

THE DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF FUEL SUBSIDY REMOVAL CRISIS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

A flip over from the economy is the issue of fuel subsidy removal, which many Nigerians felt very touchy about. Nigerians are disappointed that despite their disapproval of the plan, government has continued to promote it. There has been vociferous undaunted in trying to convince Nigerians to buy into the subsidy removal is the claim that the economy may crash if the subsidy as not removed. From the time Jonathan's government brought up the issue of removing what it called subsidy on petroleum products after the 2011 elections, feathers had been ruffled both in the National Assembly, among civil society groups, the opposition political parties, professional associations, and many other interests in the polity. Proponents of the subsidy posit that the subsidy has to go because we need the money to rebuild the economy. Opponents of the policy argued that there is nothing like subsidy ever existed in Nigeria, and that hat was surreptitiously being promoted by government as removal of subsidy was increase of petrol price under a deceptive guise. The paper, therefore, examines the implications of the subsidy removal on the economy in general and the populace in particular. To achieve this objective, the first section of the paper explores conceptual issues of subsidy and deregulation. The next section examines the theoretical framework of analysis upon which the conceptual issues are based. Neo-liberalism will be used in anchoring our thesis. The third segment discusses the implications of the policy on the economy and the Nigerian masses. The final section offers recommendations and concludes the paper.

Keywords: subsidy, deregulation, international economic relations, neo-liberalism, privatization, and industrial action

INTRODUCTION

Nigerians get a shocking New Year gift from the Federal Government on January 1st 2012. They found long queues at the filling stations where petrol was sold above ₦140 per liter. Gone was fuel subsidy, which gave way to deregulation.

Fuel subsidy removal which the Federal Government under President Goodluck Jonathan has canvassed and lobbied for since he was sworn in last May 29, appeared to have finally got to the blast off stage, Monday, December 12, 2011. That was when the national Economic Council (NEC), headed by vice President Namadi Sambo decided that government should finally remove the subsidy come January 2012. The body which consists of the Vice President, governors, strategic ministers and Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), claimed that subsidy removal had become inevitable to avert the collapse of Nigerian economy.

Briefly, the media at the end of their meeting held in Abuja, Governor Peter Obi of Anambra State had said the removal of subsidy was the best option left for the polity to take at the current scheme of things, if it must avert bankruptcy. On the side of Obi were government officials, including finance minister, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, Petroleum minister, Mrs. Diezani Alison-Madueke, Central Bank Governor, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi and others. They explained why the subsidy which the government says cost about ₦1.3 trillion in 2011, should go. According to Sanusi Lamido:

If we borrow to subsidize today, it is our children that are subsidizing us let us take a difficult decision today and make tomorrow better by supporting the removal of subsidy (Onanuga, 2011:3)

Governor Obi, however, lamented that what had made the current situation most difficult for government was the fact that Nigerians no longer trust government on issues; a situation which he said could be traced to the disappointments they have suffered under past and present governments. Corroboratory Obi's thesis, the finance minister Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala while speaking at the Town Hall meeting of the Newspapers proprietors' Association of Nigeria, NPAN, in Lagos, December 22, 2011 adds that: There is a lot of cynicism about everything the government says and does. What we are saying is give us a chance to rebuild that confidence. You have a programme that is correcting this (Sobowale, 2012:42).

Countering the Minister's thesis, I.F Stone, who in 1929 in the eve of the great depression, wrote that, "Every government is run by liars and nothing they say should be believed (Sobowale, 2012:42). One need not to go as far as stone but our national history since independence is strewn with unfulfilled government promises. For instance, Jonathan was vice president in a government which reached an agreement with the Academic Staff Union of Universities in 2009. Government had failed to fulfill its part of the agreement.

Similarly, the Petroleum Industrial Bill (PIB) which government has announced would be signed into law by May 2011, expired with the sixth National Assembly. A new bill has not been sent to the National Assembly till today. Meanwhile, the minister of petroleum resources recently declared that the new bill had been made "more equitable" to all stake holders.

Dr. Okonjo-Iweala was also the minister of finance in 2004; when the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategies (NEEDS), was launched filled with promises and a very few of which were redeemed. One cardinal promise related to the launching of NEEDS II. Nobody in government discusses NEEDS I any more, certainly NEEDS II has been consigned to the dustbin.

Incidentally, the declaration made by NEC did not make much impact with Nigerians as was the budget presentation to the joint session of the National Assembly on December 13, 2011 by President Jonathan. To many angry Nigerians that budget presentation convinced them that the government was indeed ready to dare Nigerians on the issue of fuel subsidy.

The development provided grounds for many Nigerians and groups to express suspicion that the president's silence on the subsidy issue was an indication that he has, indeed, decided to do away with subsidy. Supervising minister on the economy and Minister of Finance, Dr. Okonjo-Iweala, however, tried to calm frayed nerves of the Nigerian populace when she came out on the 14th day of December 2011 to declare that the Presidency had not really decided on the subsidy issue, but was still consulting with Nigerians.

As a matter of fact, the president has been making consultations. In a recent meeting with Civil Society Organizations, the president had told them that his mind was made up, and that without removing the subsidy, the polity would be broke before two years. He therefore, said, "even if we deregulate and I am shamed, posterity will be there to judge me, that I did the right thing; and I will be vindicated when Nigerians start enjoying the benefits of my decision (Maduabuchi, 2011:15).

Again, President Goodluck Jonathan told Nigerians to brace up for a tough year. The President spoke at the First Baptist Church, Garki, where he attended the New Year Service at the church. He said:

The Journey will be tough, but it is not going to be too painful. Anyway, I know tat leaders who inflicted pain on the people always end up badly. Leaders who think they are so powerful always end up badly and no leader will want to be reckoned with as one who inflicted pain on the people. We are all writing our history, whatever you saw as a leader, even if you are dead and gone, the story will be told how you brought pain on the people. So, nobody will bring pains on Nigerians (Ofikhenua, 2012:4).

Notwithstanding their explanations, it is not lost on many Nigerians that the consultations had not actually been to seek the input of the people, or to gauge their feelings and opinions concerning the issue, instead analysts felt that was meant to reform them if their resolve to go ahead with the policy.

This article seeks to address the implications on removal of subsidy will have on the various segments of the Nigerian economy.

CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

Deregulation

In a popular parlance, to deregulate means to do away with the regulations concerning financial markets and trades. Ernest and Young (1988) posit that deregulation and privatization are elements of economic reform programmes charged with the ultimate goal of improving the overall economy through properly spelt out ways. For example, freeing government from the bondage of continuous financing of

extensive projects which are best suited for private investment by the sale of such enterprises; encouraging efficiency and effectiveness in resources utilization; reducing government borrowing while raising revenue; promoting healthy market competition in a free market environment; improving returns from investment and broadening enterprises share ownership thus engendering capital market development (Izibili and Aiya, 2007:228).

Put differently, deregulation in the economic sense means freedom from government control. According to Akinwumi et al (2005), deregulation is the removal of government interference in the running of a system. This means that government rule's and regulations governing the operations of the system are relaxed or held constant in order for the system to decide its own optimum level through the forces of supply and demand (Ajayi and Ekundayo, 2008:212).

Deregulation allows enterprises and services to be restricted as little as possible. For our purpose, deregulation means either the partial or total withdrawal of government controls in the allocation and production of goods and services. The question that should be asked at this juncture is what are the gains of deregulation in Nigeria? This question cannot be convincingly answered in isolation of the theoretical foundation of deregulation.

The most contentious issue in Nigeria is arguably the question of deregulation of the oil sector which has been generating heated debates from its protagonists and antagonists.

The protagonists posit that the liberalization and deregulation of the down stream sector of the petroleum industry would finally actualize the objective of ending perennial fuel scarcity and maintaining sustainable fuel supply across the polity.

It also added that liberalization and deregulation of the sector would open it up for foreign investments, and, the incidents of petroleum products smuggling and inefficiencies in the sector. Besides, the thesis argues that petroleum products in Nigeria were the lowest in the world and with deregulation; the government would be able to channel funds to other sectors of the economy.

Furthermore, the protagonists equally posit that deregulation would break the monopoly of fuel supply by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). As the refineries were not working, the liberalization and deregulation would enable either stakeholders, including major and independent marketers, to import and market products.

As the NNPC lacks the capacity to import enough petroleum products for the country, couple with the perennial malfunctioning of the refineries, the government's introduction of the Petroleum Support Fund (PEF), from which it draws money to pay the excess expenditure incurred by the marketers for importing and selling petrol at regulated price and distributing it to every part of the country, should be stopped the thesis concludes. The major proponents of this thesis include the Federal Government, the Presidential Steering Committee on the Global Financial Crisis, the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG).

The antagonist believes that the Nigeria petroleum industry must not be liberalized, or deregulated, or privatized completely, for whatever reason and that the status quo should remain, maybe

with minor fine tuning “here and there” to improve efficiency, as appropriate, “in the overall national interest”.

This thesis also posits that the low capacity utilization of Nigeria’s state-owned refineries and petrochemical plants in Kaduna, Warri and Port Harcourt, the sorry state of despair, neglect and repeated vandalization of the state-run petroleum product pipelines and oil movement infrastructure nationwide, the collateral damage of institutionalized corruption, with the frightening emergence of local nouveau riche, oil mafia that controls, and coordinates crude oil, and refined petroleum product, pipeline sabotage and theft (illegal bunkering) nation wide, the insatiably corrupt Task force operatives that assist diversions of both crude oil and petroleum products, large-scale cross-border smuggling of petroleum products, of all of which are the root causes of the protracted and seemingly intractable fuel crises that have bedeviled the polity relentlessly for close to a decade now, are all predictable outcome of government involvement in the down stream sectors of the Nigerian petroleum industry.

Finally, they posit that deregulation helps increase profit margin for the importers. Essentially, this extreme is the implied position of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and the organized civil society.

Between this extreme is the third thesis that believes that deregulation is desirable in freeing government of its concurrent control and involvement in the business of refining, importation and distribution of refined petroleum products in the Nigerian market. In the opinion of this proponent, the deregulation of the petroleum industry in Nigeria should be implemented in phases, so as to enable the state-owned monopolies to regain efficiency, before full privatization.

Fuel subsidy was before the coming of the Jonathan administration, a policy of 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 spirit of its national responsibility to ensure the well being of the populace. In other words, if a product, like fuel, is to sell for N141 per litre, but for some considerations, it cannot be sold at that rate but at N97 per litre and if government then accepts to pay the difference between N141 and N97, that is N44, this simply means that there is a subsidy to the tune of N85 for every litre purchased at the filling stations. Hat are particularly significant about the fuel subsidy are its politics and its national and international implications. At the domestic level, both the proponents and opponents of fuel subsidy have valid theses. Secondly, both of them also maintain a non-compromising altitude. That is, while the government is talking about no alternative to removal of petrol subsidy to the opponents insist on no negotiation with government until government restores fuel subsidy which was removed on January 1, 2012.

Thirdly, the disagreement over removal of fuel subsidy has led to a nation wide-strike whose implications have now gone beyond the economic considerations of oil subsidy. In fact, the international dimensions are such that Nigerian’s international image has become first victim.

Beyond these considerations, the removal of oil subsidy has provided a good platform for national reflection. One of the issues is the extent of political sovereignty. This is because true sovereignty

belongs to the people. The paper concludes by positing that there is no disputing the fact that both the politics of oil subsidy removal and the strike have become a compelling factor for governmental accountability and good governance. It will go a long way in defining the success of President Jonathan in 2015 and the regimes after.

Theoretical Framework of Analysis

The theory to be adapted for this study is the neo-liberalism theory. Neoliberalism is a contemporary form of economic liberalism that emphasizes the efficiency of private enterprise, liberalized trade and relatively open markets to promote globalization. Neoliberals therefore seek to maximize the role of the private sector in determining the political and economic priorities of the world. Neoliberalism seeks to transfer control of the economy from public to the private sector, (Cohen, 2007) under the belief that it will produce a more efficient government and improve the economic health of the nation (Prasad, 2006).

The definitive statement of the concrete policies advocated by neoliberalism is often taken to be John Williamson's (Williamson, 1990) "Washington Consensus", a list of policy proposals that appeared to have gained consensus approval among the Washington-based international economic organizations (like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank). Williamson's list included ten points:

- Fiscal policy Governments should not run large deficits that have to be paid back by future citizens, and such deficits can only have a short term effect on the level of employment in the economy. Constant deficits will lead to higher inflation and lower productivity, and should be avoided. Deficits should only be used for occasional stabilization purposes.
- Redirection of public spending from subsidies (especially what neoliberals call "indiscriminate subsidies") and other spending neoliberals deem wasteful toward broad-based provision of key pro-growth, pro-poor services like primary education, primary health care and infrastructure investment
- Tax reform– broadening the tax base and adopting moderate marginal tax rates to encourage innovation and efficiency;
- Interest rates that are market determined and positive (but moderate) in real terms;
- Floating exchange rates;
- Trade liberalization – liberalization of imports, with particular emphasis on elimination of quantitative restrictions (licensing, etc.); any trade protection to be provided by low and relatively uniform tariffs; thus encouraging competition and long term growth
- Liberalization of the "capital account" of the balance of payments, that is, allowing people the opportunity to invest funds overseas and allowing foreign funds to be invested in the home country

- Privatization of state enterprises; Promoting market provision of goods and services which the government cannot provide as effectively or efficiently, such as telecommunications, where having many service providers promotes choice and competition.
- Deregulation – abolition of regulations that impede market entry or restrict competition, except for those justified on safety, environmental and consumer protection grounds, and prudent oversight of financial institutions;
- Legal security for property rights; and,
- Financialisation of capital (Williamson, 1990:80)

Put differently, Neoliberalism is a philosophy in which the existence and operation of a market are valued in themselves, separately from any previous relationship with the production of goods and services, and without any attempt to justify them in terms of their effect on the production of goods and services; and where the operation of a market or market-like structure is seen as an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide for all human action, and substituting for all previously existing ethical beliefs.

The main points of neo-liberalism theses include:

1. **THE RULE OF THE MARKET.** Liberating "free" enterprise or private enterprise from any bonds imposed by the government (the state) no matter how much social damage this causes. Greater openness to international trade and investment, as in International Economic Relations. Reduce wages by de-unionizing workers and eliminating workers' rights that had been won over many years of struggle. No more price controls. All in all, total freedom of movement for capital, goods and services. To convince us this is good for us, they say "an unregulated market is the best way to increase economic growth, which will ultimately benefit everyone.
2. **CUTTING PUBLIC EXPENDITURE FOR SOCIAL SERVICES** like education and health care. **REDUCING THE SAFETY-NET FOR THE POOR**, and even maintenance of roads, bridges, water supply -- again in the name of reducing government's role. Of course, they don't oppose government subsidies and tax benefits for business.
3. **DEREGULATION.** Reduce government regulation of everything that could diminish profits, including protecting the environment and safety on the job.
4. **PRIVATIZATION.** Sell state-owned enterprises, goods and services to private investors. This includes banks, key industries, railroads, toll highways, electricity, schools, hospitals and even fresh water. Although usually done in the name of greater efficiency, which is often needed, privatization has mainly had the effect of concentrating wealth even more in a few hands and making the public pay even more for its needs.
5. **ELIMINATING THE CONCEPT OF "THE PUBLIC GOOD" or "COMMUNITY"** and replacing it with "individual responsibility." Pressuring the poorest people in a society to find solutions to their

lack of health care, education and social security all by themselves -- then blaming them, if they fail, as "lazy."

Around the world, neo-liberalism has been imposed by powerful financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. It is raging all over Latin America. The first clear example of neo-liberalism at work came in Chile (with thanks to University of Chicago economist Milton Friedman), after the CIA-supported coup against the popularly elected Allende regime in 1973. Other countries followed, with some of the worst effects in Mexico where wages declined 40 to 50% in the first year of NAFTA while the cost of living rose by 80%. Over 20,000 small and medium businesses have failed and more than 1,000 state-owned enterprises have been privatized in Mexico. As one scholar said, "Neoliberalism means the neo-colonization of Latin America."

In the United States, neo-liberalism is destroying welfare programs, attacking the rights of labor (including all immigrant workers); and cutbacking social programs. The Republican "Contract" on America is pure neo-liberalism. Its supporters are working hard to deny protection to children, youth, women, the planet itself -- and trying to trick us into acceptance by saying this will "get government off my back." The beneficiaries of neo-liberalism are a minority of the world's people. For the vast majority it brings even more suffering than before.

Applying this theory to the Nigerian situation, it is axiomatic to posit that in Nigeria today, the most contentious issue is, unarguably, the deregulation of the prices of petroleum products. The debate acquired added impetus in January 2012, when the senate, the highest legislative organ of government in Nigeria, supported the deregulation in the downstream of the oil and gas industry, which is an important component of the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB). This move, some perspectives say is an evidence to drive the reform, the industry spearheaded by the then Minister of Petroleum resources, Alhaji Rilwanu Lukman.

However, the reform in the oil sector being spearheaded by the Oil and Gas Implementation Committee (OGIC) is largely made of technically competent technocrats. The fallout of the efforts is the conclusion that deregulation of the sector would serve the best economic interest of the polity.

Corroborating the view of the senate, the National Economic Council (NEC), the highest economic policy organ of the government in Nigeria, in its analysis stated that it costs the country's treasury one trillion Naira yearly to subsidize petroleum products in Nigeria. NEC stated therefore that it would be better if this huge sum of money spent on subsidy is used in smoothing potholed roads, providing hospitals, rehabilitating and building health facilities and schools or supplying portable drinking waters.

Already, the deregulation effort had earlier received the support of the largest oil and gas industry unions, National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG), Independent Petroleum Marketers Association of Nigeria (IPMAN), the multinational companies as well as oil companies

operating in industry. Largely, their thesis is that deregulating the down stream sector of the industry will finally end the perennial fuel scarcity as well as maintain sustainable fuel supply across the nation.

This deregulation dance is the one Nigeria has been dancing since 1999. The dancers are the same, and the music is also the same. The stage is the same and the musical instruments continue to remain the same. The only difference is the fact that new drummers are handling the drums and they may be doing a remix of the old beat, which may sound monotonously awful. Put differently, on a serious note, the issues have been the same for almost a decade now. Deregulation with all its grammatical and technical paraphernalia boils down to price increase or price deregulation. Civil society and organized labour's response has been the same as captured in this excerpt from one of its NLC's statements during the Olusegun Obasanjo's civilian regime.

The recent hike in fuel price and deregulation of downstream petroleum sector or, more precisely, the full scale deregulation of fuel prices and labour's retreat from unwillingness to organize mass actions, including strikes to fight this anti-poor, anti-growth policy is one sure process that at least, in the short and medium terms will worsen the socio- economic plights of the vast majority of the working class people (Otaigbe, 2009:24).

Traditionally, in Nigeria, pump prices of petroleum products have been regulated. Some of the reasons why some stakeholders have advocated and continue to advocate price regulation include the underlisted:

- Consumer protection
- Protection for the poor
- Uniform pricing across regions
- Political gains (Ajumogobia, 2008: C9).

However, these theses according to Ajumogobia (2008) are more of perception than reality. The reality tends to be that:

Prices are higher when control is in effect

There is often a need to create "stabilization Funds"

Distortions in Pricing/Adulteration and

It discourages competition and creates a rent mentality amongst operators (Ajumogobia,, 2008: C9).

In the year 2000, Nigerian government began a journey of partial deregulation of the Nigeria's down stream sub-sector. According to Ajumogobia (2008), Nigeria has been through two phases in its pricing policy over the last decade: First, total regulation of prices for all products until 2004 and then the regulation of PMS and DPK only from 2004.

The policy was designed to:

Move to market- based pricing regime and eliminate regulatory distortions.

Open/Liberalize downstream petroleum market in a manner that allows private sector investment as well as a level playing ground for competition by industry participant

Maintaining self –sufficiency in products supply and distribution and

Attracting of foreign and domestic investment (Ajumogobia, 2008:C9).

The semi-deregulation phase in an atmosphere of regulation for the majority of products has led to inconsistency in policy approach and implementation with the resultant effect of entrenched inefficiencies and high operation costs. Although only partial deregulation was achieved, the effort recorded some albeit short-lived, gains, including:

Short – term improvement in product availability in most part of the country

Temporary reduction in black market operations and adulteration of products

Attraction of some investments especially in storage, retail and haulage aspects of the business and Employment (Ajumogobia, 2008:C9).

Unfortunately, these gains were not sustained as the international price of crude oil started rising. In the mean time, between 1999 and 2008, we have seen crude oil prices GO from \$113 to \$147 per barrel and then retreat to current levels under \$70 per barrel. We have thus witnessed the extremes of the main factor that affect products pricing. At the same time, the relative low price does present a window to implement a pricing policy that works without adverse social repercussions.

To reduce the shock of the oil price increases, government established the Petroleum Support Funds (PSF) in 2006. The objectives of the PSF were to:

Stabilize the domestic price of petroleum products against volatility in international crude and products markets.

Create a level-playing field for active participation of NNPC and other marketers in products importation and guarantee effective, product availability and distribution nationwide (Eme, 2009, and Ajumogobia, 2008; C9).

According to Ajumogobia, the initial budget for the PSF was ₦150 billion. This has since grown to over ₦1.5 trillion in 2007; clearly, subsidizing prices over the years has not only led to unacceptably high fiscal burden on government, but has also bred several unintended consequences and practices, including:

Smuggling of petroleum products out of the country; generating rents that must likely accrue to upper income groups. Petroleum subsidies largely benefited the consumption of upper income groups. Substantial evidence indicates that the poor and the near poor consume only a small fraction of these products.

Another problem in the implementation of petroleum subsidies in Nigeria is the confirmed decline in the downstream industry for over two decades. This has also resulted in huge losses on account of low capacity utilization of installed capacity by the refineries as well as sub optimal mix of products.

Similarly, low capacity utilization in pipelines and storage depots and widespread leakages in the pipelines and networks units owing to difficulties in operations and maintenance.

Inappropriate pricing of products has made the sector unattractive to private sector investors, thus resulting in frequent shortages of products in the economy (Ajumogobia, 2008:C3).

However, government is exerting so much energy on deregulating the importation side of the so-called deregulation with less attention on the refining demand of the policy. This does not make sense, because it is clear that if the government issues licenses to independent marketers with the understanding that they can give whatever price they believe will connect with their profit margin (which only makes sense to those in the business importation), whose interest the government is supposedly pursuing is a bizarre policy.

This bizarre policy finds expression in various ways. For instance, currently kerosene sells at a minimum of ₦120 per litre. And government knows that, due to the highly inflation – sensitive nature, and the spiral effect of petroleum products increase on the price of goods and services in the market, any little increase in the price of petroleum products will tear down the purchasing power of the naira.

The consequence of this will mean that the cost of transportation will rise, the market men and women will have to increase the prices of their goods and services; school fees will have to jump higher to reflect additional cost of petroleum products.

If government officials and appointees can afford it now because they are making good and cheap money in government or earning good salaries, what about the majority, who are not as privileged as they are? This is probably the reason behind the organized labour agitation for ₦100,000 minimum wage for Nigeria workers.

The issue here is that the downstream sector has gone beyond mere business theses to an essential social issue that affects the very nerve of the polity; and only a blind or dumb government will pretend not to be aware of this glaring fact.

In view of the above theses, it is axiomatic to posit that the current state of the downstream sub-sector of Nigeria's oil and gas industry requires urgent attention. In order to appreciate the enormity of the challenges, especially as they impact on availability and affordability of petroleum products, a brief description of the status of the oil and gas industry today will suffice.

Currently, the demand driven average consumption of the three main refinery products steams are as follows:

Premium Motor Spirit (petrol) 32,500,000 litres, automotive gas oil (Diesel) 12,000,000 litres, House hold kerosene 10,000,000 liters (Ajumogobia, 2008: C9).

The Nigeria's four refineries have a maximum nominal or installed capacity to process 445,000 barrels of crude oil per day. This is less than 40 percent of the daily national consumption requirement.

Such relatively low production capacity is further hampered by maintenance and operational shortcomings. This has resulted in inevitable severe product shortages. The situation is further compounded by the price disparity between the Nigeria markets and her sub-regional neighbours, which encourages product smuggling and further widens the gap between supply and local demand.

Today, more than 90 percent of petroleum products consumed in the domestic market are imported, usually at costs, which naturally reflect international crude oil prices. This is clearly a

dysfunctional state of affairs for a polity, which is one of the top 10 oil producers in the world (see tables 1&3 showing refinery ownership and consumption in oil producing and Exporting countries OPEC).

Nigeria distributes its refined products through a network of storage depots and finished product pipelines. The inadequacy of the distribution infrastructures is shown by the frequent and often-severe shortages in some states of the federation even products exist in others. Table 2 captures the ratio between consumption capacity and refining capacity in OPEC states to add currency to support severe shortages thesis.

More recently, the lack of maintenance and vandalism of the pipelines have compromised the integrity in the pipeline network resulting in significant dependence on haulage by road with all the attendant impact on the integrity of the roads and the whims of aggrieved petroleum tanker drivers.

Imported products face similar constraint in the inadequacy of receiving jetties, leading to significant demurrage costs and adding ultimately to the pump price of the product.

The argument of the federal government has been that it spends huge sums of money to subsidize oil importation. The Presidency claimed that the government spent about N640 billion on oil subsidies last year. The Presidential Committee on deregulation said that the current template of the Petroleum Products Pricing Regulatory Agency (PPPRA) puts the cost of imported petrol at N85 per litre as against N65 the product is being dispensed at filling stations. This represents N20 per litre as subsidy paid by government. Oil marketers who import more than half of daily oil consumption in the polity have until recently suspended importation as the result of unsettled subsidy payment of about N70 billion (see Eme, 2009 and Alozie, 2009).

IMPLICATIONS OF THE SUBSIDY ON THE NIGERIAN ECONOMY: DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL

The Domestic Dimensions:

The campaign for the removal of the petroleum products through deregulation of the downstream oil sector of the industry has finally been consummated. The Federal Government first gave a hint that it would not accept any further delay of the plan when, last December, President Goodluck Jonathan presented the 2012 budget to the National Assembly. The usually huge subsidy provision was missing. It was clear to all that the government had no intention of carrying the burden in the New Year.

On January 1, 2012, the agency responsible for taking the decision, the Petroleum Product Pricing Regulatory Agency (PPPRA), told a largely unprepared and bewildered polity that no fuel importer should expect to be paid for supplying the products henceforth. The response was spontaneous. While studying the situation; the fuel stations shut down. The general public panicked. What is to follow is also fairly predictable. First, fuel, in the interim would be sold in the black market and prices would reach the roof.

Reports across Nigeria had it that motorists bought between ~~N~~138 and ~~N~~250 per liter of petrol on Monday, January 2, 2012. In Kano State, black market operators sold at ~~N~~250 per litre. Nigeria National

Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) stations had a uniform price of ₦138 across the country but for other marketers, prices were varied. The table below captures pump prices in some major cities:

Table I: Prices of Fuel across Nigerian Cities after Subsidy Removal

City	Prices per Litre
Benin	₦140 – ₦150
Ibadan	₦140
Ilorin	₦140
Kano	₦140 – ₦175
Kaduna	₦140 – ₦150
Oyo	₦150
Osogbo	₦145
Abakiliki	₦200
Lagos	₦141 – ₦158
Umuahia	₦150
Jos	₦150
Warri	₦160
Akure	₦150 – ₦170

Compiled by the authors.

The increase would provoke hyper inflation of prices in the consumer products market and thus compounded poverty. For instance, according to Daily Nation, the fare from Ilorin – Abuja ranged between ₦3,500.00 – ₦4,000.00, for busses and ₦5,000.00 for cars. The old price was ₦2,000.00. Ilorin – Lagos cost ₦5,000.00 instead of the old ₦1,600 charged by private operators. A trip from Kano to Lagos cost ₦8, 500.00 as against the old ₦5,500.00. Kano to Ibadan rose from ₦4,500 to ₦7,750. Kano to Bayelsa, which was ₦8, 500.00 is now ₦17, 000.00.

The removal of fuel subsidy has equally affected the cost of commodities at the various markets in the metropolis. Commercial motorcyclists instantly adjusted their fares as soon as the subsidy removal was announced.

There could also be increase in fire incidents nationwide as people are likely to store Premium Motor Spirit at home. Thus, lives and properties could be lost. The government posited that the prices would only rise in the interim. Comparing the situation to the development in the telecommunications industry, the government argues that the only way to arrest and correct the structural distortions in the sector is liberalization that would encourage businessmen to invest in building refineries and importing products to sell at prices dictated by the market.

However, this is an argument not supported by empirical evidence. Diesel and engine oil prices have been deregulated for years. Yet unlike the situation in the telecommunication industry, the prices have been going up.

The cost of doing business will equally respond to the trend. Businesses in the past few years have been relocating to Neighboring countries, with Ghana as the major beneficiary. The Manufacturers' Association of Nigeria (MAN) reports that 834 industries closed in 2010. It cited erratic power as the major reason for these closures. Many industries ran to neighboring West African countries because of low production cost (Eme, 2011. The Kano chapter of MAN said 86 industries have closed down in the state due to unfriendly government policies. The branch chairman, Alhaji Sanni Umar lamented that thousands

of workers have lost their jobs, saying “we consider it necessary to associate the current problems bedeviling the development of industries in Kano to absence of clear government’s industrial policy” (Saladdeen 2011:6).

Put differently, Nigerians have lost small scale industries that are supposed to serve as the backbone of our economy. Business enterprise with lofty ideas hardly survives in this country because of unconducive environment in which they operate. They have to source their own energy supply by spending fortune on diesel to power their machines and struggle to pay staff salaries. Nigeria encourages small scale industries to grow in other countries at the expense of our economy and the growing unemployment at home.

Related to the above is the fact that since many companies have official cars that then have to be fueled for their senior officers, the operating environment may be more stuffing in post-subsidy removal epoch. The middle class that is just about bouncing back to life is likely to be at the receiving end from the new policy. While the low income earners can only be indirectly hit by the policy, the upper class can easily absorb the effect as their employers will bear the cost. But, for the middle class that has no access to alternative transport, an increase of more than 100 percent rise in price can only make life more difficult.

Artisans and technicians who rely on PMS to power generators to earn their daily meal will be forced to pass the cost to customers where this is feasible. Otherwise, they will be forced to close shop, with the consequent implication for unemployment – one of the evils the government says subsidy removal will fight.

Also considered critical to the economy as the fuel subsidy issue is the provision of employment for teeming Nigerian graduates being churned out yearly by tertiary institutions. Unemployment has resulted in so much brain-drain that there are so many Nigerians working in, and contributing to the development of other countries. But since it is not every body that has the ability to leave the shores of the country, unemployment has continued to rise in the country. According to Salaudeen (2011:6), the national unemployment rate rose from 4.3 percent in 1970 to 6.4 percent in 1980; 40 percent in 1992 and 41.6 percent in 2011. The high rate of unemployment recorded last year is attributed largely to depression in the economy.

As identified earlier, over the years, hundreds of factories that hitherto provided employment to graduates and artisans have collapsed. This is because energy supply which serves as the main engine of production has been comatose, thus forcing the surviving industries to depend on power generators while the polity becomes a dumping ground for all imported items.

Many artisans like welders, aluminum window filters, tailor, who cannot afford power generators are today out of work. In desperation, many Nigerian youths have taken to riding commercial motorcycle and tricycle while others went into street hawking just to keep body and soul together. Nigeria is face with a gross abuse and under-utilization of human resources with direct impact on national production and competitiveness. Brian drain in all professions has become common.

Early December last year, President Jonathan noted that the nation was faced with the danger of youth revolt in its hands unless government provides jobs for the teeming unemployed youths roaming the streets of the country. He promised that his government was poised with the provision of 50, 000 jobs in the New Year. How much he would be able to do this is another matter, as Nigerians had seen government after government make promises in the past which they never got to keep.

President Jonathan has repeatedly said that subsidy withdrawal is necessary to safeguard Nigeria's future. He said the total deregulation of the downstream sector will open the oil industry for foreign investments; which will lead to massive jobs creation and development. For instance, the government's Subsidy Reinvestment and Employment Programme (SURE), under which it listed among other projects, the construction or completion of eight major roads and two bridges, provision of health care for three million pregnant women, six railway projects, youth employment, mass transit, 19 irrigation projects, rural and urban water supply (Ofikhenn, 2011:4).

Labour said its response to the planned palliative measures is that "out of the projected ₦1.134 trillion to be saved from the subsidy removal, the local government allocation is ₦202.23 billion, states is ₦411.03 billion and the Federal Government ₦478.49 billion and concluded that even if the Federal Government alone were to spend entire ₦1.134 trillion, it cannot execute even a fifth of the projects it had listed" (Ofikhenn, 2011:4).

Anti-Subsidy removal thesis concludes by positing that the presidency's palliative presentation was simply a repetition of the presentations made by the Babangida, Abacha and Obasanjo regimes, and that more of those promises were kept.

Specifically, the Jonathan's palliative measures are faulty because of the under listed unresolved questions:

[1] Since there is no cash allocated to petrol subsidy in Budget 2012, where will the money to be reinvested by the Christopher Kolade Committee come from?

[2] Any cash for subsidy in the NNPC's budget?

[3] NNPC's budget and those of the 34 other Federal Government agencies are usually not made public. How will the government redress this lack of transparency?

Finally, anti-subsidy protest will weaken the already fragile Nigerian economy. Employers of labour have warned of the implication of protests over the planned removal of fuel subsidy. According to the Director General of the Nigerian Employers Consultative Association (NECA), Mr. Olusegun Osinowo:

Any crisis will worsen the economic situation. You know that salaries are paid from the daily income of the companies – the manufacturers – and it will be difficult for the employer to honour his salary obligations if businesses are put on hold due to labour protest (Oladesin, et al, 2011:1). For instance, Nigeria lost about 4.75 million Man-days to strike in six years.

President of National Industrial Court, NIC, Justice Babatunde Adejumo, has disclosed that no less than four million, Seven Hundred and Fifty Thousand, One Hundred and Ninty-One man-days (4, 750,191) were lost to industrial actions in six years in Nigeria.

Justice Adejumo in a paper on Building Effective Conflict Management Mechanism for Sustainable Development in Nigeria, at the 7th National Labour Relations Summit organized by the Michael Imoudu National Institute for Labour Studies, MINILS, gave details of the man-days lost in six years as follows:

- 2004 – 539,809;
- 2005 – 708,659;
- 2006 – 111,310;
- 2007 – 2,329,946;
- 2008 – 495,860 and
- 2009 – 564,607 (Ahiuma-Young, 2011:17)

He explained that man-days are calculated on the simple logic of multiplying the number of days a strike action lasted by the strikers i.e. the workers embarking on the strike, saying “in other words, each striking worker’s loss of a day is treated separately from that of a fellow worker.”

The International Dimensions

The opposition to removal of fuel subsidy and workers’ strike should be seen as a healthy development in the transformation agenda of President GoodLuck Jonathan. First, the president has shown democratic disposition and courage in telling the Nigerian populace his economic-political direction. His foreign policy is pro-west. For instance, President Jonathan’s co-ordinating Minister, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala is familiar with the ways of international finance from the standpoint of the West. In those institutions, they look at the developing world from two platforms. One, they want to know how it will benefit them. Two, they “help” with what is called paternalist attitude. That means they look at us as children who must be helped because we do not have the brains to do things for ourselves. This is why they want the developing society to follow the market forces even though they know African economies cannot compete on an equal footing with theirs.

It is that kind of thinking that she brings to Nigeria. Her economic sense has not been domesticated. Hence, the so called Sovereign Wealth Fund is being made available to Western companies like Goldman Sachs and J.P. Morgan. She does not understand that the Nigerian economy is for Nigerians and not for America and her allies.

Put differently, Nigeria’s economy is actually tied to the global economy. Prices of international products are not fixed by the government of Nigeria but by internal market forces. The price of crude oil from Nigeria is internationally determined. For as long as Nigeria does not have control over fuel prices internationally, it can not but be better for Nigeria to take the initiative now and embark upon a new path of self-reliance. Apart from internationally controlled prices, the volume of imported fuel has not always been enough, thus making importation of fuel a desideration, in light of the inability of the domestic refineries to produce to the tune of their installed capacity.

The opposition parties, organized labour and civil society groups are also consistent with domestic ethos and traditions. The tough positions of both parties now compel a compromise, thus indirectly promoting the culture of mutual respect. Beyond that, the strike has considerably impacted on the global community as a whole in different ways.

Second, is the international aviation community; Not only have international aircraft grounded, so have been international passengers. Many are the Nigerian passengers wanting to go back to their offices in Europe, America and other countries of the world but who could not. Several business investors are also stranded. Some stranded Nigerians have complained that they might lose their jobs for not being able to resume duty promptly in European and American offices.

The impact of the strike as identified earlier was also felt by the various airline operators. These included Air Nigeria, Chan Changi Airlines, Aero Contractors, IRS Airlines, Dana Airlines, Associated Aviation and Overland Airways among others. Aviation sources said these airlines on a normal day would operate about 200 flights worth amount to hundreds of millions of naira for scheduled passengers and cargo operators. The situation was said to be worse for the airlines that fly into the West African Coast. The list includes Arik Air Nigeria and Aero contractors.

Reports indicated that business ground to a halt at the ever busy Tin-Can and Apapa last week as importers and their clearing agents deserted the ports while the strike lasted. All the terminals at the ports were said to have been deserted by importers and their agents.

Meanwhile, a maritime expert, Mr. Tunde Folarin, in a radio programme monitored in Lagos last Wednesday said the industry was bound to suffer a demurrage crisis by the time the strike was over. According to him, some of the importers will try to resist the payment of demurrage as they are bound to argue that they were not the cause of the crisis which made goods clearance at the ports impossible (Akanbi and Agbo, 2012:24).

In the same vein, the effect of the crippling strike and protests was profound on the nation's money market as banks remained under lock and key while the strike lasted. For instance, many Ghanaian businessmen, having business transactions with Nigerian banks in Ghana, have also complained bitterly about the strike. The Ghana branches need approvals from their headquarters before they can take some decisions. The implication here is that whatever happens in Nigeria necessarily affects political and economic activities in the West African region. Central Bank Governor, Lamido Sanusi Lamido put the loss incurred during the period of strike at \$617million daily, translating into about N100 billion (Akanbi and Agbo, 2012:24).

At the diplomatic level, visa applicants cannot be attended to as scheduled appointments had to be cancelled. Many countries issued travel warnings to the citizens to be cautious about traveling to Nigeria. For instance, Canada and the USA have said that "civil unrest is occurring in several cities throughout the country after the removal of government subsidy on January 1, 2012. This type of warning also raises Nigerian's international image. The manner of perception of Nigeria as not being stable enough for the security of foreigners, extent of security of foreign investments in Nigeria and in fact

capability to ensure security and lives and property are what is considered in relating with the people of Nigeria now. Perhaps, more significantly, it raises questions on the extent to which democracy can continue to thrive in Nigeria.

But beyond these considerations, the removal of fuel subsidy has provided a good platform for national reflections. One of the issues is the extent of sovereignty of government and that of the people. True sovereignty belongs to the people when people are elected into public offices, it is generally admitted that sovereignty is delegated in part. The prize no is that when a government takes a decision on behalf of the people, and the people are not favorably disposed to the decision, who should have the pre-eminence?

RECOMMENDATIONS

While Nigerians were still reeling in the aftershocks of the Christmas Day bombing at St. Theresa's Catholic Church, Madalla, Niger State, which claimed scores of lives, the Goodluck administration as against reasonable expectations of the populace, yanked off the fuel subsidy of New Year Day. The result was as expected, unprecedented hike in the price of petrol and attendant inflations.

Like every Nigerian, we are shocked at the apparent sleight of hand and the surreptitious manner the removal came about. We recalled the coordinating/finance minister, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala assuring Nigerians that no final discussion had been taken on the implementation date for the subsidy removal. That was at the highly publicized event of the Town Hall meeting convoked by NPAN.

Of course, Nigerians had every reason to expect that the removal would not come before April. In the first place, going by the measures published to cushion the impact of the subsidy removal, a lot of things were supposed to have been put in place before it could take effect. Today, none of them has taken off. In the second place, aside the lack of provision for the subsidy in the 2012 budget, nothing makes the removal a done-deal a the National Assembly may in fact choose to tinker with the budget

We are therefore left to wonder as to what informed the rush to remove the subsidy when Nigerians are still weighing all the options. In view of the above, the paper, therefore recommends as follows:

The Federal Government should revert to the Pre-New Year's Day Petrol Price in order to restore normalcy and avoid nation-wide strike, rally and protests. This is because there was a subsisting understanding between labour and the Federal Government in 2009 that removal of subsidy will not begin, until certain conditions have been met. These conditionalities include fixing of the refineries and building of new ones. These conditions have not been met. The others are regular power supply and provision of other social infrastructure, such as railways and repairs of roads as well as eliminating the corruption associated with supply and distribution of petroleum products in the downstream sector of the oil industry.

Also, the Federal Government should consult wider on the matter and also allow the input of the National Assembly and members of PPPRA board to make the removal of the fuel subsidy a participatory

action. In other words, the decision of the Federal Government through the management of the PPPRA to increase the price of fuel through the deregulation of the downstream sector is illegal and unconstitutional. The decision to increase the pump price of petrol can only be taken by the PPPRA board but the board whose members include representatives of the media, the Nigerian Labour Congress, the trade Union congress, NUPENG and PENGASSON never met to deliberate and take action on the matter. Therefore, the deregulation policy announced by the PPPRA is illegal and as it contravenes section seven of the PPRA Act 2004. The National Assembly should not hesitate to reject the illegal decision of the PPPRA and proceed to allocate fund to cover for fuel subsidy in the 2012 Appropriation Bill.

Again, Government at all levels should pay serious attention to data management and statistics. For instance, the Federal Government did not present facts on the impact of subsidy removal on the populace, particularly the informal sector, where most Nigerians earn a living. The organized labour and other informed Nigerians also pointed out that some of the statistics presented by the Minister of Finance were joggled to reach false conclusions. It was all at the president's meeting with unionists at the villa in Abuja on Tuesday, 20th December 2011. The president told the labour delegations that the government subsidizes a litre of petrol by ₦74. The President, who was quoted by Labour officials at the meeting as saying that "the actual cost of petrol supply is ₦139 per litre, admitted that all Nigerians benefit from fuel subsidy but claimed that the rich benefits more" (Ofikhenua, 2011:1).

Petrol costs ₦65 per litre at the pump. Nigerians, according to PPPRA figures, consume 33 million litres of petrol per day. But a former oil minister, Professor Tam David West viewed the development from other perspective. He said the government and its spin doctors have been economical with the truth. David-West posited that a barrel of crude oil is 42 gallons or 159 litres. He argued that our four refineries, four in all have the capacity to produce 445,000 barrels per day.

Due to ageing equipment, they are producing at 30 per cent, translating to 133,500 barrel per day. David-West argued further that 133,500 barrels equals about 21.2million litres, more than enough to meet local demand of a little above 12 million litres (Olu Kayode and Kujenya, 2012:6).

He said the ageing refineries can still meet local consumption, giving a graphic detail of the pricing structure of crude oil (Qua Iboe Crude Oil) production as follows:

Crude Facts According to Tam-David West

- One barrel of crude oil – 42 gallons or 159 litres
- Our refineries(4) installed confined capacity – 445,000 barrels per day
- Actual refineries capacity due to mismanagement – 30% i.e. 133,500 barrels per day
- 133,500 barrels – 21.2 million litres
- Local required consumption (F.O.S) 12 million litres.
- It means that even our moribund refineries can actually meet our local consumption need of production.
- The cost structure of crude oil (Qua Iboe Crude Oil) production.

- Findings/development	-	\$3.5	
- Production Cost	-	\$1.5	
- Refining Cost	-	\$12.6	
- Pipeline Transportation	-	\$1.5	
- Distribution/Bridging fund Margin	-	\$15.69	
- True cost of one litre of petroleum any where in Nigeria	-	\$34.8	
- 1litre cost	-	\$134.8/159litre	- \$0.219
- Naira equivalent	-	\$0.219 x ₦160	- ₦35.02k
Add Tax ₦5 + ₦35.02	=	₦40.2	

Source; Olukayode and Kujenya (2012:6), "New Year, New Pairs as fuel price like bites", *The Nation*, Thursday, January, 5 Pp. 6-7.

Hence, Government would not let the ordinary Nigerian understand the fib and stark lies of the so-called subsidy. First, Nigerians must understand that what the government is trying to remove is not fuel subsidy but corruption subsidy.

Now, let us look at how the corruption subsidy works. A marketer brings in ₦40 million litres of fuel into the country, but he declares 5 million litres and sells 35 million at what is called the Plate Price elsewhere, whereas Nigeria has paid him the subsidy worth 40 million litres. He will pocket the value of 35 million litres times ₦65.00.

The department of Petroleum Resources that must verify the actual quantity brought in turns a blind eye because some of its top officials have been bribed. The Petroleum Products Pricing Regulatory Agency has the list of those who can import oil. PPPRA bribes the control price of ₦65.00 with international price which is around ₦139.00. They pay the importer. Why did PPPRA lose its independence under the office of the minister of petroleum resources? The minister approves the list. So it is clear whatever distortion happens in the PPPRA, DPR and the minimum of petroleum resources.

Furthermore, Senator Magnus Abe Committee that investigated fuel importation should speed up its investigation of the fraud that has characterized the importation of petroleum. The report of the Committee will assist the National Assembly in tackling an informed decision in the national interest. With the help of international forensic auditors and the National Assembly, Nigerians can establish the fuel consumption truth. To ascertain the truth, we should trace the fuel from the ports to the end user. They should go to PPPRA and the marketers' banks and obtain receipts, bills of lading for products brought in to authenticate if the products came into Nigeria. A fake bill of lading will be discovered. The CBN has copies of bills of lading as well as the commercial banks.

The announcement of some marketers as beneficiaries recently was diversionary. The marketers are too afraid to protest. The real culprits are the political elites. We have not considered those who do round tripping and declare fuel at the port, obtain subsidy and come back to declare same. This is what Nigeria need to stop with the help of the National Assembly and international forensic auditors. If we subsidize the actual fuel that we consume in Nigeria, the expenditure will be negligible.

Apart from the above, the anti-corruption agencies such as the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offenses Commission and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission should probe PPPRA, NNPC and DPR. For instance, the sum of ₦240 billion was voted for fuel subsidy in the last year's Appropriation Act, but in what amounted for a violation of the Act, ₦1.4 trillion was paid by the PPPRA for fuel subsidy from January to December last year.

Giving instances of how the fraud was allegedly committed; human right crusader, Mr. Femi Falana in a petition sent to EFCC's Acting Chairman recently noted that fuel subsidy of ₦240 billion was illegally increased to ₦1.4 trillion without a Supplementary Appropriation Bill passed by the national Assembly. He said out of the ₦1.4 trillion, only 62.9 percent was paid as subsidy on petrol in 2011. Falana said:

Where as ₦421 billion and ₦673 billion were paid for 2009 and 2010, respectively, the NNPC was paid over ₦400 billion as arrears of subsidy claims for 2009 and 2010. Demurrage payments made by the NNPC translated to an average of \$6.6 million per month. Variations between NNPC and verifications by PPPRA led to over deductions of several billions of naira professional fees of billions of naira were paid to two private auditors for covering up the perpetrators in the fuel importation scam (Ikhilae, 2012:5).

Beside, Falana alleged that exchange rates used by NNPC were lower than the average exchange rates approved by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN). He also alleged that contracts for fuel importation were awarded to marketers that were not included in the approved pre-qualification list. Again, as a result of late settlement of invoices from suppliers, NNPC paid interest rates running into millions of dollars.

As a result of the PPPRA's failure to regulate the supply and distribution of petroleum products, it failed to prevent collusion and restrictive trade practices harmful to the petroleum sector.

Moreover, there is the need for Nigeria to adopt Hugo-Chavez Venezuela option in order to come out of the crisis. There are similarities between Venezuela and Nigeria. Both are independent nations and members of the Organization of Oil Producing Countries (OPEC). While the former is enjoying all the benefits of oil producing nation, same could not be said of the latter. When Enerique Fernando Arrundell, the Venezuela Ambassador to Nigeria, paid about ₦12, 000 to refuel his car in 2010, he had expressed shock to Mrs. Dora Akunyili, the then Minister of Information and Communication. He had said:

In Venezuela, since 1999, we have never had a raise in fuel price. We only pay \$1.02 to fill the tank. What I pray for with ₦12, 000 here (Nigeria); in Venezuela I will pay ₦400. What is happening is simple. Our President (Hugo Chavez) decided one day to control the industry, because it belongs to the Venezuelans. If you do not control the industry, your development will be on the hands of foreigners. You have to have your own country. The oil is yours. Sorry I am telling you this. I am giving you the experience of Venezuela. We have 12 refineries in the United States, 18,000 gas stations in the West Coast. All we are doing is in the hands of the Venezuelans. Before 1999, we had three or four foreign companies working with us. Tat time they were taking 80 percent, and giving us 20 percent. Now, we

have 90 percent, and giving them 10 percent. But now, we have 22 countries working with us in that conditions (Olukayode and Kujenya, 2012:7).

The Ambassador goes on to add that it is the Venezuelan condition. You know why? It is because 60 percent of the income goes to social programmes. That is why we have 22,000 medical doctors assisting the people in the community. The people do not go to hospital; doctors go to their houses. This is because the money is handled by the Venezuelans. How come Nigeria that has more technical manpower than Venezuela, with 150 million people, and very intellectual people all around, not been able to get it right? The question is, if you are not handling your resources, how are you going to handle the country? So it is important that Nigeria takes control of her resources. We have no illiterate people. We have over 17 new universities totally free. I graduated from the university without paying one cent; and take three meals every day because we have the resources. We want the resources of the Nigerian people for the Nigerians. It is enough. It is enough; minister, the Ambassador concluded.

Finally, there is the need for the government at all levels to cut the cost of administration in Nigeria so that more money will be budgeted for capital expenditure.

CONCLUSION

The protests which have met with the hike in fuel prices were to be expected. In fact, it oil have been odd if it had not taken place. Such an astronomical increase in the price of the most essential commodities cannot just pass as if nothing had happened. The street protests in Lagos, Abuja, Kano, Kaduna, Oshogbo and Makurdi among others suggest a case of heightened anxiety.

The protesters who appear to be unimpressed by the government's official line clearly represent the gut feeling of the majority. They appear to be even less impressed with the committee on subsidy reinvestment and empowerment programme. Nigerians have rejected the "subsidy" removal because they are tired of policies which do not attempt to increase purchasing power in the country.

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