SUBSIDY REMOVAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN WUKARI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, TARABA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
The removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria has arisen as a pivotal economic policy with far-reaching socio-economic consequences. This paper explores the impacts of fuel subsidy removal on the Nigerian populace, particularly in Wukari LGA of Taraba State, Nigeria, focusing on changes in cost of living, transportation, income distribution, and social welfare. While the policy aims to reduce fiscal deficits and promote market efficiency, its implementation has disproportionately affected low- and middle-income households, exacerbating poverty, inflation, and inequality. The paper further explores the policy's effect on informal sector employment and rural livelihoods, revealing a lack of adequate social safety nets and institutional mechanisms to cushion the adverse outcomes. Anchored in the Resource Curse Theory, the study argues that Nigeria's mismanagement of oil wealth and reliance on rentier structures have intensified the socio-economic dislocations of subsidy reform. Drawing on both primary and secondary data and relevant literature, the paper finds that the subsidy removal, particularly following the 2023 policy shift, led to sharp increases in fuel prices and associated goods and services, weakening purchasing power and heightening public dissatisfaction. The paper recommends comprehensive policy measures, including targeted palliatives, investment in public infrastructure, and transparent governance frameworks to ensure equitable and sustainable outcomes.
Keywords: *Subsidy Removal, Policy, Fuel, Inflation, and Poverty*

Introduction

The removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria remains one of the most contentious policy reforms in the nation's economic history. Introduced as a mechanism to cushion the cost of petroleum products for citizens, fuel subsidies have, over the decades, evolved into a fiscal burden and a source of economic distortion (Salaudeen & Adebayo, 2021). While successive governments have argued that subsidy removal is essential for economic stability and growth, the consequences of such policy shifts often result in widespread public disagreement, inflationary pressure, and social disorder (Akinyemi, Alege, & Osabuohien, 2015). A fundamental problem underlying the fuel subsidy discourse is the persistent contradiction between economic rationality and social welfare. On one hand, the Nigerian government spends billions of naira annually on subsidies expenditure that critics argue benefits a few elite and encourages smuggling, corruption, and inefficiency (Umar & Umar, 2013). On the other hand, subsidy removal often translates into sharp increases in the price of goods and services, disproportionately affecting the poor and exacerbating socio-economic inequality (Iwayemi, 2012; Olatunji, 2023).

Furthermore, policy implementation surrounding subsidy reforms has often been characterized by poor communication, lack of transparency, and absence of credible palliative measures. For example, the abrupt removal of fuel subsidy by the Tinubu administration in May 2023 led to immediate hikes in fuel prices, transportation costs, and food prices, thereby intensifying the hardship faced by low- and middle-income Nigerians (Adegbite & Olorunfemi, 2023). This raises critical questions about the effectiveness of economic reforms that are not matched with social protection programs. Given these dynamics, the central research problem is the apparent policy dilemma between ensuring fiscal sustainability through subsidy removal and safeguarding the welfare of vulnerable populations. This problematique invites an in-depth investigation into how Nigeria can implement subsidy reforms in a manner that is economically viable, socially inclusive, and politically sustainable. Building upon the foregoing, the challenge of fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria is deeply rooted in structural economic weaknesses, poor governance frameworks, and the absence of institutional capacity to manage public expectations and deliver social compensation effectively. Despite numerous policy attempts, there remains a significant trust deficit between the Nigerian government and its citizens. This distrust stems from past experiences where promised palliatives, such as improved public transportation, healthcare, or cash transfers, were either delayed, mismanaged, or completely absent (Ogbu, 2012; Ezeabasili et al., 2021).

Similarly, fuel subsidy removal has a direct bearing on the macroeconomic environment. It contributes to inflationary trends, reduces purchasing power, and can lead to stagnation in productivity, especially in the informal sector, which constitutes a large proportion of Nigeria's economy (Okonkwo, 2022). These economic disruptions, in turn, can generate political instability, as seen in the nationwide protests during the 2012 subsidy removal attempt under President Goodluck Jonathan's administration (Ibietan, 2013). This problem is further compounded by the lack of viable alternatives to petrol for energy and transportation in the nation. The absence of a robust mass transit infrastructure or reliable electricity supply means that subsidy removal exposes citizens to increased living costs without corresponding buffers. Moreover, in a rentier nation like Nigeria, where oil revenues are central to public finance and political patronage, the politics of subsidy removal becomes entangled in elite interests and resistance to reform (Watts, 2004; Nwankwo, 2020).

Therefore, this paper seeks to interrogate the multifaceted concerns of fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria, particularly in Wukari LGA of Taraba State, focusing on the socio-economic consequences, political economy dimensions, and institutional capacities for implementing inclusive reforms. The objective is not merely to critique the policy decision but to explore viable frameworks for subsidy reform that balance fiscal discipline with equitable social outcomes.

Subsidy and Fuel Subsidy Removal

According to Raji et al (2019), a subsidy is any measure that maintains the prices paid for products or goods by consumers below market level and above market level for producers. It means an assistance given to businesses or individuals by the government in the form of tax reduction, cash or reduction of the cost of goods and services. The main rationale behind a subsidy is to help businesses and individuals purchase needed goods and services which they may not be able to afford (Raji et al, 2019). Subsidies could come in different forms, ones that have a direct and those that have an indirect impact on prices. Subsidies that have direct impacts include tax reduction, grants and price controls (Raji et al, 2019). According to Oyabure (2011), a subsidy is a benefit usually given by the government to groups or individuals in the form of price reduction to remove some types of burden, and it is often considered to be of public interest. According to the Academic Dictionary of Economics (2006), a subsidy can be defined as the cash incentive given by the government to an industry to lower the price of the product of the concerned industry and to raise its competitive power.

Fuel subsidies have been implemented in various ways, with varying results. Subsidies fall into two broad categories: production subsidies, which are primarily associated with industrialized economies, and consumer subsidies, which are prevalent in poor nations. The rationales behind the adoption or withdrawal of subsidies differ significantly. Environmental concerns, foreign trade policies and the need to maintain competitiveness are the main drivers of the policy in developed economies. Subsidies are typically provided in developing nations like Nigeria due to concerns about welfare, poverty reduction, and election cycle politics. The renewed focus on governance change promoted by the Breton Woods Institutions is a new element in the current mix of policy drivers (Idress, Rabi & Nura, 2024). Nigeria operates consumer subsidies where the government holds prices below the full economic cost of supply. Oyasipe and Olukoya (2024) described subsidies as essentially a form of a reverse tax, serving as a deliberate government intervention to bolster selected economic agents, be it consumers or producers. Subsidies can be applied across various markets involving the exchange of goods and services. It is an intervention by the government designed to reduce consumer prices or increase producer selling prices. These interventions find extensive application in numerous countries and industries, spanning commodities such as petroleum products, food items, and agricultural inputs like fertilizers and machinery. Subsidies can serve as potent policy instruments to address market failures and achieve specific social objectives.

Consequently, Adeniran (2016) argues that a subsidy can also be defined as any measure that keeps prices consumers pay for goods or products below market levels for consumers or producers above market. Subsidies take different forms. Some subsidies have a direct impact on price. These include grants, tax reductions and exemptions or price controls. Others affect prices or costs indirectly, such as regulations that skew the market in favour of a particular fuel, government-sponsored technology, or research and development. Thus, there are two major classes of subsidies (Adeniran, 2016). A subsidy is a reverse tax. It is a deliberate attempt by the government to support a chosen economic agent, a consumer and a producer, and it can be applied in any market that involves the buying and selling of products and or services (Ering & Akpan, 2012).

Okwanya, Ogbu and Prstine (2015) describe a subsidy as any policy by the government that is aimed at reducing the price of a commodity or service consumed by citizens relative to what the price would have been in the absence of such a policy. According to Kadiri and Lawal (2016), a subsidy is a reduction in the market price of goods and services by the government, such that individuals who are unable to acquire such goods and services can pay for

them. Subsidy occurs when the government helps consumers to pay a price which is below the market price for consumer goods.

According to Agu, Ekwutosi and Augustine (2018) subsidy is a kind of market manipulation whereby prices of consumer goods are fixed by the government, and the difference between the actual market price and the fixed price is paid by the government to the retailer. To Onyeizugbe and Onwuka (2012), subsidies are government measures that keep prices below market prices for consumers or above market prices for producers; these could be in the form of grants, tax reductions and exemptions or price controls.

On the other hand, fuel subsidy, according to Onyeizugbe and Onwuka (2012), means that a proportion of the amount consumers are to pay for the usage of petroleum products is paid by the government to relieve the burden of the price. The government of Nigeria removed the fuel subsidy, declaring that the prices being paid by the citizens are lower than what they are supposed to pay when compared with those of the international market. Majekodunmi (2013) sees fuel subsidy as a government program which is created to lessen the price to be paid by Nigerians for oil products. These oil products include Automated Gas Oil (Diesel), Petroleum Motor Spirit (PMS) and Dual Purpose Kerosene (DPK). Fuel subsidy can also be referred to as the effort by the government to pay for the difference between the price of fuel at the pump and the actual cost of the product. So by paying the difference, the government enables fuel to be sold at a lower price so that it will help alleviate the burden on its people, especially the lower-income group (Emeh, 2012). Fuel subsidy in Nigeria was introduced before the coming of Buhari's administration. It is a policy of the federal government meant to assist the people of Nigeria to cushion the effects of their economic hardship. Conceptually, fuel subsidy seeks to enhance financial capacity but also to accept the implied financial losses by it in the pursuit of its national responsibility to ensure the well-being of the populace (Emeh, 2012).

According to Oyabure (2011), fuel subsidy payment only applies when the landing cost of a petroleum product based on the import parity exceeds the approved ex-depot price for the product. It has been opined that a subsidy, in an economic sense, exists when consumers of a given commodity are assisted by the government to pay less than the prevailing market price of the same. In respect of fuel subsidy, the argument goes, it means that consumers would pay less than the pump price per litre of petroleum product; and on the other hand, it is reasoned, fuel subsidy could be described as the difference between the actual market price of petroleum products per litre and what the final consumers are paying for the same product (Majekodunmi, 2013). Subsidies could come in different forms, ones that have a direct and those that have an indirect impact on prices. Subsidies that have direct impacts include tax reduction, grants and price controls (Raji et al, 2019). Consequently, Onyeizugbe and Onwuka (2012) argue that fuel subsidy means that a proportion of the amount consumers are to pay for the usage of petroleum products is paid by the government to relieve the burden of the price. The government of Nigeria removed the fuel subsidy, declaring that the prices being paid by the citizens are lower than what they are supposed to pay when compared with those of the international market.

Therefore, Raji et al (2019) posit that fuel subsidy removal refers to the government's decision to eliminate or reduce the subsidies provided on the cost of fuel, typically gasoline and diesel. This can involve increasing the retail prices of fuel to reflect the actual market price without government intervention. The goal of removing fuel subsidies is often to address economic, fiscal, and environmental concerns associated with the subsidy system. However, such a decision can have significant economic and social implications, which vary based on the specific context of the country implementing the subsidy removal (Raji et al, 2019). According to Emeh (2012), fuel subsidy removal refers to the process of discontinuing or reducing government subsidies on the price of fuel, particularly gasoline and diesel. In many countries, governments provide subsidies to keep the cost of fuel artificially low for consumers. These subsidies are intended to ease the financial burden on citizens, particularly those with lower incomes, and to help stabilize the cost of living.

Theoretical Framework

The paper was anchored on Resource Curse Theory, also known as the **paradox of plenty**. The theory gained prominence through the works of **Richard Auty (1993),** who first coined the term *"resource curse"* in his study of mineral-exporting developing countries. Auty argues that natural resource abundance in developing economies often leads to economic mismanagement and poor development outcomes. Similarly, **Jeffrey Sachs and Andrew Warner (1995)** provide empirical evidence that resource-rich countries tend to grow more slowly than resource-poor countries. Their influential cross-country regression analysis revealed a negative relationship between natural resource exports and GDP growth, thus validating the theory. **Terry Lynn Karl (1997)**, in *"The Paradox of Plenty"*, expanded the theory into the political realm. She demonstrated how petroleum wealth in countries like Venezuela entrenched rentier politics, weakened state institutions, and fostered authoritarianism. **Michael Ross (2001)** further develops the political implications by linking oil wealth to authoritarian rule and the suppression

of democratic institutions, particularly in the developing world. His work highlighted how oil revenues can weaken accountability by enabling governments to spend without taxing citizens, thereby reducing public demand for representation.

The theory posits that countries endowed with abundant natural resources, particularly mineral and fossil fuel wealth, often experience slower economic growth, weak democratic development, and increased conflict compared to countries with fewer resources. This counterintuitive outcome has been widely studied across disciplines such as economics, political science, and development studies. One core assumption of the theory is that resource wealth generates large, unearned revenues (rents) that reduce the incentive for governments to develop efficient, productive economies. This rentier effect fosters corruption, patronage politics, and inefficient public spending (Auty, 1993; Karl, 1997). Instead of investing in infrastructure or human capital, governments may focus on distributing rents to maintain political loyalty. Another economic assumption of the theory is that resource booms lead to an appreciation of the real exchange rate, which harms non-resource sectors like agriculture and manufacturing. This phenomenon, termed *Dutch Disease*, reduces export competitiveness and hampers diversification (Sachs & Warner, 1995). This theory also argues that resource prices are subject to fluctuations in global markets, and countries heavily dependent on natural resource exports face fiscal volatility, which can destabilize macroeconomic planning and lead to cycles of boom and bust (Gelb, 1988; Ross, 1999).

The theory further assumes that resource wealth weakens democratic accountability. Because governments have access to significant revenues without taxation, they face less pressure to be transparent or accountable to their citizens (Karl, 1997; Ross, 2001). This leads to weak institutions, undermines civil society, and perpetuates authoritarianism. **Resource Curse theory** argues and concludes that the control and distribution of resource wealth can lead to violent conflict, especially in ethnically or regionally divided societies. Resources become a source of competition among elites, often fueling civil wars and insurgencies (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004).

Theory Application

The suitability of the Resource Curse Theory in this paper stems from the fact that the Resource Curse Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the paradox of fuel subsidy removal in resource-rich Nigeria and its disproportionate socio-economic impacts on local communities like Wukari LGA. Despite being a petroleum-rich country, Nigeria's mismanagement of oil wealth and the rentier structure of its economy have left vulnerable populations without the institutional support needed to navigate subsidy reform. Thus, the theory effectively explains why a policy intended to promote fiscal sustainability has, instead, exacerbated poverty and underdevelopment in places like Wukari.

Discussion of Findings

The removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria, particularly the 2023 policy shift by the federal government, has had far-reaching socio-economic consequences across the country. In rural and semi-urban areas such as Wukari Local Government Area (LGA) in Taraba State, the effects are especially severe due to structural poverty, weak infrastructure, and limited government presence. While subsidy removal was intended to reduce fiscal leakages and promote market efficiency (Salaudeen & Adebayo, 2021), its ripple effects have disproportionately impacted vulnerable populations in underserved areas like Wukari. One of the most immediate socio-economic impacts of the subsidy removal in Wukari is the sharp increase in the cost of transportation. Wukari, being an agrarian community with limited internal transport networks, relies heavily on commercial motorcycles (okada), tricycles (keke), and buses. Following the subsidy removal, fuel prices surged from below ₦200 to over ₦600 per litre, leading to a tripling of transportation fares (Okonkwo, 2023). This has severely restricted the mobility of rural farmers, traders, and students, increasing the cost of accessing markets, schools, and healthcare facilities (Ezeabasili et al., 2021).

Similarly, the agricultural economy of Wukari has also been significantly affected. The majority of the population engages in subsistence farming and petty trading. With higher transportation costs, farmers find it increasingly difficult to transport produce to nearby markets such as Takum, Jalingo, and Makurdi. This has led to post-harvest losses, reduced income, and worsened rural poverty. Moreover, the increased fuel cost has also escalated the price of farming inputs, such as fertilizers and pesticides, which are usually transported from urban centres (Akinyemi et al., 2015). In terms of household welfare, the rise in fuel costs has translated into higher food prices and general inflation, as businesses pass the additional transportation costs onto consumers. In Wukari, the prices of staple goods like maize, rice, and yam have increased significantly since mid-2023. This inflationary pressure has eroded the purchasing power of households and led to reduced food security and living standards (Adegbite & Olorunfemi, 2023). Women and children, often at the lowest rungs of the socio-economic ladder, bear the brunt of this hardship due to increased costs of nutrition, education, and healthcare (Olatunji, 2023).

Furthermore, the removal of fuel subsidies has exacerbated unemployment and informalization in Wukari. Many small businesses that rely on fuel, such as grinding mills, cold rooms, and barbershops, have either reduced their operating hours or closed down entirely due to rising operational costs. As a result, many youths have been pushed out of employment or into unregulated informal jobs, increasing vulnerability to exploitation and insecurity (Umar & Umar, 2013; Nwankwo, 2020). Socially, the hardship has increased public dissatisfaction and strained communal relationships, particularly where local authorities are perceived as unresponsive to the people's plight. Although the federal government proposed palliative measures such as cash transfers and food support, these have largely failed to reach remote LGAs like Wukari due to bureaucratic inefficiencies, poor data systems, and corruption (Ogbu, 2012; Ibietan, 2013).

Similarly, assessing the socio-economic impacts of fuel subsidy removal on the socio-economic development of Wukari LGA of Taraba State, questionnaires were administered, and the results are presented in the Tables below:

Table 1: Frequency and valid percentage of the respondents on the impact of subsidy removal on the economic development of Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State

Items	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Agree	117	39.9
Agree	106	36.2
Undecided	28	9.6
Disagree	27	9.2
Strongly Disagree	15	5.1
Total	293	100

Source: Field Work, 2025

Data in Table one above reveals respondents' responses on whether the removal of fuel subsidy has made the people of Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State not to have trust in the government policies and programmes again on political, social and economic activities in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State. 117 respondents, representing 39.9% strongly agreed that the removal of fuel subsidy has led to distrust in government policies and programmes by the people of Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State. Similarly, 106 respondents, representing 36.2% agreed, while 28 respondents, constituting 9.6% were undecided, and 27 respondents, representing 7.8% disagreed, while 15 respondents, constituting 5.1% strongly disagreed. The implication of this is that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that the removal of fuel subsidy has led to distrust in government policies and programmes by the people of Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State.

Table 2: Subsidy removal has led to a high rate of poverty among the people of the Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State.

Item	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Agree	123	42
Agree	71	24.2
Undecided	32	10.9
Disagree	43	14.7
Strongly Disagree	24	8.2
Total	293	100

Source: Field Work, 2025

Information in Table 2 above reveals respondents' responses on whether subsidy removal has led to a high rate of poverty among the people of Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State. 123 respondents, representing 42.0% strongly agreed that subsidy removal has led to high rate of poverty among the people of Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State, 71 respondents, representing 24.2% agreed, 32 respondents, representing 10.9% were undecided, 43 respondents, signifying 14.7% disagreed while 24 respondents, constituting 8.2% strongly disagreed. The implication of this is that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that subsidy removal has led to a high rate of poverty among the people of Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State.

Table 3: Subsidy removal has led to an increase in the unemployment rate in the Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State

Item	Frequency	Valid Percent
Strongly Agree	117	39.9
Agree	101	34.5
Undecided	34	11.6
Disagree	25	8.5
Strongly Disagree	16	5.5
Total	293	100

Source: Field Work, 2025

Data from Table 3 above reveals respondents' responses on whether subsidy removal has led to an increase in the unemployment rate in the Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State. 117 respondents, representing 39.9% strongly agreed that subsidy removal has led to increase in unemployment rate in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State, 101 respondents, representing 34.5% agreed, 34 respondents, representing 11.6%) were undecided, and 25 respondents, representing 8.5% disagreed, while 16 respondents, constituting 5.5% strongly disagreed. The implication of this is that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that subsidy removal has led to an increase in the unemployment rate in the Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba State.

Conclusion

The fuel subsidy removal policy has virtually affected every sector in the country, from the political, social and economic activities, because it serves as the main source of energy for the majority of Nigerians. However, despite the fact that the proponents of subsidy removal posit that the rural sector of the economy will be better catered for if the subsidy is removed, as government expenditure on oil will be reduced. It is, however, obvious that none of the objectives highlighted above have been achieved, as the fuel scarcity in the country is still on the increase, and social amenities in both rural and urban areas remain the same, if not worse. While the macroeconomic rationale for fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria may be compelling, its socio-economic impacts on rural communities like Wukari LGA are deeply adverse. The policy has aggravated poverty, disrupted livelihoods, and widened inequality. This underscores the need for targeted and transparent interventions to cushion the effects of subsidy removal in marginalized areas.

Recommendations

From the foregoing conclusion, and on the strength of the findings, this paper recommends, among other things, targeted palliatives, investment in public infrastructure, and transparent governance frameworks to ensure equitable and sustainable outcomes of fuel subsidy removal.

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