COLLABORATIONS

Since 2018, through its [Asia EDGE](#) initiative, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) supports overcoming existing energy constraints to strengthen energy security and expand access to sustainable and clean energy to help power a healthy and prosperous South Asia. These efforts include technical assistance to promote utility modernization, increasing deployment of modern clean energy technologies, fostering regional energy connectivity and trade, and accelerating the

adoption of competitive energy markets with transparent procurement. To support the implementation of Asia EDGE in South Asia, USAID/India established the South Asia Regional Energy Hub (SAREH) to help coordinate and communicate all Asia EDGE activities within the region.

Central to this coordination, communication and USAID’s technical assistance efforts remains the need for people-to-people ties. With global lockdowns in a post pandemic era, physical connections were quickly replaced with virtual engagements. As we changed our programming gear at USAID’s South Asia Regional Energy Hub (SAREH), we were clear that lockdown won’t mean locked out, leading to the emergence of the **South Asia Energy Series**. Targeting audiences in six countries—Bhutan, Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka— it was conceived as an open to the public webinar forum to exchange knowledge and experience. We stayed committed to circumventing physical communications barriers with digital engagements forging lasting regional dialogue, enhancing sensitization, and building consensus and capacity for a clean energy transition in South Asia. We have this far engaged with over 850 participants from over 30 countries around the world in the past six months since November during the live sessions.

The panellists and speakers, both public and private sector energy stakeholders, enabled an informative and interactive exchange of knowledge and learning on clean energy development and deployment in South Asia, setting the stage for future energy cooperation, regional energy security, and energy access.

We still have miles to go but here are **five** Energy Series sessions and their topics:

## TALKING ABOUT A RESILIENT POWER SECTOR



Stock photo of Power Grid in India

“Resilience hinges on provision of secure, reliant and affordable electricity supply” –

*COVID-19 Impact on Indian Power Sector*

Report by USAID’s SPARC Utilities

From March 2020 onwards, as nation-wide lockdowns were imposed by countries around the world, commercial and industrial activities were halted and early impacts on the power sector became immediately visible. Existing unutilized production capacity, combined with the COVID-19 impact, resulted in a significant decline in the industrial and commercial power consumption, with a sharp rise in domestic consumption. According to a [South Asia Regional Initiative on Energy Integration \(SARI/EI\)](#) paper titled, ‘[Impact of Covid-19 pandemic on South Asian Power Sector](#)’, the COVID-induced lockdown led to the peak power demand declining by about 18% in Nepal, 28% in Bhutan, 12% in Bangladesh, and 26% in India. The lockdown also resulted in the energy demand of subsidizing consumers (industrial and commercial) being outnumbered by demand from subsidized consumers (agriculture and households). Having open conversations could help build mitigation strategies to support the distribution utility sector and make it more resilient for future contingencies. In November 2020, we collaborated with two USAID programs – the South Asia Regional Initiative on Energy Integration (SARI/EI) and Smart Power for Advancing Reliability and Connectivity (SPARC) - bringing together senior leadership of South Asian power distributions companies for a webinar titled [Tackling](#)

[the Covid-19 Crisis with South Asian DISCOMs](#). The delegates from South Asian utilities shared their experiences and challenges faced through Covid-19, the mitigation strategies adopted and the way forward to make the region's power distribution sector more resilient. USAID's support in establishing a 'South Asia- Distribution Utility Network (DUN)', which will be an informal platform for knowledge exchange, learning and practises between DISCOMs in South Asia, was announced at this virtual event.

## RENEWABLE ENERGY AT THE CORE OF THE POWER SECTOR EVOLUTION

No conversation today on the power sector would be complete without discussions on renewable energy integration, which is at the core of the South Asia's power system evolution. The region is exploring different approaches and learnings to increase system flexibility for variable renewable energy (VRE) integration and achieve its ambitious goal of 180+ GW renewable generation capacity (excluding large hydro) by 2022. To support this learning curve, SAREH collaborated with USAID's [Greening the Grid-Renewable Integration and Sustainable Energy \(GTG-RISE\)](#) initiative for a two-part webinar series that discussed the importance of enhancing grid flexibility for a clean energy transition. In February 2021, we conducted the first part of the series which led to a focussed knowledge exchange on [Coal-Based Flexible Power Generation](#), helping expand the knowledge exchange between South Asia stakeholders in the area of flexible operations of power plants to enable VRE integration. The challenges of VRE integration, strategies, learning, and results from the Indian experience on coal plant flexibilization were showcased and understanding of the VRE landscape in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka were discussed with a distinguished panel of speakers. The second part of the series, focused on [Battery Energy Storage Systems \(BESS\)](#), in March 2021 where USAID India's GTG-RISE initiative showcased experience from the pilot projects in India that were demonstrated at transmission and distribution networks. The [National Renewable Energy Laboratory \(NREL\)](#) presented on the U.S. Department of State funded energy storage projects in South Asia, especially on policy and regulatory environment assessment to help transform utility scale energy storage in South Asia. Also present at the event, [Fluence](#) shared its experience of navigating local challenges in BESS installation.

Solar rooftops when looped back into the grid helps consumers turn into micro-generators of power and save on monthly energy bills. Our webinar in March 2021 shed some light on '[Scaling Grid-Connected Distributed Solar In South Asia](#)'. We collaborated with USAID's [PACE-D 2.0 RE Program](#) and [National Renewable Energy Laboratory \(NREL\)](#) for the session. In the webinar, USAID India's PACE 2.0 RE program, NREL, and [Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory \(LBNL\)](#) showcased the results and learnings from their recent work with Indian national and sub-national governments and Indian power utilities on next generation interventions for distributed solar energy systems. The speakers demonstrated that the solar PV solutions are geography agnostic and can be adapted by other South Asian countries with the aim to improve the region's quality of life.





Stock photo of electric vehicle transformation

## MOVING TOWARDS AN ELECTRIC VEHICLE FUTURE

South Asian countries are in different stages of economic recovery but what is consistent through the region is an unwavering enthusiasm in significantly reducing barriers for electrified vehicle to help decarbonize road travel and help improve overall air quality. To engage knowledge exchange on the sector, SAREH collaborated with USAID's [Smart Power for Advancing Reliability and Connectivity \(SPARC\)](#) initiative and civil society organization, [Alliance for an Energy Efficient Economy \(AEEE\)](#) this March 2021 for a webinar highlighting [Accelerating EV-Charging in South Asia](#). Insights from [Energy Efficiency Services Limited \(EESL\)](#)'s collaboration through SPARC and first large-scale roll-out of public EV-charging stations in India was shared. AEEE presented on charging technology selection for different electric vehicle segments from their research on EV-charging, battery swapping, and associated challenges.

Through the energy series, we have embarked on a journey to forge a new kind of regional energy integration that is premised on building people to people ties by enabling a platform to regularly connect, share, and learn, and with each program our community is getting stronger.

*This blog was written by [Ipshita Nandi Banerjee](#), Communications Lead, South Asia Regional Energy Hub. To learn more about the #SouthAsiaEnergySeries follow us on [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#). We will have our website up soon. Till then you can download the SAREH brochure [here](#).*

.....