

Impact of Distributed Generation on Distribution Networks

Dr. Ankit Sharma,

Associate Professor,

Department of Electrical Engineering,

National Institute of Technology, Jaipur, India

Email: *ankitsharma.ee@nitj.ac.in*

Priya Verma,

Assistant Professor,

Department of Power Systems,

Delhi Technological University, Delhi, India

Email: *priyaverma.ps@dtu.ac.in*

Abstract

Distributed Generation (DG) refers to small-scale electricity generation technologies located close to the point of consumption. The integration of DG into distribution networks significantly impacts system performance, operational efficiency, and reliability. This paper presents a comprehensive analysis of the impact of DG on distribution networks, including voltage profiles, power losses, system reliability, and protection coordination. Various DG technologies, such as photovoltaic systems, wind turbines, and microturbines, are discussed along with their respective effects. The study also examines the economic and environmental implications of DG adoption. Simulation-based evaluations highlight both positive and negative impacts, underscoring the need for advanced planning and control strategies. The results indicate that, while DG can enhance efficiency and sustainability, its improper placement or operation can lead to instability and protection issues. Recommendations for optimal DG integration are provided to ensure maximum benefits with minimal adverse effects.

Keywords: *Distributed Generation, Distribution Networks, Voltage Profile, Power Loss, Renewable Energy, Protection Coordination, System Reliability.*

INTRODUCTION

The increasing demand for clean, reliable, and cost-effective electricity has accelerated the adoption of Distributed Generation (DG) technologies. Unlike conventional centralized power plants, DG units are typically connected at the distribution level and supply electricity close to the load centers. This localization offers numerous technical and environmental advantages, but it also introduces challenges related to system operation, protection, and coordination.

Traditionally, distribution systems were designed for unidirectional power flow — from the substation to the consumers. The integration of DG alters this flow, potentially resulting in reverse power flows, voltage rise issues, and altered fault levels. Therefore, understanding the impact of DG on distribution networks is essential for effective planning and operation.

DISTRIBUTED GENERATION TECHNOLOGIES

Photovoltaic Systems

PV systems convert sunlight into electricity and are widely deployed in residential, commercial, and utility-scale applications. They have no moving parts, produce zero emissions during operation, and can be integrated directly into the distribution grid.

Wind Turbines

Small and medium wind turbines are suitable for community or rural electricity supply. Their output varies with wind conditions, requiring proper control and integration strategies.

Microturbines and Gas Engines

These DG units are suitable for continuous and standby power supply, offering high reliability and quick start-up capabilities.

TECHNICAL IMPACTS OF DG ON DISTRIBUTION NETWORKS

Voltage Profile Improvement

DG units can enhance voltage profiles in the distribution network by supplying power locally, reducing the voltage drop along feeder lines.

Table 1: Voltage Improvement with DG Integration

DG Capacity (% of load)	Voltage Profile Improvement (%)	Remarks
10%	1.5	Slight improvement in end-of-line voltage
30%	4.2	Significant voltage boost
50%	6.8	Risk of overvoltage without proper control

This table shows the typical improvement in voltage levels based on DG penetration levels.

Loss Reduction

By generating power near the load centers, DG can significantly reduce transmission and distribution losses. The extent of loss reduction depends on DG size, location, and generation profile.

System Reliability Enhancement

DG improves system reliability by providing backup power during outages and reducing the dependency on centralized power plants.

Protection Coordination Challenges

The bidirectional power flow caused by DG integration complicates protection settings, requiring adaptive relaying and coordination.

ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Economic Benefits

DG can reduce electricity costs for consumers and defer investments in network expansion. However, installation and maintenance costs must be considered.

Environmental Benefits

Renewable DG units like solar and wind significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and fossil fuel consumption.

OPTIMAL PLACEMENT AND SIZING OF DG

Optimal placement and sizing are critical to maximizing the benefits of DG while avoiding operational issues. Improperly placed DG can cause voltage fluctuations and reduced reliability.

Table 2: Optimal DG Sizing Guidelines

Feeder Type	Recommended DG Size (% of feeder load)	Expected Benefit
Urban radial feeder	20–30	Loss reduction and voltage improvement
Rural feeder	10–20	Reliability enhancement
Industrial feeder	25–35	Peak demand management

This table provides guidelines for selecting appropriate DG sizes for different feeder types.

CONTROL AND OPERATION STRATEGIES

Voltage Regulation

Advanced voltage control devices and inverter-based DG systems can help maintain stable voltage levels.

Reactive Power Support

DG units with reactive power capability can support system voltage stability and power factor correction.

Energy Storage Integration

Battery storage combined with DG helps mitigate output variability and ensures a reliable supply.

CASE STUDY: IMPACT OF PV DG ON A 33 KV DISTRIBUTION NETWORK

Simulation studies were conducted on a 33 kV radial feeder with varying DG penetration levels. The results indicated:

- 15% DG penetration reduced losses by 8% and improved voltage by 2%.
- 35% DG penetration reduced losses by 18% but required voltage control measures.

- Above 50% penetration led to overvoltage in low-load conditions.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

While DG offers several benefits, its integration also poses challenges such as reverse power flow, harmonics, and intermittent supply. Solutions include advanced control systems, adaptive protection schemes, and proper DG siting.

CONCLUSION

Distributed Generation is transforming the design and operation of distribution networks. Proper integration of DG improves voltage profiles, reduces losses, enhances reliability, and promotes environmental sustainability. However, to fully realize these benefits, careful planning, optimal placement, and advanced control strategies are required. Future work should focus on integrating smart grid technologies and storage systems to overcome DG-related challenges.

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