

Brief Research Report



Evaluation of the Impact of Fuel Subsidy Removal on Family Income and Sustainability in Ondo City, Nigeria

Justinah. O. Ogboru^{1*}, Oseyemi E. Akinyotu²

¹Department of Home Economics, Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo City 520, Nigeria.

²Department of Home Economics, Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo City 520, Nigeria.

***Correspondence:** Oseyemi .E. Akinyotu, Department of Home Economics, Ondo City 520, Ondo State, Nigeria (Email: oseakin@gmail.com).

Abstract: This study evaluated the impact of fuel subsidy removal on family income and sustainability in Ondo City. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Three (3) research questions guided the study. The study population was comprised of all household members in Ondo Metropolis. The total population of the study is two hundred and fifty-three thousand, four hundred and sixty-two (253,462). The sample size was one hundred and eighty-five (185) and was randomly selected using a simple random technique. A structured questionnaire was the research instrument used to elicit responses from the respondents. Split-half reliability was used to determine the instrument's consistency, and a correlation coefficient of 0.76 was obtained. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that the fluctuation of oil prices in the international market necessitated subsidy removal, and the higher cost of transportation increases the cost of food items. The study concluded that the factors that necessitate fuel subsidy removal have a significant relationship with the possible challenges encountered by households in family sustenance. It was therefore recommended that the government's actions, such as increasing civil servants' wages and providing incentives for business owners, could enable them to cope with the increasing prices of commodities, offering a hopeful outlook for the future.

Keywords: Family Income, Family Sustenance, Fuel Subsidy, Households, Nigeria

1. Introduction

To cushion the effect of price hikes in petroleum products, which automatically affect the prices of other commodities, especially food products for Nigerian citizens, the issue of subsidies by the federal government has become significant in making a living better and more comfortable. The government has been paying fuel subsidies for decades to make the retail price affordable to the citizens in Nigeria, but this has brought untold hardship on other developmental programs to the extent that the government had to resolve to borrow. The reason had been that the refineries in the country were not working, hence relying on the importation of petroleum products leading to excessive payment, which cost the country a lot, most especially the activities of cabals and even the smugglers stealing and selling the commodities into other countries in the vicinity (Nnodim, 2022).

A fuel subsidy is an aid the government provides that makes the commodity available at a lesser cost to consumers. The subsidising is done in Nigeria to make the product affordable and accessible and to make life easy for the citizens. Government resources are used to pay for the differences, sustain the welfare of the citizens, and bridge the gap between private costs and societal benefits. Fuel subsidy has been in place in Nigeria since the 1970s; the Nigerian government has since been augmenting the differences in the importation cost of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) and the cost at which customers purchase the commodity. The benefit of a subsidy is that it lowers the cost of products and living costs. However, it financially burdens the government (Adegoke, 2023)

Fuel subsidy removal implies the deliberate action by the government to withdraw all forms of reductions and leverages on the price of crude oil or its products (Oladeji & Akinlabi, 2022) This subvention is a means through which the government reduces the purchase of crude oil products and its allies. However, the country's subvention of crude oil products significantly affects the economy. It poses a substantial financial burden on the system, diverting resources that could be allocated to other important sectors such as education, health, and infrastructure. Over the years, the purchase cost of petrol has kept increasing regularly, which has led to its scarcity and adverse effect on the general populace due to the subsidised rate attached. The non-functional state of Nigeria's refineries for the past three decades due to inconsistency in government policy, lack of maintenance culture, and corruption, among others, has led to the continuous importation of refined petroleum, which the country produces. The impact of oil on the nation's economy is large, and this is no surprise because Nigeria has enormous oil, which ranks it first in Africa, coupled with its 24% allotment in the world. Unfortunately, Nigeria exports crude oil to refine and then spends much money transporting refined products. This singular act of importation of refined petroleum affects the nation's economy, stains the local currency, hinders job opportunities, affects local value creation and causes an increase in the nation's annual budget due to the large sum going into fuel subsidy (Adekunle, & Akinyemi, 2021).

Removing fuel subsidies is crucial to change the nation's ailing economy positively. This is necessary because the payment of fuel subsidies is nothing but a farce due to the widely spread corruption hidden under it, which has toiled on the development and growth of the nation, despite the large part of the budget going into it, much has not been profited by the nation from it. The decision was long overdue; however, the trepidation of its effect on political ambitions and the dread of pressure

from cabals and corrupt people benefiting from fuel subsidies made the government hesitant to overhaul it. Nonetheless, there has been agitation for general reformation of the whole nation's infrastructure and economy as well all of which is centred on fuel subsidy removal(Ojide & Akpan, 2022). The subsidy was brought in to buffer the effect of the oil price hike in 1977 by the then military Governments. However, its advantages are long overdue. It is now taking its toll on the nation's growth, development and, of course, the economy. Page | 119

The country has been importing petrol due to its faulty refineries, thus putting untold hardship on its economy, development, and growth, with only a few cabals, corrupt officials in charge, and petrol smugglers in neighbouring countries. A series of unrest, incessant price hikes, scarcity of products, strikes in protest, and much more accompanied the production and sales of petrol in the country with the advent of civilian government in 1999 (Omotola, 2007). With the incoming of the new government, led by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the fuel subsidy has been removed. After swearing-in on May 29, President Bola Tinubu's administration removed fuel subsidies in Nigeria. In the inauguration speech of the new Nigerian President, President Bola Tinubu, on Monday, May 29 2023, said that the period of subsidising petrol consumption was gone, leading to an increased hike in fuel price from N185 to between N800-N900 per litre. This has led to an increase in the price of domestic products and foreign exchange rates, thus pressuring the nation's economy.

It is, hence, pertinent to the need for adequate and proper planning on subsidy reform to drastically reduce this untold hardship on citizens brought about by fuel subsidy removal. This hardship is mostly felt in the petroleum industry, where the retailer allegedly refuses to sell their current stock to maximise profit. The sales later commenced with the announcement and pump price adjustment by Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) Limited, a body responsible for importing petrol, which adjusted the pump price of its retail outlets upwards and circulated a statement. The action signalled the implementation of the subsidy removal, and other retailers followed suit (Udenta, 2022). Family or household income can be referred to as earnings shared among family members. Family income can be defined and explained as the total monetary value accrued by parents daily, weekly or monthly in terms of additional earnings (Anyanwu, 2014). Family income may determine the financial status of families. Families who have high incomes can provide better shelter, good nutrition, medical care, and better schools with modern facilities. They can also ensure better living standards for their children than those from low-income families. By implication, students from high-income families attend better schools and have access to better learning environments, guaranteeing improved academic performance (Akiri, 2019).

Every citizen feels the negative impact of fuel subsidy removal on his/her finances because the flow of income cannot be commensurable with expenditure; that is, expenditure is much greater than income due to the high cost of commodities. Subsidies removal is undesirable from an equity viewpoint since they cause unfair pay variations and are not a cost-effective method to provide a cushion for the average Nigerian and the poor. (Adebayo, 2020). The adverse impact on inequality can arise through dual notable stations. Primarily, the benefits of fuel subsidies are dispersed in amount to household energy consumption, such as the use of kerosene, a damn exorbitant gas, and its use by

households is typically more energy exhaustive for the lower income households (Oyedepo, 2019). Next, public expenditures on energy subsidies through more redistributive public spending. Still, the Nigerian government remains resolute in removing subsidies, not minding the adverse impact it will have on real household incomes, especially the lower-income households, who are least able to absorb the cost of higher fuel prices.

This research study is hinged on the Rational Choice Theory of Adam Smith, which states that individuals decide by weighing the potential costs and benefits of an action or behaviour. This theory explains how individuals and households make rational decisions about fuel consumption and adaptation to price changes (Scott, 2000). It assumes that people tend to act rationally and make choices that maximise their satisfaction, pleasure, cost-effectiveness, preferences, and opportunity cost despite the increase in the price of fuel, which affects the prices of all goods and commodities. Yet, Nigerians cope and adjust to the exorbitant prices of commodities, though it's very hard. Evaluating the magnitude of income loss on households as fuel price increases becomes pertinent because households' income cannot in any way be equated to the higher expenditure incurred by households. The cost of commodities in the market today is highly exorbitant, making it quite difficult for family members to feed as well as expected. In addition, the percentage of wage/salary spent on transportation is alarming and may take people off-balance and gradually turn them into corporate beggars if not attended to. The question is, is this fuel subsidy removal not reversible? Is the Nigerian government not aware of the high cost of commodities? Can't Nigerian refineries be revived to reduce the high cost of petroleum products? These and many more questions are the worries of the researchers. Hence the need for this study. Removing subsidies can lead to more efficient use of resources as consumers are incentivised to reduce energy consumption and help reduce the financial burden on the government, thereby allowing for the reallocation of resources to other vital sectors like education and health (World Bank, 2019). However, the fact remains that the financial burden will be much on low-income families and vulnerable groups.

This research study helps assess fuel subsidy's social impact on vulnerable populations. It offers new insights into analysing the effects of fuel subsidy removal on the transition of Nigerians to renewable energy sources and its implications for sustainable development. By targeting support to vulnerable populations, fuel subsidy removal can help reduce poverty through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Targeted support programs, utilising SDGs 1 and 10, which focus on reducing income and social inequalities, can help mitigate the impact of fuel removal subsidies on the nation's vulnerable populations. In addition, SDG 1 on No Poverty helps to reduce poverty and ensure all people have a minimum income level; fuel subsidy removal can lead to increased poverty if properly managed by the federal government. Thus, the researchers investigated the assessment of the impact of fuel subsidy removal on family income in Ondo City.

1.1. Statement of Problem

All and sundry, including individuals, private and public sectors, and small, medium and large-scale business owners, utilise fuels one way or the other, either in the form of petrol or diesel, cooking gas, kerosene, and aviation fuels, among others. The price of all the commodities is quite high, affecting virtually everything in the country. Living has been hell for the people, and the poor are not finding it that easy to cope with the cost of living any more. The stoppage of subsidies has not only created an imbalance in the financial stability of households. However, it has also reduced families' income because of the escalating prices of goods and services. Families spend more on essentials such as food, transportation, medical care, and school fees. This has resulted in untold hardship and an increase in the level of poverty of families in Nigeria. Hence, the researchers carried out this study to assess the impact of fuel subsidy removal on family income in Ondo City.

The fuel sold in Nigeria is being distributed to public and commercial firms for sale and people's consumption. Individuals cannot do without consuming these fuel products because they serve as a means of transportation for goods and services, which brings about hardship. At present in Nigeria, the prices of PMS have risen from #160 to #650-750 and even lately sold at the rate of #950 to #1000 during the recent scarcity, while diesel is sold at the rate of #1500, if not more than that. This has resulted in untold hardship and an increase in the level of poverty because an average Nigerian with stable and comfortable living conditions before the fuel subsidy removal has moved to a poor and unbearable state. Parents with average incomes can hardly afford three square meals for their children again. School fees have been increased because of the high cost of commodities to be bought by teachers. Schools, especially higher institutions, cannot afford to pay some bills, such as NEPA, because of the increase in tariffs. Hence, schools that ought to be illuminated are in total darkness, leading to an irregular water supply. Salary earners and others barely save money as the money received cannot sufficiently meet the basic needs of the home.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this research was to evaluate the impact of fuel subsidy removal on family income in Ondo City. The specific objectives were to:

- (a) Investigate the possible factors that necessitate fuel subsidy removal in Ondo City.
- (b) Assess the impacts of fuel subsidies on family income in Ondo City.
- (c) Find out the possible challenges households encounter in family sustenance.

1.3. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- (a) What are the possible factors that necessitate fuel subsidy removal in Ondo City?
- (b) What are the impacts of fuel subsidies on family income?
- (c) What are the possible challenges households encounter in family sustenance?

2. Materials and Methods

1.1. Design for the Study

This study employed a descriptive survey design. A descriptive survey design was useful in

compiling variables, interpreting existing relationships, attitudes, practices, and processes, and comparing variables (independent and dependent variables) in the research study. This design helps in assessing the opinions of households in the study area regarding the impact of fuel subsidy removal.

2.1.1. Ethics Statement

This study got approval from the community head of the study area before administering the questionnaire. Participants were fully informed of the purpose of the study, the procedures involved in the study, such as data collection methods and the benefits of the study. They were also informed of the confidentiality and anonymity procedures for protecting their demographic information and the right to withdraw from the study without penalty as they wished.

2.2. Area of the Study

The area of the study was Ondo City in Ondo State. Ondo City is one of the major cities in Ondo West Local Government Areas of Ondo State. The language spoken here is the Ondo dialect, while the general language and means of communication is the Yoruba language. It is the occupation midpoint for the state where marketable crops such as cassava, grains, yams and cotton are sold. Edo bounds it on the east, Osun and Ogun States on the west, and Kwara and Kogi States on the North. Osemawe is the title of Ondo King. It has three tertiary institutions: one federal, one state, and one private university. They deal in the production of cocoa and kola nuts as their cash crops.

2.3. Population and Sample

The study population was comprised of adults in Ondo City. The total population of adults in Ondo City was two hundred and fifty- three thousand four hundred and sixty-two (253,462). The sample size for the study is one hundred and eighty- five (185). A purposive sampling technique was used to select the sample size for the study. Hence, one hundred and eighty-five (185) respondents were used as the sample size. Sample selection was done to achieve a reliable and accurate result, considering ethical and practical constraints.

2.4. Instrument for Data Collection and Study Procedure

A structured questionnaire titled “Impact of Fuel Subsidy Removal on Family Income Questionnaire [IFSRFIQ]” was used to elicit responses from the respondents. 4-Likert Scale structure questionnaire consisting of items meant to solicit information from the respondents was used for the study. The research adopted the 4-Likert Scale because it allowed respondents to indicate their responses using the provided options according to the degree of acceptance or rejection of the stated statements. Four Likert Scale options denoting Strongly Agreed (SA = 4, Agreed (A) = 3, Disagreed = 2, Strongly Disagreed = 1) were used as the rating scale. The research instrument comprised five (5) sections, A and B. Section A comprised respondents' demographic information. Section B contained questions on assessment of the impact of fuel subsidy removal on family income, such as the possible factors that necessitate fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria, the impact of fuel subsidy on family income, the possible challenges encountered by households in family sustenance and strategies adopted by families to reduce the impact of fuel subsidy removal on family income.

2.5. Data Collection Technique

The researchers personally administered one hundred and eighty-five questionnaire items with the

help of two briefed assistants. The completed copies of the questionnaire were collected immediately to avoid loss in transit.

2.6. Data Analysis Technique

Mean and standard deviation (SD) of items were interpreted. The decision value on the findings was guided using a mean score of 2.5 as the cut-off point. Items with a mean of 2.5 and above were accepted as agreed, while those below were regarded as disagreed. Page | 123

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1: Possible factors that necessitate fuel subsidy in Ondo City

SN	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
1	The fluctuation of oil prices in the international market necessitated subsidy removal	3.36	0.08	Agreed
2	The high level of corruption necessitated subsidy removal	3.37	0.07	Agreed
3	The unbearable increase in government expenditure led to subsidy removal	3.42	0.05	Agreed
4	The need to make petroleum and other products of crude oil readily available led to subsidy removal	3.62	0.18	Agreed

SD = Standard deviation

Table 1 shows mean responses on the possible factors that necessitate fuel subsidy in Ondo City. Items 1, 2, 3 and 4 have mean values of 3.36, 3.37, 3.42 and 3.62, respectively, which are above the cut-off point of 2.50, implying that they agreed that oil price fluctuation in the international market necessitated subsidy removal. The high level of corruption necessitated subsidy removal, the unbearable increase in government expenditure led to subsidy removal, and the need to make petroleum and other crude oil products readily available led to subsidy removal.

Table 2: Impacts of fuel subsidy on family income

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Fuel subsidy removal led to higher prices for fuels consumed for cooking, heating, lighting and private transport	3.42	0.07	Agreed
2	The removal of fuel subsidies increases poverty and vulnerability among household members	3.52	0.03	Agreed
3	Fuel subsidies resulted in inequality as richer households benefited more	3.41	0.08	Agreed
4	Reduced income and savings due to an increase in expenditure	3.61	0.12	Agreed

Table 2 shows mean responses on the impacts of fuel subsidies on family income. Items 1, 2, 3 and

4 have mean values of 3.42, 3.52, 3.41 and 3.61, respectively, which are all above the cut-off point of 2.50 which implies that they agreed that fuel subsidy removal led to higher prices for fuels consumed for cooking, heating, lighting and private transport, the removal of fuel subsidy increases poverty and vulnerability among household members, fuel subsidy removed resulted into inequality as richer households benefit more and that reduced income and savings due to increase in expenditure.

Table 3: Possible challenges encountered by households in family sustenance

SN	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
1	The higher cost of transportation due to subsidy removal increases the cost of food prices	3.67	0.77	Agreed
2	The increased fuel cost leads to a rise in inflation, and this results in a devaluation of the local currency	3.41	1.03	Agreed
3	Removal of the fuel subsidy brings a reduction in employee's income as they must pay more for other utilities	3.64	0.80	Agreed
4	Transportation companies are likely to increase their fees due to the high cost of diesel and petrol	3.58	0.86	Agreed
5	Fuel subsidy removal can have an indirect impact on energy costs as increased fuel prices will lead to higher energy expenses	3.48	0.96	Agreed

Table 3 shows mean responses on the possible challenges households encounter in family sustenance. Items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 have mean values of 3.67, 3.41, 3.64, 3.58 and 3.48, respectively, which are all above the cut-off point of 2.50. The results imply that the higher cost of transportation due to subsidy removal increases the cost of food prices, the increased fuel cost leads to a rise in inflation and this results in a devaluation of the local currency, removal of the fuel subsidy brings a reduction in employee's income as they have to pay more for other utilities, transportation companies are likely to increase their fees due to the high cost of diesel and petrol and that fuel subsidy removal can have an indirect impact on energy costs as increased fuel prices will lead to higher energy expense.

As shown from this study, respondents agreed that the fluctuation of oil prices in the international market necessitated subsidy removal. This implies that when oil prices rise, the cost of importing fuel increases, putting a strain on government finances and making it difficult for the government to maintain subsidies. Since Nigeria has crude oil but no refineries to process it, exporting it for refining is necessary. In addition, the government receives less revenue from oil exports and subsidies, which can also lead to overconsumption and inefficient use of resources, exacerbated by fluctuating oil prices. The high level of corruption necessitated subsidy removal, the unbearable increase in government expenditure led to subsidy removal, and the need to make petroleum and other crude oil products readily available led to subsidy removal. In view of this, Otio (2024) noted that Nigeria's refineries are non-functional, necessitating the continuous importation of refined petroleum. Fuel

importation strains the local currency, while the subsidy primarily favours the cabals and leeway for arbitrage and the illicit transportation of petrol to neighbouring countries(Oyewole, 2021).

Respondents agreed that fuel subsidy removal led to higher prices for fuels consumed for cooking, heating, lighting and private transport, the removal of fuel subsidy increases poverty and vulnerability among household members, fuel subsidy resulted in inequality as richer households benefit more and that reduced income and savings due to increase in expenditure. The subsidy removal has led to a significant increase in fuel prices, which has a ripple effect on the prices of other essential commodities, making it difficult for households to afford necessities, especially food. The cost of beans lately in the market is over #4000 per rubber, something sold at the rate of #1000 or below before the removal of fuel subsidy. Oyebanji (2020) stated that the high cost of transportation affects the price of agricultural produce, while the distance between the market and the farms is a major reason why the cost of transportation is high. In addition, the study of Umeji and Eleanya (2021) explained that Nigerian citizens, especially the poor, suffer more in the form of higher transport fares and increased prices of food items and other essential commodities. Yet, the government argued that fuel subsidy removal is in the overall interest of the citizens. This increased cost of living has reduced households' purchasing power, making it more difficult for households to afford three square meals. Given this, IMF (2019) noted that subsidies are vital for keeping fuel prices and, hence, low living costs. However, the cost of these subsidies is a burden on government finances. Adeniyi (2021) pointed at the high cost of living as causing a high crime rate and an increase in poverty level as people and businesses struggle for survival, among other socioeconomic implications of fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria. In addition, the subsidy has pushed more households into poverty, as they cannot cope with the increased cost of living, making living more unbearable for households.

Respondents agreed that the higher cost of transportation due to subsidy removal increases the cost of food prices, the increased fuel cost leads to a rise in inflation and this results in a devaluation of the local currency, removal of the fuel subsidy brings a reduction in employee's income as they have to pay more for other utilities, transportation companies are likely to increase their fees due to the high cost of diesel and petrol and that fuel subsidy removal can have an indirect impact on energy costs as increased fuel prices will lead to higher energy expenses. This is in line with the contribution of Adeoye (2020) who noted that the fear of the political consequences of large price increases coupled with widespread corruption and pressure from those benefiting from the fuel subsidy regime has made successive governments hesitant to reform the system. However, there has been a growing consensus on the imperative of reform, at the heart of which is the elimination of fuel subsidies.

The use of cheaper transportation networks such as rail and sea will help reduce the cost of transporting food and other commodities through mass transportation, increasing salaries and wages through diversifying into other means of sustainable income and increasing minimum wage to a reasonable level will help in reducing this continued hardship caused by fuel subsidy removal. Oladeji (2020) reiterated that fuel subsidy payment diverts part of the resource for developmental purposes towards consumption. Hence, the resources that should have gone into infrastructure, education, health, and security with positive externalities are going into consumption. Also, PwC (2023) noted

that removing fuel subsidies would encourage investors to establish firms or business organisations. The question is this: Is the government using the removal appropriately? As the IMF (2019) noted, fuel subsidies significantly burden government budgets and can be a major obstacle to energy market reform. According to Ozili and Obiora (2023), the positive implications are that fuel subsidy removal would free up financial resources for other sectors of the economy, incentivise domestic refineries to produce more petroleum products, reduce Nigeria's dependence on imported fuel, increase employment among others.

The findings of this study imply that higher fuel prices and reduced purchasing power of households lead to decreased savings for family members. This automatically limits the access of household members to essential services, increases costs for transportation and increases the poverty burden on women and the vulnerable population. Accurate data on household expenditure and income is scarce due to the nation's lack of record keeping, limiting the study. In addition, the findings from this study may not be generalised to all states and households of the country, as the impact of fuel subsidy removal depends on the economic status and political and environmental conditions. Further studies can be carried out on the perception of Nigerian workers of the increased cost of commodities and its impact on family relationships.

4. Conclusion

Based on the study's findings, it was concluded that the fluctuation of oil prices in the international market, the high level of corruption necessitated subsidy removal, and the unbearable increase in government expenditure, among others, led to subsidy removal. The removal of the subsidy significantly affected family income and household sustainability. It was therefore recommended that household members seek other means of income to alleviate the effect of the subsidy on the family. The Nigerian government need to regularise oil prices in the international market; the government should also increase the wages/salary of civil servants, provide incentives for business owners to be able to cope with the increasing prices of commodities, see to the renovation of Nigerian refineries to reduce the cost of petroleum products and federal government should not limit the disbursement of loans to students alone but to small scale business owners. In addition, to reduce this untold hardship, the government at all levels should make provisions for transportation services at reduced cost. Business owners should be strictly advised not to add to people's burdens by abnormally increasing the prices of goods.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

JOO conceived the topic, while OEA designed the study. Both authors collected the data and wrote the manuscript. The authors approved the final draft.

Data Availability Statement

The data generated for this research can be accessed in the article. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

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