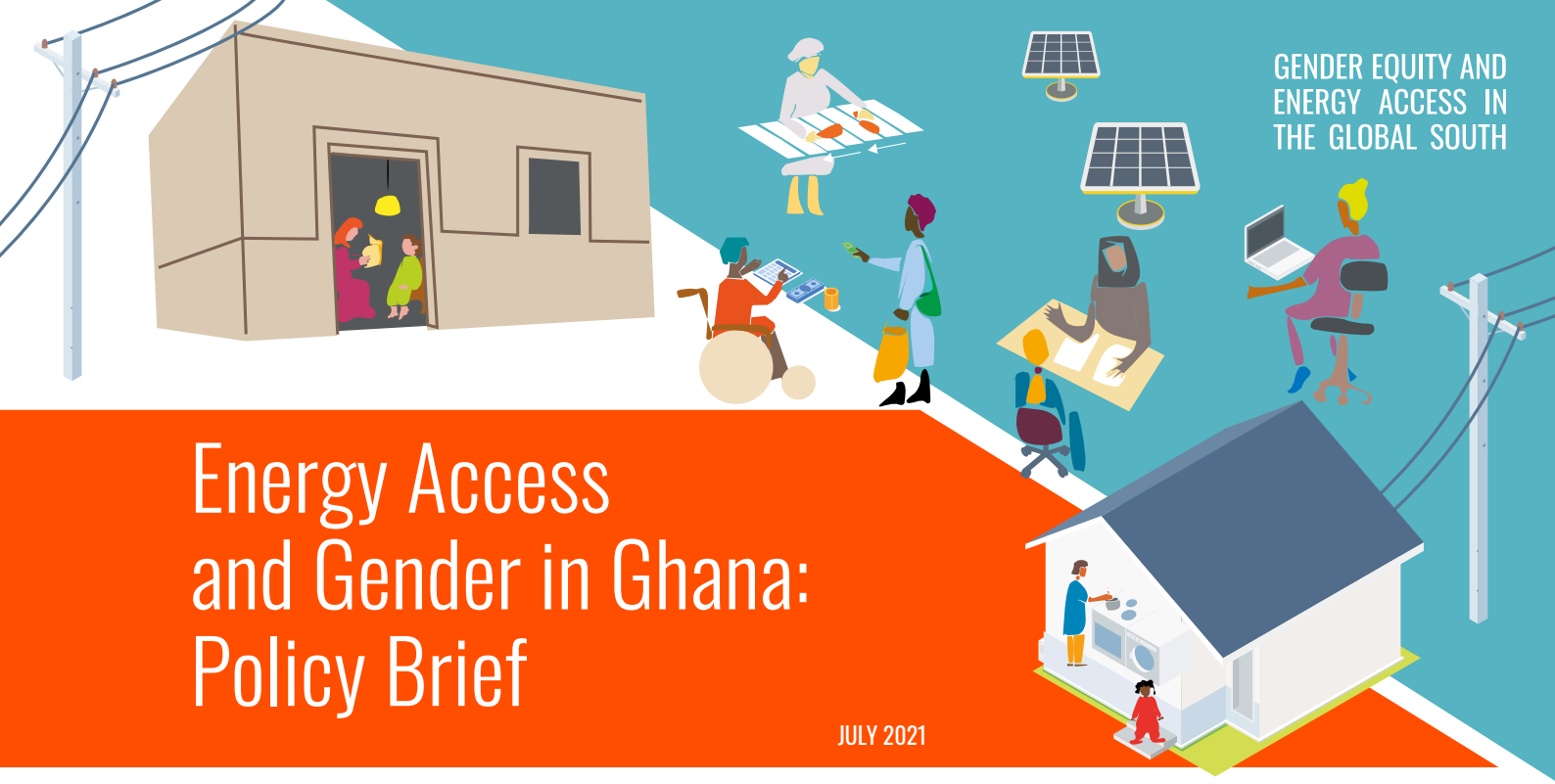

GENDER EQUITY AND ENERGY ACCESS IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Energy Access and Gender in Ghana: Policy Brief

JULY 2021

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INTRODUCTION

In the wider West African region, Ghana is often seen as an energy success story with over 80% of the population having access to grid electricity. Yet, 50% of rural areas live without this access while 'dumsor' (load shedding) poses an ongoing challenge for those connected.

In terms of gender equity, national energy policy recognises the need for gendered responses to improving energy access. Ghana's Energy Policy 2010 clearly indicates that women are some of the most important actors in the energy sector, in terms of their use and management of household energy including renewable sources. It therefore seeks to mainstream energy related gender concerns and align them with wider health and safety as well as environmental standards. Similarly, the Renewable Energy Master Plan[1] indicates that the development of policies and strategies should always seek to ensure equitable participation and delivery of energy services to men, women, children and the vulnerable.

However, there is still a wide gap between gender-aware text in an energy policy statement and its actual implementation at local level. Therefore, our qualitative investigation sought to provide new insights into professionals' perceptions of gender equity in energy access. We carried out interviews with 25 Ghanaian energy professionals including industry, governmental and non-governmental stakeholders.

1 Energy Commission (2019) The Renewable Energy Master Plan, 2019. Energy Commission, Ghana.

Suggested reference: Schiffer, A., and Nkpeebo Yesutanbul, A., 2021, *Energy Access and Gender in Ghana: Policy Brief.* Cambridge: Global Sustainability Institute.

CHALLENGES FOR POLICY

- There is a strongly perceived gap between national gender mainstreaming policy and how this translates into local decision-making.
- Despite their central role in domestic energy consumption, women's involvement in energy related policy making and planning is minimal. Subsequently, less attention is paid to women's energy needs.
- Especially in rural contexts, persistent cultural barriers were highlighted as limiting participation of women in local decision making.
- The lack of targeted energy finance is recognised as a major barrier to increasing access to modern energy for women. This lack of access prevents women from making purchasing decisions such as buying clean cookstoves or investing in solar home systems.
- Rural women and those living in urban slums tend to face additional spatial energy inequalities. They are more likely to have lower incomes and face greater challenges in physically accessing energy, e.g. having to travel larger distances to charge phones, limited access to mobility and living beyond grid infrastructure. Yet, energy policies demonstrate little recognition of these spatial inequalities.
- Not long ago, settlements located on Ghana's Lake Volta received small grid systems to provide electricity.[2] However, these island grids are increasingly facing capacity challenges as demand has outgrown local supply. Consequently, energy cannot be used in a way that meets the needs of women, for example to use refrigeration for income generation.
- There is little gender disaggregated data on energy available for decision making. Therefore, policy programming and implementation cannot effectively formulate actions that promote gender equity.
- An estimated 75% of the Ghanaian economy is informal, with women constituting the bulk of the sector. This means they are not connected into the national energy related development framework, leaving energy needs unmet. This systemic structural issue has been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic[3] and is a key barrier to equitable energy access and economic recovery.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Build capacity and resourcing of local decision makers: Local government structures including Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) need to be better equipped in identifying, communicating and addressing gender inequities in energy access. This includes training for key staff as well as resourcing to implement practical interventions.

Ensure a balanced gender representation in government structures: Across all levels of government better representation of women (including rural women) will ensure their needs are reflected in policy and implementation programs and that gender equality becomes integral to achieving just energy transitions. Quotas or similar interventions should be explored.

Create targeted energy finance for women: lack of access to adequate finance poses a barrier when women require access to larger sums of money to invest in energy hardware such as solar home systems. This can be further compounded in patriarchal homes where women depend on their husbands for outgoings. Targeted energy finance for women to enable better purchasing decisions is needed to overcome socio-cultural and economic barriers. This can be made available via government or non-governmental organisations.

Develop target action to address spatial inequity: rural women and those that live in slums on the fringe of urban areas have to overcome additional challenges when it comes to energy access. Improving access for these women requires effective decentralisation of energy production and distribution systems, addressing the specific context in which they are situated. This includes responding to local energy consumption practices, addressing the causes of economic disadvantages and improving supply chain issues, including seasonal access challenges.

2 For example, see: https://www.ippmedia.com/en/news/electrifying-lake-volta-islands-ghana

3 Akuoko, P.B., Aggrey, V. and Amoako-Arhen, A. (2021) Ghana's informal economic sector in the face of a pandemic. Social Sciences & Humanities, 3. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2020.100094

Future proof off-grid systems[4]: To ensure that remote island grids do not become obsolete, careful consideration of how consumption may evolve over time is needed from the outset. Only providing 'basic' energy access is unlikely to meet long-term demand. Yet, consumption caps may be needed to reduce spikes in demand and associated infrastructure costs.

Make policy implementation data-driven: It is important to start by raising awareness of MMDA on the significance of gender disaggregated data, including intersectional data. These agencies need to develop gender sensitive data collection systems and ensure proper record keeping in a manner that facilitates accessibility and gender mainstreaming in the energy sector.

Offer targeted support to women entrepreneurs: Improving energy access for female entrepreneurs through resources and training will ensure a more inclusive approach to energy access; this is currently overlooked in the informal sector. It will enhance employment opportunities for women as both users of energy as well as promoters of renewable energy systems.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Policy Brief is part of the 'Gender equity and energy access in the Global South' project led by Dr Chris Foulds at Anglia Ruskin University (ARU). We acknowledge funding received through ARU's 2020-21 QR Global Challenges Research Fund award which enabled this collaboration with partners in Ghana, India, Netherlands, Nigeria, Pakistan, and the UK. We would like to thank Cecilia Alda Vidal for undertaking the interview analysis and Sarah Royston for providing editorial feedback on the brief.

In Ghana, we are grateful to GROC-350.org, ABANTU for Development and the Energy Commission for their support of and contribution to the project. We are especially thankful to all the energy sector professionals who contributed their invaluable time and expertise by participating in the interviews.

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

4 See Chapter 5 'Enough is Enough: considering energy sufficiency' in: Schiffer, A. (2020) *Reframing energy access: insights from The Gambia.* London: Routledge.