

Solar energy research and development caracas

Five teams were selected to participate in the SunShot Prize: Race to 7-Day Solar ...

Overall, the winning teams will have installed nearly 9.3 MW of solar energy ...

The Solar Energy Research and Development is designed to fund ...

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A woman inside her house in Caracas, Venezuela's capital, during a blackout (Image: Luis Morillo / Alamy)

For more than a decade, the residents of Zulia have only had electricity around 50% of the time. Food rots and appliances break down because of the unpredictability of their power supply. In 2022, the state on Venezuela's northwestern Caribbean coast had more than 37,000 power cuts - the worst in the country, according to the Committee for People Affected by Blackouts, a civil society movement that monitors outages nationwide.

Juan Cristóbal Nagel, a economist from Zulia, argues that "there are two main reasons for the crisis: excessive electricity consumption and insufficient production. And at the root of both problems is poor governance: populism, poor planning, inflexible ideology and overwhelming corruption."

Aixa López, president of the Committee for People Affected by Blackouts, adds that it is now urgent that repairs and upgrades are carried out on Venezuela's electricity system, because these problems are worsening year on year.

On top of the blackouts, Venezuelan consumers are being hit by rising electricity tariffs, due to the reduction of a state subsidy for the first time since the 1970s.

In the midst of this crisis, President Nicolás Maduro's administration is seeking to harness solar energy to cover part of the national demand. But this energy transition will need to overcome numerous obstacles.

The year 1976 holds the key to understanding Venezuela's energy challenges. That year, the oil industry was nationalised. Petrol, gas and electricity began to be heavily subsidised - a policy continued by all subsequent governments. Until the second half of 2021, Venezuelans paid just US\$0.002 per kilowatt hour of energy, the lowest tariff in the world.

More recently however, things have changed. The fall in oil prices and, in particular, the internal crisis at

Petr?leos de Venezuela, the state-owned oil company, led to a drop in production. Venezuela currently produces around 685,000 barrels per day, just 20% of what it produced at the end of the 1990s. As a result, state revenues have fallen sharply, forcing the government to increase tariffs 86-fold in June 2022 to \$0.173 per kilowatt hour, according to data compiled by Global Petrol Prices. This exceeds the global average (\$0.161), and is close to what is paid in Israel (\$0.171) or the United States (\$0.175). But this increase in tariffs hasn't led to a rise in electricity generation to remedy the blackouts.

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Web: <https://www.kary.com.pl/contact-us/>

Email: energystorage2000@gmail.com

WhatsApp: 8613816583346

