



Energy Access and Gender in Nigeria: Policy Brief

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INTRODUCTION

Understanding the gender dimensions of energy access is essential. Women play important roles in energy system development and their empowerment is crucial in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Indeed, many household tasks (e.g., cooking, water collection, and other domestic chores) are mostly performed by women. Equitable access to energy can reduce the burden of household chores as well as contribute in many other ways to women's health, wellbeing and economic participation.

Only 5% of the Nigerian population have access to clean cooking fuels and technologies, meaning that about 190 million people lack this access¹. Over 85 million Nigerians (amounting to about 43% of the population), in over 15 million households, still lack access to electricity². Nigeria is ranked 139 out of 156 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report 2021, with its Human Development Index lower by 13.5% for women than men.

We conducted interviews with 20 stakeholders in Nigeria's energy sector from November 2020 to February 2021. We targeted a diverse array of stakeholders including: government policy institutions and regulatory agencies; development authorities and planners; energy practitioners and engineers responsible for turning policy into action; non-governmental organisations and advocacy groups; and energy users. The aim was to explore the gender dimensions of energy access and how gender dynamics shape energy access interventions in Nigeria. There was particular interest in what professionals working in this space imagined the problems to be and ultimately what their ground-level experiences of energy access interventions were, and with what implications for gender.

1 Eleri, E. O., Ugwu, O. and Onuvae, P. (2012) *Expanding Access To Pro-Poor Energy Services in Nigeria*. International Centre for Energy, Environment & Development (ICEED) Abuja Nigeria.

2 WorldBank (2021) *Nigeria to Improve Electricity Access and Services to Citizens*, Press Release. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/02/05/nigeria-to-improve-electricity-access-and-services-to-citizens> (Accessed: 10 June 2021).

CHALLENGES FOR POLICY

Our research identified five key policy challenges that impact on gender-equitable energy access interventions in Nigeria.

1. **Multiple understandings and meanings of energy access pose challenges for (infrastructure and policy) interventions.** Our research shows five different meanings of energy access within the Nigerian context implying:
 - Energy as a material raw resource (e.g., coal, firewood, gas, etc.).
 - Access to infrastructure of supply (e.g., cables, transformers, etc.).
 - Access to domestic services that energy enables (e.g., cooling, food preparation, ironing, etc.).
 - Energy as a human right.
 - Wider sustainable development enabled by energy (e.g., good health, sanitation, etc.).

These varied understandings held by different stakeholders can lead to disconnected or even contradictory policies and interventions. Essentially, 'prioritising energy access' means different things, and therefore intervention plans and/or measures of success will differ.
2. **Access to an energy supply does not guarantee energy use.** Local stakeholders' and users' acceptance (people's buy-in) and affordability, for example, influenced energy use too – beyond mere provision of energy access.
3. **Local understandings and framings of gender roles (at both household and community levels) shape energy use patterns.**
 - Housework and cooking are often regarded as tasks for women.
 - Women are considered as agents of change at the community level via their role as mothers, carers and social linchpins.
 - Men are viewed as more energy competent (e.g., more technically skilled) than women.
4. **Some energy technology interventions produce unintended gender meanings.**
 - Solar Home Systems (SHS) are viewed as infrastructure for women given that they are used more by women and children (for reading).
 - Hard-wired energy systems are viewed as infrastructure for men given that more men are involved in the value chain for grid infrastructure.
5. **Inequality in access to finance for energy assets poses a risk to achieving energy efficiency and climate goals.**
 - Most energy assets decisions are made by men (e.g., purchase of refrigerators and air conditioners)
 - Many financial institutions still require men (husbands) to serve as guarantors before providing financing facility to women.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Building on the successes in upscaling energy access achieved by the Rural Electrification Agency (REA) and other stakeholder groups, we recommend the following approaches for consideration:

For national and state governments

- Understanding the various roles of men and women as energy users will be useful for targeting energy systems interventions, particularly at community levels. The REA's energy access interventions need to consider gender roles (at household and community levels) for greater impact.
- Energy interventions targeting the community level should begin from understanding the local framings of energy access. What does that local community mean by energy access? In what ways do they think it will benefit them? Is it access to gas, firewood, infrastructure of supply, or energy services for agro-processing or drying fish? This needs to be considered before actual interventions are planned. Bottom-up approaches, rather than top-down impositions and assumptions, may help in this regard.
- There is greater need for inter-agency/sectoral coordination and action on energy infrastructure planning so as to yield multiple benefits. When multiple government agencies set renewable energy targets for themselves, this can lead to inefficiencies in implementation. The REA (normally covering

e.g. minigrids, solar home systems etc.), Energy Commission of Nigeria (e.g., pilot renewable projects), Ministry of Water Resources (e.g., solar pumps), etc., represent clear examples of how policy responsibilities can significantly overlap. Such policy areas need to be better coordinated to yield greater positive outcomes.

For advocacy groups and non-governmental organisations

- There is a need to develop targeted energy training programmes that prioritize economic and social empowerment for women. This can take the form of trainings and workshops that increase their energy knowledge, skills and competences, such as how to use clean cook stoves, blenders, smoking kilns, etc. Women are actually very skilled in energy-using domestic practices, but they may sometimes need support when rolling out energy access programmes that involve the provision of new (unfamiliar) energy technologies.
- Professional women can help in scaling up access to energy assets for rural women through the provision of alternative financing options. For example, female entrepreneurs involved in the sale of energy assets can provide financial plans to purchase such assets. This will provide new opportunities for women to acquire new energy assets and technologies that improves their work.

For financial and funding institutions

- There is a need for more gender-sensitive financing policies that address the energy needs of women. This is important in addressing inequality in access to finance for energy assets such as refrigerators, smoking kilns, etc. Current financing instruments are usually gender-blind. Working with women's associations and cooperatives in drafting loan policies is one way to achieve this.
- Financial and funding institutions should partner with women social entrepreneurs and cooperatives to enable viable energy asset financing options for women. This can be done through partnerships with women's cooperatives and associations. Regular training on financial literacy should also be provided to these women's cooperatives and to social entrepreneurs that serve as intermediaries between the financial institutions and women on the end-use side.

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The views and analysis expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the views of the partner organisations.

