

Introduction

The East Asia Summit (EAS) region needs to develop every kind of power facility for its future demand for electricity. Of these facilities, those on coal, nuclear, grid, and in some cases, even renewable energy such as wind are facing protests from the locals or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from the start of an infrastructure's construction. Therefore, it is crucial to enhance social acceptance for electric energy if a nation is to achieve a stable electricity supply and a well-balanced power supply mix.

Thus, the previous study on social acceptance on nuclear power plants stemmed from an organized symposium attended by experts from energy businesses and the academe. The seminar acknowledged that the need for such power sources as coal and nuclear energy is not fully accepted by the public, and it is incumbent upon the government and power companies to explain the importance of these power sources as well as their safety and environmental impact. In FY 2016, the study focuses on a case study in Thailand where conflict continues between advocates and opponents of coal-fired power plants (CPPs). The study tries to develop a consensus-based process that reflects and takes into consideration Thailand's unique conditions. As the issues raised on Thailand's CPPs are the same ones tackled elsewhere, the findings from this study can be disseminated among the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members.

The focus of the study is aligned with the various strategic themes in the ASEAN Economic Community Blue Print 2025 and its subordinate paper, APAEC 2016-2025 phase 1, such as the 'ASEAN power grid', 'Coal and Clean Coal Technology', 'Energy Efficiency and Conservation', 'Renewable Energy', and 'Civilian Nuclear Energy', and is anticipated to contribute to the discussion.

In addition, the study is consistent with the goal of creating a resilient society as described in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025, particularly with regard to the principle of ensuring 'availability and accessibility of affordable energy services'. In this context, this project aims to improve social acceptance of electric power infrastructure.

This project has three methodologies:

1. It conducted a case study on social acceptance for CPPs in Thailand, with the cooperation of local energy experts. Currently, the government promotes CPP from the energy security perspective, in the midst of protests over CPPs because of past experiences. The result of the case study may be useful to other ASEAN member countries that face the same kind of conflict. The analysis considered the following points:

- Summary of issues raised by advocates and opponents
- Essentials in improving social acceptance
- Formation of a consensus-based process that takes into consideration the above findings
- Information sharing and further discussion through workshops

2. It reviewed cases on public involvement in large energy infrastructure projects from developed countries as a reference. The study analysed the influences of policy and policymakers' decisions and by learning from their cases, found ways to drive public dialogues in Asian countries.

3. Based on the above-mentioned methodologies, the study delivered two kinds of policy recommendations: one for the EAS region in general, and another specifically for Thailand.

This study highlights policy implications on how to mitigate public protests and prevent delays in electric power infrastructure projects in the region. It also raises the crucial issues that can affect public acceptance of electric power infrastructure with potential risks. Direct public involvement would be one of the important measures for social acceptance and political decision-making; however, whether it is valid in other Asian countries should be carefully examined.

The CPP case study in Thailand delivers two kinds of policy recommendations. The first kind provides lessons learned and highlights crucial conditions that must be in place before proceeding with large and risky infrastructure projects in Asian countries. The second suggests an alternative measure for constructing public consensus on general issues, which may be useful information for stakeholders in other Asian countries.