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Mitigating the Effects of Fuel Subsidy Removal in Nigeria from 2023-Till Date: The Journey Thus Far

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Abstract

The complete removal of fuel subsidy by the President Bola Ahmad Tinubu led Administration in 2023 came as a surprise as the administration wasted no time in implementing the policy, however the various palliative measures put in place to cushion the effects on the venerable segment of the society and how far it have changed the forturne of the masses is what this paper seeks to analyze. Key palliative measure were evaluated and how their impact can better be felt by the target segment of the society. The work is qualitative and uses documentary research design, hence data were majorly gotten from secondary sources and content analysis method was used in analyzing the data. The work identified key palliative measure taken in area of fund re-investment to providing infrastructure and other amenities, social safety nets to support the purchasing power of both the civil servants at first and the larger society later and the conditional cash transfer packages target paying the vulnerable segment a monthly stipend. Despite these lofty palliative packages the government still needs to do more capturing these vulnerable segment and ensuring seamless registration as well as embarking on massive awareness campaign to ensure inclusiveness and continuous monitoring/evaluation to help address grey areas.

Key Words: Fuel Subsidy, Fuel Subsidy Removal, Government, Mitigate, Palliative.

Introduction

Petroleum subsidy commonly referred to as fuel subsidy is an aid the government provides that makes the commodity available at a lesser cost to consumers. The subsidizing is implemented by governments in many developing countries with the aim of promoting economic growth and affordability of basic transportation and cooking fuel needs. In Nigeria, subsidy was implemented to make the product affordable and accessible as well as to make life easy for the citizenry. Government resources are used to pay for the differences in cost, sustain the welfare of the citizens and bridge the gap between private cost and societal benefits. Fuel subsidy has been in place since 1977 in Nigeria and the various regimes and government has been augmenting the differentials in the importation cost and the price at which consumers purchase the commodity. Fuel subsidies payment in Nigeria have long been a topic of debate due to their substantial impact on government spending and the economy. The Nigerian government has spent trillions of naira annually to keep fuel prices low, despite the economic strain this imposes on national revenue. According to the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI), Nigeria spent over ₦10 trillion on fuel subsidies between 2006 and 2018, diverting funds from crucial sectors like education, healthcare, and infrastructure (NEITI, 2021). Despite this enormous expenditure, fuel subsidies have not significantly improved the living standards of the poorest citizens, many of whom still lack access to basic amenities, also instead of reducing the socioeconomic inequality gap, it is increasing it.

In 2023, the Nigerian government decided to remove fuel subsidy completely a decision that has generated heated debate, particularly regarding its immediate effects on the most vulnerable segments of society. A major concern for the opponents of the decision is the inflationary impact of higher fuel prices on food, transportation, and other essential goods. For example, the cost of transportation, which will directly affects the ability of low-income workers to access jobs and markets, has skyrocketed since the subsidy was lifted (BudgIT, 2023).

Though the removal of fuel subsidies has far-reaching economic, social, and political consequences, particularly in Nigeria, where a significant portion of the population lives in poverty. Fuel subsidies, was meant to provide relief, but due to its short-coming, have long been criticized for being economically inefficient and socially regressive. Studies indicate that the wealthiest twenty percent (20%) of Nigerian households capture the majority of the benefits from fuel subsidies, while the poorest forty percent (40%) benefit the least. This occurs because the rich tend to consume more fuel, directly and indirectly, through private transportation and energy-intensive lifestyles (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2024).

While the debates rages on the positive or negative effects of fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria, mitigating its effects especial on the vulnerable people is what this paper seeks to looking at cushioning efforts of the government in addressing problem associated with fuel subsidy removal and providing some solution to the challenges of this palliatives distribution in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

While the fuel subsidy removal policy has been hailed as a necessary economic reform, it also raises important concerns about its immediate and long-term consequences on the vulnerable poor people in Nigeria. The sharp rise in fuel prices following subsidy removal has led to increased inflation, higher transportation cost and food costs, as well as a decline in the purchasing power of low-income households. This has further deepened the economic strain on Nigeria's most vulnerable populations, threatening to widen the already significant inequality gap instead of freeing up resources to build infrastructure and social welfare packages that ought to bridge the gap.

Secondly, the positive effects of fuel subsidy removal are hardly been felt by the people, is it a problem of inadequate palliative measures or insincerity on the part of its handlers to addressing the problem caused by removing subsidy..

Research Question

i. What are the cushioning measures in place to help address the effects of fuel subsidy removal on the vulnerable poor in Nigeria?
ii. How can the palliatives be effectively utilized to help address the problem raised in the society?

Objective of the Study

i. The study seeks to understand what are the palliatives in place to help alleviate the suffering of the vulnerable poor in Nigeria.
ii. Also the work intend to shade more light on what the government needs to do both immediately and in the long run to help mitigate the effects of fuel subsidy removal on the masses.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This section tends to shades light on previous study on the subject being studied to enable the researcher find new theme and gap to be filled.

Empirical Review

The influence of fuel subsidies and its removal has been subject of several studies, this work will examine some of these studies to appreciate better the gap this research seeks to fill.

Ogundipe and Amaghionyeodive (2013), examined the macroeconomic effect of fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria, focusing on aspects like inflation, government revenue and employment. Using Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) model, their research simulated various scenario to assess the policy's outcome on the citizens and their findings was all three variable had negative impact on the masses. Also, Obiora and Ozili (2023), analyzed the macroeconomic microeconomic impacts of the 2023 fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria using discourse analysis. Their findings highlighted several benefits such as freeing financial resources for critical sectors, boosting local refinery operations, reducing reliance on imported fuel and addressing infrastructural deficits. However, the study also acknowledged political drawbacks including short term economic growth decline, inflationary spikes, increased poverty, fuel smuggling and job losses in the informal sector. Notably, the study limitations included a lack of empirical data and insufficient explanation on practical implementation challenges on the social and political implication. Ikenga and Oluka (2023), examined the benefits and challenges of the fuel subsidy removal on Nigeria's economy during the fourth republic. The study employed descriptive analysis and a qualitative data collection method was deployed. Neo-colonialism theory was used as the theoretical framework for the study. The paper concluded that previous administrations attempt to reverse the fuel subsidy policy had significant negative effects on citizenry as they led to increased prices of petroleum products, food and transportation. The study recommended that the central government should pay closer attention to the policy impact on the masses by providing palliatives to alleviate their suffering. Additionally, the government should ensure availability of stable electricity supply, essential amenities and infrastructural facilities to mitigate the effects on the citizens.

Lawal and Umar (2024) discusses the "impact of fuel subsidy removal on the welfare of Nigeria's working class, examining the policies surrounding fuel pricing and its socio-economic consequences". Subsidies have been utilized by Nigeria's consecutive administrations to lower the cost of fuel, a vital energy source. But in May 2023, President Bola Tinubu discontinued the fuel subsidy, which caused petrol prices to skyrocket. The study makes the case that this removal has made living circumstances for the working class worse by raising the cost of commodities and transportation, aggravating poverty, and decreasing the purchasing capacity of the populace. The data also shows that the elimination of fuel subsidies has not been matched with sufficient assistance programs to safeguard the working class. Because of this, inflation has increased, further impoverishing a large number of Nigerians. Concerns about the drastic impact on livelihoods have been voiced by groups including the Christian Association of Nigeria and the Nigerian Labour Congress. The working class is left vulnerable since the federal government has promised palliative care and salary adjustments, but these actions have not yet been implemented. According to the study, the Nigerian government ought to have made non-commercial refining partnerships with other nations or given local petroleum

product refining priority. This would lessen the impact of outside price changes and offer a steady supply of gasoline at reasonable costs. The wellbeing of workers suffers in the absence of such safeguards, and the report calls for extensive policy changes to address these issues.

Odojoma,Musa, Maduekwe, Isah, Idiege, Emmanuel, Ogunrinde, and Atteh (2024), examined how the removal of fuel subsidies affected households in Bwari Area Council, Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, Nigeria. The study concluded that the removal of fuel subsidies had a major impact on people's quality of life because it had a strong negative impact on businesses, which resulted in challenges like high transportation costs, high healthcare costs, and high food costs. In order to lower the expensive cost of food items. They recommend that the state implement measures like price control and enhance distribution channels, the government should also provide public transportation services. And implement measures like price control and better distribution channels to lower the exorbitant price of food items. They also recommend that the government provide public transportation services to mitigate the impact of the removal of fuel subsidies. Lastly, they recommend that programs like social welfare, skill development, and entrepreneurship be started to address the issues of social unrest. Fighting insecurity will require a concerted effort, including community policing, law enforcement, and intelligence sharing. This will promote the growth of economic activity. Employee compensation should be increased in both the public and private sectors. Finally, in order to mitigate the impact of the loss of gasoline subsidies, the government must enhance the delivery of healthcare services.

Okereke, Emenekwe, Nnamani, Onyeneke and Amadi (2024) explores the socio-economic impact of Nigeria's fuel subsidy reforms on households, focusing on petrol price changes. The Quadratic Almost Ideal Demand System (QUAIDS) model is used in the study to evaluate household budget patterns and energy use, especially in response to the absence of subsidies. The results show that the elimination of subsidies raises the price of petrol, which disproportionately affects people in rural and lower-income areas. Nigerians have a very inelastic demand for petrol, which means that price rises put a heavy burden on household budgets rather than considerably reducing use. The welfare losses that are particularly severe for lower-income and rural populations exacerbate economic inequality. The study makes specific recommendations for government actions, like lump-sum transfers, to lessen these negative consequences. It has been discovered that redistribution policies targeted at the poorest forty percent (40%) of workers and those living below the federal poverty line are effective in lowering welfare losses. These policies are progressive since it has been demonstrated that they greatly mitigate the negative effects of subsidy reforms. The research highlights the significance of well-crafted redistribution tactics to safeguard marginalized communities while promoting energy shifts and budgetary adjustments. The report's conclusion emphasizes the necessity of equitable policy approaches that take into account the many effects that differ among

income categories and geographical areas. To guarantee the socioeconomic viability of subsidy reforms, a comprehensive strategy that incorporates targeted assistance for households with lower incomes and revenue regeneration through lump-sum transfers is necessary. The results also highlight how crucial it is to address gender-specific effects and enhance public services, especially in rural regions, in order to promote a fair and inclusive energy transition.

Okorie and Wesseh (2024) discusses the effects of fuel subsidy removal on economic welfare and environmental quality, using Nigeria's 2020 subsidy reform as a case study. The authors simulate the effects of the reform using the African Energy and Environment Integrated Computable General Equilibrium (AEEICGE) model. They discover that while eliminating the subsidy reduces carbon emissions and the usage of fossil fuels, it has detrimental economic effects as well, especially for Nigerian firms and people because it raises prices and reduces welfare benefits. For the impoverished, the detrimental economic effects are more pronounced. The report suggests redistributing the eliminated subsidy to individuals and companies as transfer payments from the government in order to lessen these effects. The alternative approach reverses the negative economic effects and improves both the economic and environmental welfare results. In particular, the reallocation helps low-income households—who first bear the brunt of the elimination of subsidies—while firms may utilize the money that was transferred to grow and boost productivity. The report emphasizes how crucial it is to take the economy and environment into account when creating subsidy reforms.

Raifu and Afolabi (2024) emphasized the inflationary consequences of premium motor spirit price (PMS) and projected how much PMS Price will contribute to inflation in Nigeria. Demonstrating that while, there is a small variation in the inflationary impact in both urban and rural regions, premium motor spirit price primarily controls the path of inflation in Nigeria. The current gasoline subsidy has a long-lasting inflationary effect, which emphasizes the necessity to implement methods to lessen Nigeria's rising inflationary pressures. The Nigerian government ought to specifically redeploy the money saved from the elimination of subsidies toward modernizing the nation's refineries. Before renovating the other refineries, the nation should first make sure that the one with the lowest cost is completely operational. Moreover, specific financial transfers to...Before renovating the other refineries, the nation should first ensure that the refinery with the lowest cost is completely operational. In order to offset inflationary pressures and lessen the immediate impact of an increase in oil prices on living expenses, targeted financial transfers should be made to areas that are particularly vulnerable, especially those in rural communities.

Idrees, Rabi and Nura (2024), studied the effects of fuel subsidy elimination on Nigeria's sustainable development. They concluded that the issue has been controversial, with some experts contending that it will exacerbate poverty while others believe it will free up much-

needed resources. This study evaluated the effects of eliminating fuel subsidies on Nigeria's long-term economic growth. By analyzing the economic effects of removal fuel subsidies, this study aimed to contribute to the current policy discussion by examining the implications of such subsidies and their potential role in promoting sustainable development. The study used an exploratory research design and mostly used a qualitative data collection method Through the use of qualitative content analysis, secondary data were examined. The theoretical foundation for the investigation was human capital theory. According to the study, eliminating fuel subsidies has a direct impact on the economy and can lead to increased inflation, fiscal viability, reducing debt, poverty and vulnerability, protests, and social unrest. The federal government should also guarantee accountability and transparency in the handling of the money saved from eliminating subsidies. The government should give priority to addressing widespread hunger, rising unemployment, and falling living standards, according to the study. In Nigeria, the elimination of gasoline subsidies may cause short-term economic difficulties, but over time, the nation's sustainable development may benefit from careful planning, openness, and well-targeted policies.

Thus, it is necessary that, in order to secure a more robust and prosperous future for Nigeria, greater focus needs to be placed on responsible budgetary management, infrastructure improvement, energy industry reform, and economic diversification. It is crucial to understand that eliminating fuel subsidies may lead to short-term financial difficulties but may also open the door to long-term sustainable development. In light of the aforementioned, it is advised that government utilize funds saved from the removal of subsidies transparently and accountably, as well as the funds should be directed toward development projects and programs aimed at reducing poverty. A comprehensive strategy that strikes a balance between economic effectiveness, welfare for society, sustainability of the environment, and inclusive growth should be adopted, and efforts to broaden the economy and free us from an excessive reliance on oil should be accelerated. By doing this, the economic shocks brought on by changes in oil prices may be lessened. the distribution of money saved by eliminating subsidies toward the building of public transit networks, roads, and power plants in an effort to lower living expenses and spur economic expansion. The business sector ought to be Encourage participation in service delivery and infrastructure development to increase productivity and lessen the financial strain on the government. Putting in place fiscal changes to increase income creation and lessen the government's dependence on oil profits. This may entail taking steps to increase revenue collection and widen the tax base.

Gap in knowledge

Majority of the literatures review harp on the subject matter of subsidy removal in Nigeria and how the government can help mitigate its impact holistically. This paper seeks a

mitigation paradigm drawn from what the government already puts in place as palliatives and social safety nets. The problem with these palliative challenge remains largely on the managing processes.

Theoretical Framework

Neo-liberal Economic Theory emphasizes free-market capitalism, minimal government intervention, and the primacy of individual enterprise in driving economic growth and societal progress. Rooted in classical liberalism, it advocates for policies that promote privatization, deregulation, free trade, and fiscal austerity. This theory emerged prominently in the late 20th century as a response to perceived inefficiencies of state-controlled economies and was championed by economists such as Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman. They argued that markets, when left to operate without significant government interference, are the most efficient mechanisms for allocating resources, fostering innovation, and driving economic development (Hayek, 1944; Friedman, 1962). Friedrich Hayek's work, particularly in *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), warned against excessive state control, suggesting that central planning leads to inefficiencies, stifles individual freedoms, and paves the way for authoritarianism. Milton Friedman expanded on these ideas in *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962), where he advocated for policies such as the deregulation of industries, floating exchange rates, and monetarist approaches to controlling inflation. Neo-liberalism gained traction globally during the 1980s, with leaders like Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and Ronald Reagan in the United States implementing policies that embodied its principles.

Core features of Neo-liberal Economic Theory include the prioritization of market mechanisms over state intervention. It posits that governments should focus on creating an environment conducive to free enterprise rather than directly managing the economy. This is achieved through policies like reducing trade barriers, encouraging competition, and privatizing public assets (Friedman, 1962). Another key feature is the emphasis on fiscal discipline, which advocates for reducing government spending and deficits to ensure economic stability. Proponents argue that limiting government borrowing prevents inflation and encourages private sector investment.

Neo-liberalism also stresses individual responsibility and self-reliance, often linking economic success to personal effort rather than structural factors. While this approach incentivizes productivity and innovation, critics argue that it can exacerbate inequality and neglect the needs of vulnerable populations (Harvey, 2005). In developing countries, neo-liberal policies have often been implemented through structural adjustment programs mandated by institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, which condition financial assistance on the adoption of market-oriented reforms. These programs have sparked debates over their social and economic impacts, particularly in regions like Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America (Stiglitz, 2002).

Neo-liberal Economic Theory remains influential in shaping global economic policies, though it has faced criticism for its role in widening inequality and undermining public welfare systems. Its proponents, however, continue to argue that free markets are essential for fostering long-term economic growth and innovation.

Application of the theories to the study

The research can therefore be examined effectively through the dual lens of neo-liberal economic theory. These frameworks provide complementary perspectives on how policy decisions, such as fuel subsidy removal, shape economic and social hierarchies, and their broader implications for inequality and poverty in society.

Methodology of the Study

The research adopted a documentary and qualitative research design which enables a through exploration of the topic. Secondary sources of data was collected from textbooks, journals, official document reports, online publication and seminar papers related to the subject matter. This approach ensures various perspectives and insights were captured. The content analysis method was used in analyzing the gathered information. This method allowed identifying key themes, patterns and meaning within the data ensuring the acquired data supports findings and conclusions that sufficiently addresses the research objective.

Evaluation of Research Question Raised.

i. What are the cushioning measures in place to help address the effects of fuel subsidy removal on the vulnerable poor in Nigeria?

The President Tinubu's administration has taken several steps to mitigate the effect of fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria focusing on re-investment, conditional cash transfer and social safety net. These have led to economic relief, infrastructural development and other financial incentive packages. According to (Punch Newspapers, 2023), the government has announced palliative package including cash payments to public servants and pensioners, hazard allowance for health workers and peculiar allowance for public servants. Also, (Uko, Etefia and Ebang, 2024), noted that funds saved from fuel subsidy removal is being re-invested in public infrastructure, education, health and job creation, like the super highway from Lagos to Calabar, the education sector receiving a boost and establishment of more federal university as well as the building of healthcare centers in the various wards of the federation and creating jobs through entrepreneurial skill acquisition centers in the federation. Social Safety Nets measures like unemployment benefits and cash transfers are being explored to support vulnerable populations. (Amnesty International: 2023). Additionally, the government is exploring innovative transportation operations like the conversion from Premium Motor Spirit (PMS), to

Compress Natural Gas (CNG) vehicle for transportation purposes. This initiative is aim to reduce transportation cost and carbon emission. And efforts are ongoing to promoting alternative energy sources and supporting small and medium sized businesses.

Another cushioning measure introduced by the Nigerian government is the establishment of conditional cash transfer programs. This programs aim to provide financial assistance to low-income households, helping them cope with rising costs of living due to higher fuel prices. According to the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs (2024). A twenty-five thousand naira (N25, 000) cash transfer to Nigerians through the Tinubu Palliative Registration portal was set up to help disburse the fund.

And the National Social Safety Net Coordinating Office overseeing these initiatives and working to improve the lives of vulnerable populations. Noted, the government is providing financial assistances, Insurance and other forms of support like household support for those in need. Also targeted support for those affected more directly by the fuel subsidy removal. And the social security insurance to ensure citizens well-being. For instance the National Education Loan Fund commonly referred to as NELFUND to students in tertiary institution to enable them fund their education and Nigerian Consumer Credit Corporation (CREDICORP) aim at helping first the civil servants and later consumers pay fifty percent of the cost price for a commodity while the remaining fifty percent will be rescheduled and pay installmentally. These schemes are meant to improve the purchasing power of both the workers and citizens

From the above, the palliative thus far were intended to effective reduce the negative impact of fuel subsidy removal on the citizenry, however it effectiveness is the basis for the next research question for evaluation.

ii. How can the palliatives be effectively utilized to help address the problem raised in the society?

The immediate and long effects of fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria and the palliative in place to help cushion these effects have remain a subject of debate on its effectiveness or otherwise. While some believe the impact of these palliative are being felt by the vulnerable poor in the society, others believe the palliative impact is hardly felt due to the management and handling processes. The following are some of the ways of ensuring the effectiveness and efficiency of the process.

i. Identification of the targeted vulnerable people in Nigeria: this will help the government to ensure that only those who are truly within the bracket are captured for enrollment as beneficiary. .
ii. Streamlining the process with clear criteria guideline: this will ensure the registration process is not ambiguous and the guideline for registration is uniform across board.
iii. Create enough public awareness that will reach these targeted vulnerable poor through: exploring different channels and avenue of communication. Reaching them through languages they understand

iv. Consistent monitoring and Evaluation: these measures will help ensure compliance to due process and help check any form of sabotage and fraud associated within the scheme.
v. Regular Assessment of the palliative exercise to ensure timely completion and clear feedback on area that needs attention. Also, assessing progress made will help the government to know and equip itself for the task ahead.

Conclusion

The removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria remains a contentious issue in the light of the effect it is expected to have on the citizenry. While palliative measures are being outlined and put in place to help alleviate the suffering associated with fuel subsidy removal, its effects are yet to be rightly felt as Centre for Transparency Advocacy rightly puts it,

> "the composition of the palliative consultative committee was poor constituted as it is not all inclusive, particularly in representing vulnerable groups like women and persons with disabilities"

Meaning the government still needs to do more in order to get its efforts right at providing palliative

Recommendations

The study therefore recommended the following:

i. Nigerian government should prioritize the welfare and well-being of the citizens mostly the vulnerable through ensuring palliative packages reached the targeted audience in Nigeria.
ii. Also, efforts should be made to ensure seamless process is followed in capturing and registering these vulnerable people in the Nigerian society.
iii. Finally, the needed awareness needs to be created and effective monitoring and evaluation should be routinely carried out to ensure seamless operation.

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