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FUEL SUBSIDY REMOVAL AND THE FUTURE OF SMALL OIL MARKETERS IN KATSINA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

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Abstract
Taking into account that successive governments in Nigeria have been complaining that fuel subsidy benefits only the oil marketers and very few people around them at the expense of the targeted poor, this study aimed at examining the impact of the out-and-out removal of fuel subsidy in May 2023 by the President Bola Ahmad Tinubu's Administration on the small oil marketers in Katsina Local Government Area. To achieve this, the study employs an ex-post facto research design and exclusively utilized qualitative data that was derived from an observational method and content analysis of relevant documents. The findings of the study reveal that the complete removal of fuel subsidy has negatively affected the small oil marketers to the extent that many of their filling stations in the study area are either closed or leased out. Thus, the paper recommended among the following that Federal Government should consider devising a means of making the product available to the people, such as opning public filling statations, lest more and more marketers continue to move out of the business. This can be done by increasing the number of NNPC filling stations to replace the closed private ones
Keywords: Subsidy, Fuel Subsidy, Oil Marketers, and Filling Station

Introduction

Subsidy is a sort of market manipulation in which prices of consumer goods are fixed by the government and the variations between the real market price and the fixed price is paid by the government to the marketers (George & Eleanya, 2021). This means that subsidies of whatever kind are measures taken by the government which keep prices of the subsidized commodities below market prices for consumers of those products, or above market prices for producers. This could be in the form of grants, tax reductions and price control or exemption. The Academic Dictionary of Economics (2006) in Adeniran (2016) defines subsidy as a cash incentive given to an industry by the government with the view of lowering the price of the product of the concerned industry as well as raising its competitive power. This incentive may be given as a counterbalancing measure to the imposition of the customs duty by the government of an importing country. Fuel subsidy refers to a transfer of economic resources to consumers of producers of goods or services by the government to boost the production or consumption of the commodity over what it would otherwise have been (Ayanruoh, 2023). The reality of fuel subsidy, according to Adeniran (2016), is that as the pump price of fuel rises, consistently the cost of everything in Nigeria increases. Thus, the essence of subsidizing the pump price of fuel is to make the cost of living, production and services affordable to all Nigerians, and maintain a fairly good standard of living.

Fuel prices at the international level have revealed significant instability in recent years. The nominal fuel prices increased more than fourfold between the last quarter of 2003 and the second quarter of 2008 with most of the increase happening during 2007 and the first half of 2008 due to the government claims that it found it very difficult paying huge amount of money as fuel subsidy. Nonetheless, most governments in less developed countries were unwilling to fully pass through the increase to domestic consumers which resulted in

significant fiscal costs (Granado, Coady, & Gillingham, 2010). According to George (2013), petroleum subsidy is regarded as one of the most controversial and passionate issues in less developed countries like Nigeria because of the country's overreliance upon it. The issue, in Nigeria, has become a frequent phenomenon as it is richly endowed with large crude oil deposits as well as being a greater exporter of the God-given commodity (Obasi, Ezenkwa, Onwa, & Nwogbaga, 2017). The effect of subsidy reform on the consumer price index in the country is very significant as about 90% of the transportation of persons and goods is done by road necessitating the use of fuel. Therefore, the impact of any reform on fuel subsidies arguably has an impact on both the rich and the poor as such reforms directly or indirectly affects their income (Okwanya, Moses, & Pristine, 2015). Thus, understanding the beneficiaries of fuel subsidies as well as the welfare impacts of increasing fuel prices is the key to designing and gaining public support for subsidy reform (Coady, Flamini, & Sears, 2015).

The oil wealth derivable by Nigeria has not translated into an enhanced standard of living for most Nigerians as described by George and Eleanya (2021) that the majority of Nigerians, despite their oil wealth, are living in absolute poverty as a result of the fact that the resources are not effectively and efficiently utilized to achieve the developmental goals of the country. Akpobasah (2004) believes that the distribution of oil wealth in the country is very uneven to the extent that less than 15% of the citizens enjoy the wealth leaving all others in poverty – unemployed and underemployed. Even though fuel subsidy removal is a policy on its own that is analytically based, politically acceptable, and economically sound it is not socially credible and the sustainability will pose a life threat to the citizenry due to the unprepared atmosphere and the strangeness of the public officeholders in the country (Adeniran, 2016). Furthermore, the opponents of fuel subsidies conceive that fuel subsidies mainly favour people at the upper rung of the societal ladder for they are the ones who run generators and own cars that use fuel Onyekwena, Adedeji, Akanonu and Momoh (2017). According to them, the poor who are the target of the subsidy do not enjoy the subsidy as they reside in the rural parts of the country, use charcoal, and firewood, have less transportation, and source their food from their immediate environment.

The Nigerian petroleum industry is the largest in the country and provides the region with 90% of foreign exchange earnings and about 80% of the federal government revenue is generated from the industry (Mustapha, Badru, Popoola, Alaga, Ogunyemi, & Samson, 2016). Thus, petroleum is the largest source of foreign exchange and income in general to Nigeria. However, in recent years, the fuel subsidy in Nigeria has consumed over a third of the recurrent budget – constituting a large waste of resources which could have been used more effectively and efficiently on pro-poor intervention in the economy (Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research, 2016). According to Ayanruoh (2023), critics of fuel subsidy believe that the large amount of money spent by the government in subsidizing the product to the citizenry has failed to help Nigerians buy refined products at much lower than the prevailing market price. It is observed by Ayauruoh (2023) that although the out-and-out removal of subsidies may have serious economic challenges for Nigerians, the end will be of great benefit to them. This is because the revival will end the diversion and smuggling of subsidized products outside the country's border which drains its economy. It is based on this that this study seeks to examine the future of individually owned filling stations in Katsina State and specifically in Katsina Local Government as the huge amount of money they received for the oil storage they provided, which served as the basis for their business has stopped, and the diversion and smuggling of the product to other neighbouring countries has become almost impossible. Therefore, the main objecive of the paper is to examine the impact of complete fuel subsidy on small filling-statation owners in Katsina Local Government Area.

Conceptual Clarification of Fuel Subsidy

Fuel subsidies come into effect in many less developed countries because domestic consumer prices for fuel are directly under the control of governments and are only adjusted on an ad hoc basis in an attempt to protect domestic consumers from volatile and high prices (Coady, Flamini, & Sears, 2015). Thus, subsidy reform is increasingly seen as an opportunity for consolidating public finances and fostering sustainable economic development. According to Solomon (2016), a fuel subsidy is a direct payment by the government to a producer or consumer. This means that fuel subsidy is a consequence of a government action that bestows an advantage on producers or consumers to supplement their income or lower their costs. According to George (2013), it is a payment made by the government that forms a wedge between the cost incurred by the producers and the price consumers pay, to the extent that the price is less than the marginal cost. He stated that subsidies form part of the vehicles of public policy with the major aim of altering the result most likely under the operation of the free market and which are regarded as politically, socially and developmentally undesirable. Such kinds of payments can be made to distributors or even producers to reduce the heavy cost of production on such investors and subsequently price of goods and services to consumers.

Obasi, Ezenkwa, Onwa and Nwogbaga (2017), opined that fuel subsidy in an economic sense is in existence when consumers of the product are assisted by the government to pay less than the actual pump price per litre of the product. Alternatively, it is the difference between what the final consumers are paying and the real market price of petroleum products per litre. According to Tax Bites (2022), fuel subsidies are direct or indirect payments made by the government to private individuals to offset costs of the petroleum products. These subsidies are driven by enhancing social and economic policy objectives. Shagali and Yusuf (2022) see fuel subsidy as any measure taken by the government to keep prices for petroleum products below market level for consumers. According to them, fuel subsidy within the Nigerian context is the situation whereby petroleum motor spirit is sold below the cost of importation.

Empirical Review of Literature

Studies on fuel subsidy in the entire world and Nigeria to be specific are countless. However, most of the studies conducted in Nigeria focused more on the impact of the removal of the subsidy on economic growth, especially prices of goods and services, and the general well-being of the citizenry. Solomon's (2016) study was conducted to examine the challenges and prospects of fuel subsidy removal on the Nigerian economy. The study employed the ANOVA statistics in testing the stated hypotheses; and the result showed that the removal of fuel subsidy negatively affected the standard of living of the citizenry, reduced the level of savings and investments, and reduced the consumption pattern. The study recommended that the country should diversify its economy by turning to agriculture. George (2013) examines the impact of petroleum subsidies on the consumption of products in Nigeria using a dummy variable to explain its findings. The study concluded that more goods and services are consumed by Nigerians when fuel subsidy is paid as the goods are cheaper.

Obasi, Ezenkwa, Onwa and Nwogbaga (2017), in their study titled *The Political Economy of fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria,* examined the implication of the removal of the subsidy on the populace in particular and the economy in general. Using secondary data, the study found that the rampant corruption that sprawls the oil sector in the country is largely responsible for the obstinate poor economic development that negatively affects the living conditions of the citizens. Thus, fuel subsidy has, instead of benefiting the masses, created room for the very few elite to squander the wealth of the nation in the name of the subsidy. Similarly, Shagali and Yusuf (2022), in their study titled *Political Economy of fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria,* examined the nature and politics of oil subsidies in Nigeria with an

emphasis on identifying the factors behind subsidy removal. By making use of political economy and public choice theory as the framework for analysis, the study concluded that unless the Nigerian government predicates its legitimacy on the citizens' obedience and support through better socio-economic performance, the country may still experience another setback in the process of democratic consolidation.

A study on petroleum subsidy withdrawal, fuel price hikes and the Nigerian economy was carried out by Inegbedion, Inegbedion, Obadiaru and Asaleye (2020) with the major aim of investigating the degree to which the removal of the fuel subsidy results in the increase in the prices of goods and services in the country. The study used an input-output model and concluded that the reduction in the amount of money paid by the government as a subsidy for fuel gave birth to the increase in the prices of other commodities. Omotosho (2019) studies the macroeconomic implications of oil price shocks and the existing fuel subsidy regime for Nigeria. By developing and employing a New-Keynesian DSGE model, the results of the study showed that oil price shocks create persistent and significant impacts on output which account for around 22% of its variation up to the fourth year. McCulloch, Moerenhout and Yang (2020) also examine the fuel subsidy reform and the social contract in Nigeria using a micro-economic analysis. They found out that the fuel subsidies in the country are very large, reaching about US$3.9 billion; almost doubling the entire health budget. And the subsidy for fuel in Nigeria comes at a great cost to the government.

Akinyemi, Alege, Ajayi, Amaghionyeodiwe and Ogundupe (2015) examine the existence of a long-term effect of petroleum subsidy reform on environmental quality in Nigeria for the period from 1970 to 2012 employing the Johansen and the Eagle-Granger two steps co-integration procedure techniques. The findings of the study supported evidence of a long-run sustainable equilibrium model. Another study titled Fuel Subsidy Corruption and the Illusions of Economic Reconstruction in Nigeria was carried out by Akov (2015) to specifically analyze the incapacitating state of Nigeria's energy-dependent economy against the background of unparalleled oil-generated wealth. Using only secondary data, the study found that corruption in the country's oil sector is hugely responsible for the economic hardship of the citizenry and that the government has shown little political will to address the issue. Adeniran (2016) also conducted a study on the effects of fuel subsidy on transport rates and transport costs in Nigeria where he found out that the effect of fuel subsidy on transport costs, transport rates, as well as the cost of production is quite complex.

Based on the data generated above, and to the best of the researcher's knowledge, it is understood that most of the studies conducted focused more on the impact of fuel subsidy removal on the wellbeing of the citizenry without considering the impact of the removal on the oil marketers which is the main target of this paper.

Methodology

This article employed an ex-post facto alias after-the-fact research design. The ex post facto design is a quasi-experimental research technique that entails comparing preexisting groups based on a dependent variable (Buhari, 2017). The purpose of experimental studies is to investigate the potential influences that one factor or condition might have on another factor or condition; In other words, the ex post facto research design examines causal relationships. In this study, the researchers examined the impact of fuel subsidy removal, which was considered the independent variable, on the future of the small oil marketers in Katsina Local Government Area, which was deemed the dependent variable. The study exclusively utilized qualitative data that was derived from an observational method and secondary sources of data. This is considered more feasible and productive means of generating the needed information required by the researcher. The obtained data was presented and analyzed in a narrative format.

Nature of Fuel Business in Katsina LGA Prior to the out-and-out Removal of Subsidy

Before the complete elimination of fuel subsidy on May 29, 2023, as implemented by the Nigerian Government, several oil markets, particularly those that moved the product to the extreme northern region of the country, were alleged to have redirected the product to neighbouring countries. Akov (2015) elucidated that in addition to the substantial subsidies provided to oil marketers by the Nigerian government, they still partook in the act of smuggling the product to neighbouring nations such as Niger, Cameroon, Chad, and the Benin Republic. This illicit practice significantly contributed to the exacerbation of product scarcity in the affected states. Consequently, Shagali and Yusuf (2022) stated that the Nigerian government has proposed the complete elimination of all fuel subsidies, contending that such a measure would hinder the diversion of the product to other nations by marketers and consequently bring an end to the scarcity of the product across the country.

Being one of the northern states situated at a considerable distance, Katsina State has been experiencing the impact of fuel scarcity on its population. According to a report by Premium Times in 2022, the majority of filling stations in the city of Katsina were inaccessible, while the operational ones were heavily congested. The report, compiled on a specific day, highlighted the presence of more than 10 filling stations along the Yahaya Madaki route to the Barhim Estate, with only three of them actively dispensing fuel. These stations were identified as NNPC, Danmarna, and A. A. Rano, where long lines of vehicles were observed at all entry and exit points of the stations (Babangida, 2022). Similarly, along the route from Kofar Kwaya to the Kutsinta Barracks roundabout, only two out of the over 15 filling stations were selling fuel. This scarcity was a prevailing issue across every part of the city. Premium Times reported on October 12, 2022, that motorists in Katsina State expressed their concerns regarding the negative impact of petrol scarcity on their businesses. The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) (2022) further elaborated that the NNPC Mega station on Kano Road and Jibia Road were the only stations selling the product at the approved price, but they were characterized by long queues. Motorists were forced to spend the night or several hours waiting to refill their vehicles. However, the Independent Petroleum Marketers Association of Nigeria (IPMAN) attributed this situation to the delay in commodity transportation caused by recent flooding in various parts of the northern region, including Katsina (Agency Report, 2022).

Similarly, it has been documented in the Tribune in 2023 that the residents of Katsina metropolis have become accustomed to the exorbitant surge in prices over the past three months. The majority of the fuel stations are currently retailing petrol at rates ranging from N290 to N300 per litre, which was in stark contrast to the approved price of ₦186. Consequently, a considerable portion of the population in the city has resorted to utilizing commercial vehicles and motorcycles for their daily commutes (Abba, 2023). The fuel scarcity situation in Katsina was of such critical nature that the former governor of Katsina State, Right Honourable Aminu Bello Masari, deemed it necessary to convene a meeting with the leadership of the state chapter of the Independent Petroleum Marketers Association of Nigeria, as reported in the Punch. After the meeting, the Governor briefed the media, expressing that the gathering was aimed at finding a lasting solution to the persistent fuel scarcity in the State. According to him, the Association clarified that part of the predicament was attributable to the directive from NNPC, instructing them to procure fuel from Lagos at N172 and N174 per litre (Agency Report, 2023). Unfortunately, fuel was not readily available in Lagos, hence they were compelled to purchase from independent importers, who were vending it at the depot for prices ranging from N300 to N310. Similarly, the News Agency of Nigeria conveyed that the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), in collaboration with the Independent Petroleum Marketers Association of Nigeria (IPMAN), endeavoured to terminate the issue of fuel scarcity in Katsina. Based on the report, the recently appointed state commandant of the aforementioned corps, Jamilu Abdu Indabawa,

convened a meeting with the marketers and conveyed that the diversion of petroleum products allocated to the State was an act of sabotage. Consequently, the marketers were cautioned against stockpiling or vending the products to illicit traders who illicitly transport them to neighbouring nations (Daily Nigerian, 2023).

Fuel Subsidy Removal and Fuel Business in Katsina LGA

Nigeria has executed the policy of fuel subsidies as a measure to provide less expensive petroleum products to its citizenry. However, the removal of fuel subsidies in the country in general and Katsina State in particular resulted in an immediate increase in fuel prices (Naidoo, 2023). Naidoo further stated that despite the foreseen benefits of the removal of the subsidy, it poses various challenges in terms of social unrest, potential negative impact on low-income individuals, and above all inflation. It is observed by the researcher in the study area that the number of vehicles moving about in the streets has drastically reduced due to the rise in the price of fuel resulting in the reduction of the movements of people. It was also observed that the time normally taken by a passenger's vehicle to be loaded at both Sabuwar Tasha and NATO motor parks in the Katsina metropolis has increased to the degree that in some cases a driver who used to convey passengers from Katsina to Dutsin-ma and back three or four times a day, for instance, now ended up with only one or two loads of passengers. Opera (2023) stated that the effect of fuel subsidy removal by the Federal Government of Nigeria in May 2024 has been taking a toll on Nigerian automobile owners recently. According to Opera, well-to-do Nigerians are beginning to dump their big cars that consume much fuel for smaller ones just to reduce the quantity of fuel they consume daily. This affects, in no small measure, the quantity of fuel demanded by motorists from the filling stations in Local Government. Consequent to the reduction in the quantity of fuel needed by motorists, the amount of money generated by the filling stations for selling fuel reduced, which negatively affected their wellbeing.

It was also observed by Eromosele (2023) that many marketers developed a habit of blaming the action of the Federal Government of removing subsidies as the cause of low patronage and high cost of food products. Therefore, this hike in the prices of goods due to the removal of fuel subsidies affected the purchasing power of people leading to a reduction of the quantity of goods they bought and moved from one place to another. This affected the business of many commercial motorists which ended up in a reduction in the quantity of fuel purchased in the filling stations in the study area. Being it obvious that one of the major determinants of profit realization is the level of patronage of goods offered for sale (Fareed, Ali, Shahzad, Nazir, & Ullah, 2016), the less patronage of fuel especially in filling stations owned by small private marketers have been complaining of less profits. According to Ozyasar (2021), a decline in the profit margin, which is due to the lower sales price, higher cost, or both, results in the closure of the firm. Thus, the researcher observed that some of the filling stations, especially those owned by small marketers in the study area are either closed or are leased out to big oil marketers in the State.

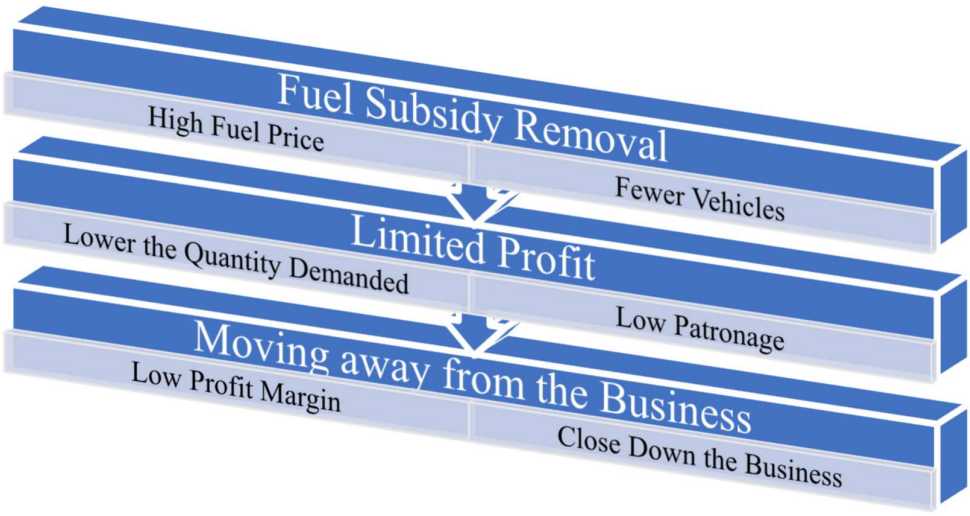


Figure 1: *Model of Fuel Subsidy Removal and the Future of Small Oil Marketers*

The model above clearly indicates the relationship between the total removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria and the pushing out of small oil marketers in Katsina Local Government from the business. It shows that the removal of the subsidy that constitutes a certain amount of money given to the marketers by the government for the citizens to get the product at affordable prices gave birth to the increase of the pump prices to the extent that many people in the study area decided to abandon their vehicles for commercial ones while many others resorted to minimize their movement unless necessary. This resulted in the reduction of the number of bicycles that move about on the study area's streets – a situation that affected the level of patronage of the product due to the decrease in the quantity demanded. This has strongly affected the profit margin of the owners of the filling stations in the Katsina Local Government Area, which in the end resulted in pushing many small oil marketers out of the business. After this condition of low patronage, the profit realized by many filling stations was reduced which made it difficult for the owners to continue in the business. Thus, they resorted to either abandoning the business or hiring out their filling stations to bigger marketers.

Conclusion

The effect of subsidy reform on the consumer price index in Nigeria is very significant as about 90% of the transportation of persons and goods is done by road necessitating the use of fuel. Therefore, the impact of any reform on fuel subsidies arguably has an impact on both the rich and the poor as such reforms directly or indirectly affects their income which subsequently affects the level of patronage of the product. This has strongly affected the profit margin of the owners of the filling stations in the Katsina Local Government Area, which in the end resulted in pushing many small oil marketers out of the business.

Recommendations

It is based on the findings of the this study that the following recommendations are made;

i. The Federal Government should consider devising a means of making the product available to the people lest more and more marketers continue to move out of the business. This can be done by increasing the number of NNPC filling stations to replace the closed private ones.

ii. The government should also initiate programmes meant to create employment opportunities as various youth, especially those connected with the oil businesses lost their jobs. This will contribute immensely to having them engaged so they will not think of indulging themselves in illegal ways of acquiring livelihood.
iii. Government should also use part of the money spared from the removal of fuel subsidy to come up with poverty alleviation programmes. This will help in reducing the level of hardship experienced especially by those at the bottom of the social ladder due to inflation caused by the removal of the subsidy.

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