Philippines bin gravity energy storage

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The Philippines has turned its focus onto transitioning its energy sector to larger shares of renewable energy. Carlos Nieto of ABB writes about how the company delivered a 60MW battery storage project in alignment with that aim.

It is easy to see why the energy transition has become such a huge priority for the Philippines. Historically, like many regions in Southeast Asia, the country"s energy mix has been largely reliant on fossil fuels due to their low cost.

In fact, as of 2018, it was estimated that fossil fuels such as coal and gas still accounted for approximately 77% of the Philippines" total electrical energy needs. More so, a growing economy and rising population have resulted in an increased dependence on imported coal in recent years.

Inevitably then, like many other countries, the evolving energy crisis has been quick to expose the vulnerabilities associated with its inherent fossil fuel dependence. This is seen as escalating energy prices continue to push the Philippines, along with other developing countries, out of the market and threaten the energy security of millions of its people and its economy.

The result is a renewed strategic focus by the Philippines government to transition to clean energy sources, not just to meet its sustainability targets but to support its broader economy and the communities it serves.

To address this while accelerating its net zero goals, the Philippines is set to become the main renewable energy producer in Southeast Asia, thanks to an ambitious plan designed to achieve 35% renewable energy generation by 2030 and 50% by 2040.

Philippine President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. claims that his administration will focus on developing renewable energy to pursue energy security.

But while certainly positive, this transition will present many challenges – principally, in terms of how to integrate these new energy producers into the existing grid.

This is because the majority of the Philippines" existing grid structure is decades old and was only ever designed to deal with a steady, reliable supply of energy under the assumption that the amount of energy fed into the grid is always equal to the amount consumed.

The inherent variability of wind and solar, including potential imbalances in supply and demand and changes in transmission flow patterns, make balancing the grid problematic. Without some form of backup, utilities run the risk of instability or even a blackout.

At the same time, the Philippines, as with most island nations, is exposed to an increasingly unpredictable tropical climate, where it is common to experience extremely hot periods followed by sustained rain. This can make the invariability of renewable generation an even greater challenge.

So, the big question is - how can the Philippines integrate renewables to help cut emissions, future-proof and, perhaps, most importantly, build energy security?

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