

Beyond Man-power: How can electricity from mini grids be harnessed to boost productivity for women in agricultural value chains?

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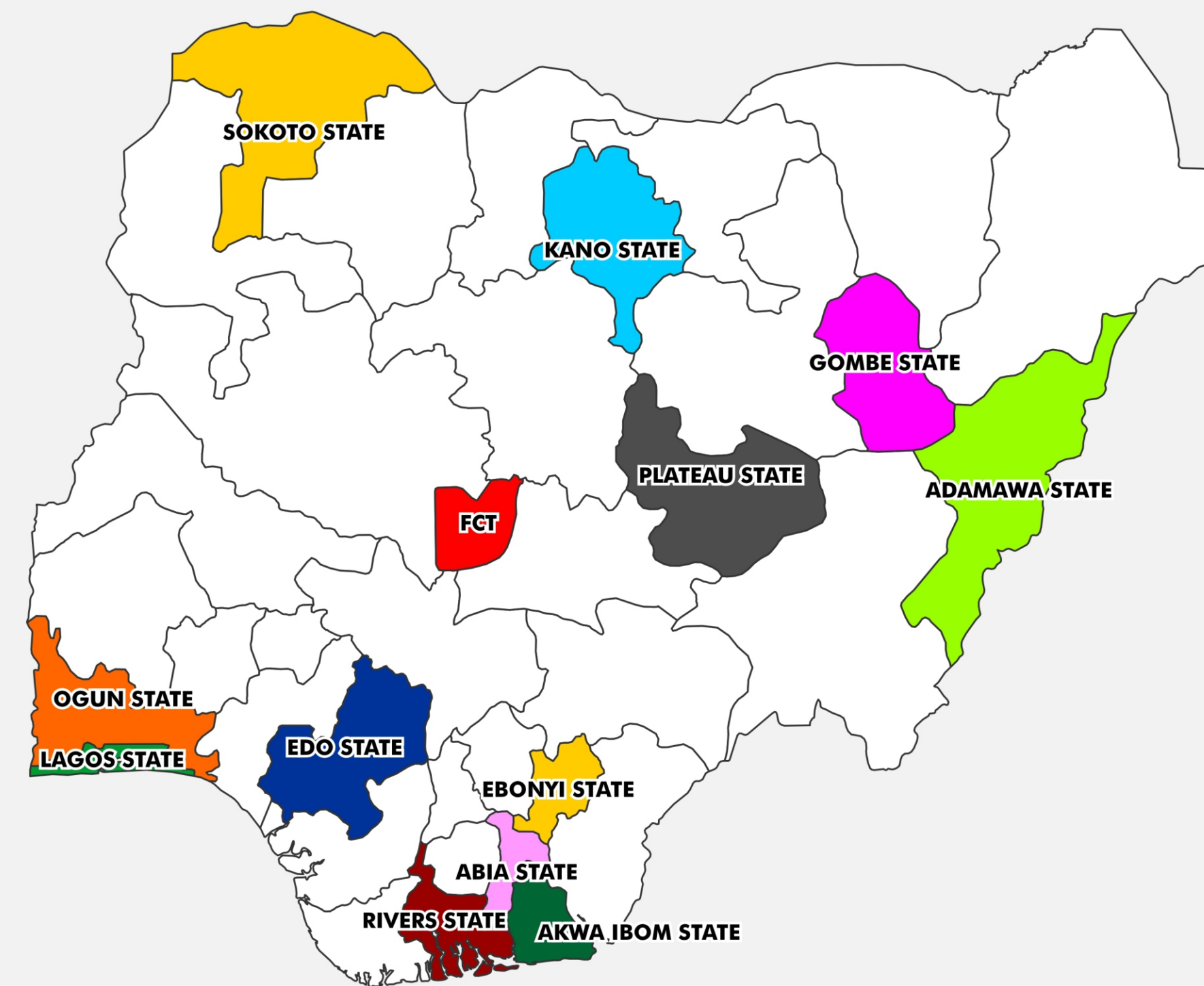
1 Introduction

Mini grids are currently having a moment in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. These initiatives are increasingly focused on productive uses of power, which are expected to raise rural incomes while also enhancing the commercial viability of mini-grid installations. However, the extent to which rural women – many of whom are at the bottom of agricultural value chains – are benefiting from mini-grid electricity has not been thoroughly examined.



2 Methodology

Qualitative research was carried out in thirteen communities across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria to understand patterns of electricity access distribution in the rural areas being served by mini grids. Between February and August 2022, interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with 260 stakeholders from the private sector, government, civil society, host communities, and development finance institutions. The data were coded and analysed under the broad theme of inclusiveness.



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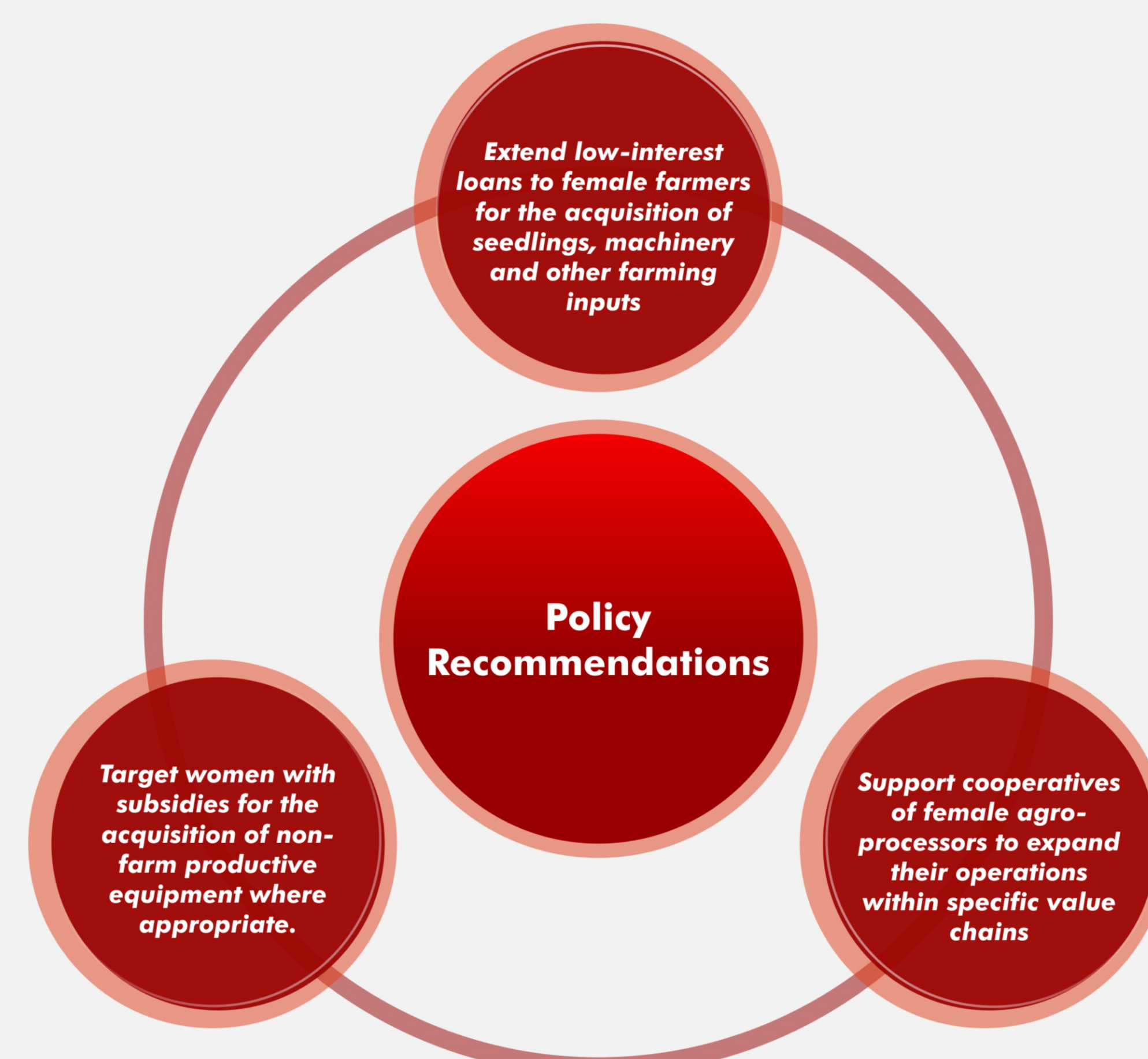
3 Results

Our research showed that, while mini-grids have enabled productive uses of electricity for relatively well-established rural enterprises that previously relied on electricity from petrol and diesel generators, the impact on smallholder farmers and agro-processors has been more muted, with women being the most affected. Importantly, the traditional methods overwhelmingly used by women in processing agricultural staples do not readily lend themselves to electrification, with negative implications for productivity and profitability.



4 Conclusion

To maximise the payoffs from mini-grid investment in Nigeria, stakeholders need to conceive of rural development and energy access holistically, taking agriculture as the starting point. It is especially important to understand the needs of female farmers and agro-processors, with a view to expanding their traditional roles in agricultural value chains. Policies aimed at helping these women upskill and upscale their operations are required if they are to benefit equitably from the burgeoning mini-grid movement in the country.



“Our society is a bit patriarchal and most times you find out that most of the customers are mostly men... and what we try to do is try as much as possible to encourage female involvement in the whole energy dynamics, so we try as much as possible to encourage female-owned businesses... just to try as much as possible to maintain a healthy balance between genders. – Mini-grid developer in Nigeria”