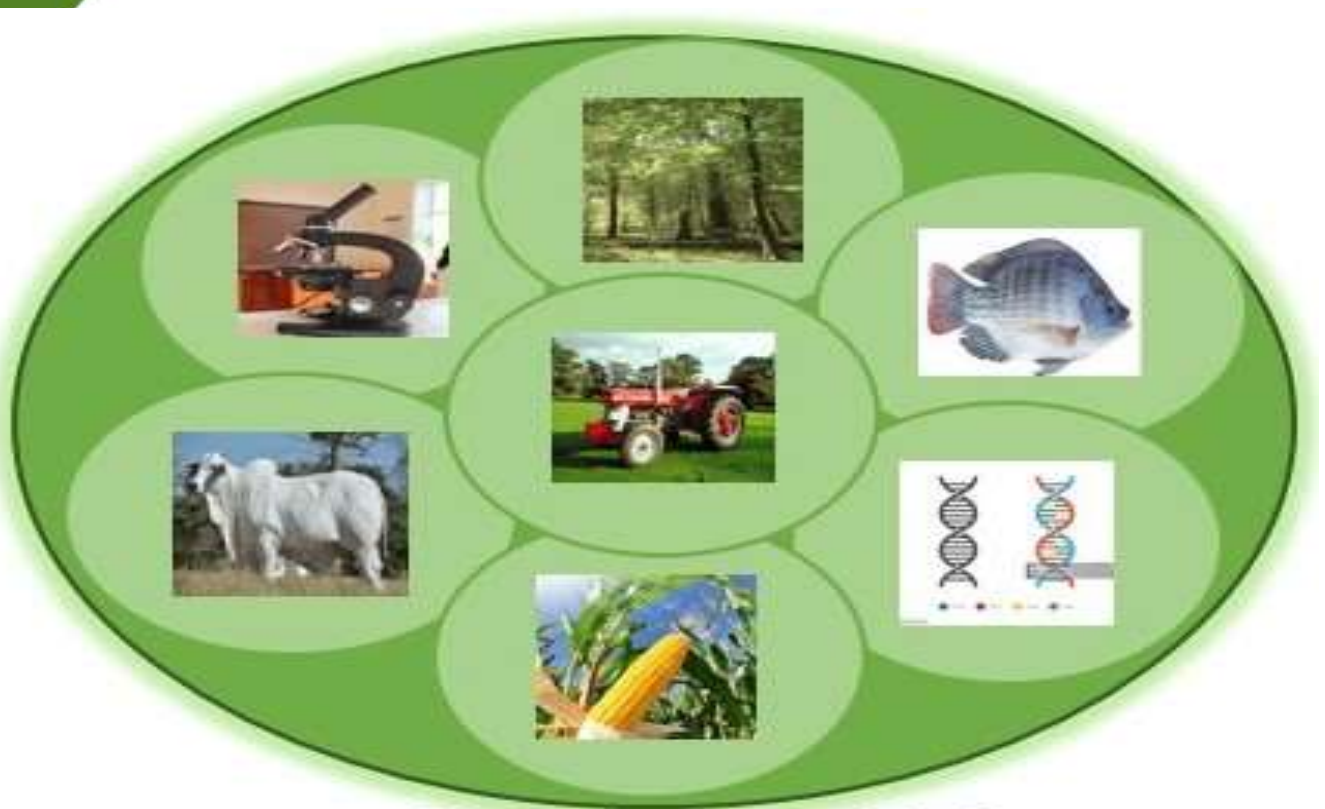




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CONTACT:

The Editor-in-Chief,
Kebbi Journal of Agriculture and Natural Sciences,
Faculty of Agriculture,
Abdullahi Fodio University of Science and Technology
Aliero,
PMB 1144, Birnin kebbi, Nigeria.
Email: kejaanseditor@ksusta.edu.ng,

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PERCEIVED EFFECT OF FUEL SUBSIDY REMOVAL ON THE LIVELIHOOD ACTIVITIES OF RURAL HOUSEHOLDS IN SOUTHERN SENATORIAL DISTRICT OF BENUE STATE

Agada, Sunday Adole, Kyaharle, Bigin Sani, Jemisenia, John Oluwaseyi and Ntat, Felix Habila

Department of Agricultural Extension and Management, Federal College of Forestry, Jos
agadaadole@gmail.com, 07036589051

Department of Pest Management, Federal College of Forestry, Jos
Department of Sociology & Anthropology, University of Nigeria Nsukka
john.jemisenia@gmail.com, +2349064451525

Department of Agriculture Economics and Extension, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Jos
ntatfelix@gmail.com, +2347068223651

Corresponding Author: agadaadole@gmail.com, 07036589051

ABSTRACT

The study examined the “Impact of fuel subsidy removal on the livelihood activities of Households in Southern Senatorial zone of Benue State. The specific objectives of the study encompassed the livelihood activities of the rural households, the impact of subsidy removal on the households and the challenges faced by rural households. A total of 120 households were selected through a simple random sampling method. Data were collected with the aid of a structured questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics and chi-square statistics. The study found fuel subsidy removal impacted transportation, food, medication, farm input, yield, income and many other aspects. Also, farmers were challenged by the high cost of inputs, low level of education, poor access to credit and roads, increased activities of banditry and many more. It was recommended that farmers' cooperatives or associations can play a significant role in organising themselves to better access credit or loans from financial institutions for their members at a low interest rate. More so, rural farmers should diversify their livelihood in areas of non-agriculture so that during off-farming seasons they can derive income from other means for survival. Also, the government can make inputs such as fertilisers, insecticides and herbicides affordable to lessen the impact of subsidy removal on rural farmers in the study area.

Keywords: Subsidy Removal, Livelihood, Households

Introduction

Nigeria is blessed with unquantifiable natural resources such as fossil fuels that have become the major revenue-generating sector for the country's economy. Fuel or premium motor spirit is one of the valuable mineral resources or other geologic materials from the earth, which is usually extracted from crude oil that is usually below the earth's surface. Most

industries and households requires fuel run their economic growth and development. Rural households in Nigeria continue to depend on agriculture as their main source of livelihood, and the recent removal of the fuel subsidies has worsened the economic conditions of the rural dwellers (Akinyemi et al., 2015; Olarenwaju, 2022).

Depicting the picture, Nwagwu (2014) argues that the deteriorating situation in the rural regions has further escalated poverty and the growth of human and social capital. Livelihood refers to all socio-economic activities that people participate in, be it in the form of self-employment or wage employment, making use of human or material skills to sustain themselves. It covers not just the sources of making a living but the things that enable citizens to constitute a good life, the judgements that are made in dealing with the sources of better living and the institutional and policy structures that either make or hinder their quest towards a better standard of living (David, 2016).

Nigeria is a country whose economy was based on agriculture until the early 1970s. Its exports were known to be agricultural products, especially groundnuts, which were represented by Kano pyramids of groundnuts, oil palm, and cocoa, especially in the western region (Adetola, 2015). The commercial discovery of oil, however, changed the economic path of Nigeria. Subsidies on fuels were started in the 1970s, and the annual subsidies were formalised and enacted into law in 1977 as the Price Control Act, which barred the sale of some commodities, such as petrol, beyond the regulated prices. Despite the good intentions behind the subsidy policy, it has been characterised by rampant corruption and mismanagement in its implementation (Daily Trust.,2022; Oyedele et al., 2023).

The importance of premium motor spirit (fuel) to the Gross Domestic Product of Nigeria is huge. According to Arinokore (2022), although it is the largest producer of oil in Africa and one of the largest exporters to the world, Nigeria does not have the capacity to refine the estimated 1.6 billion barrels per day. Most of the refineries in the country were set up during the colonial period, and they are therefore not functioning effectively; it has to

export crude oil and import refined petroleum products to consume them locally. Since most of the key services in Nigeria are oil-dependent, the impacts of changes in fuel prices can be felt in almost all sectors of the economy. Fueki,Higashi, Higashio, Nakajima, Ohyama, and Tamanyu, (2018) bring empirical data about the strong effect of oil price shocks on the domestic economy of Nigeria and the global economic situation (Akpan &Nnamseh,2015).

Governments all over the world, especially the oil-producing countries, have introduced various forms of subsidies in order to ameliorate the welfare and macroeconomic impacts of oil price shocks on their citizens (Omotosho, 2019). Subsidy is a concept that has been used with a variety of essential commodities or items over the years in Nigeria to ameliorate the impact of price fluctuation on the end consumers. Items such as food, Education, fertiliser, electricity, diesel, kerosene and petrol, farm inputs have one way or the other enjoyed subsidy (Ikeora & Okoye, 2015). The need for fuel subsidy removal had always been highlighted by past and present administrations owing to the handiwork of fraudulent practices associated with the fuel subsidy regime. As the Federal Government battled to resolve the problem, scholars such as Allwell (2012) argued that smugglers and saboteurs in the country contributed so much to the fuel subsidy scam. Yemi (2012) also opined that the fuel subsidy scam has plagued the nation and caused a lot of pain, anguish, and dislocation of economic and sundry activities. There was hardly any individual industry institution or organisation in Nigeria today that was not severely affected.

Attempts were made by several governments to remove fuel subsidy, but most of which met brick walls through mass protests by trade unions, civil society bodies, students, among others, citing inhuman treatment of the



population of Nigeria by the government, and so on. Zinami (2024) alluded to the use of protests in the form of civil resistance, civil disobedience, and strikes, which often lead to a reduction of fuel prices. However, on 29th May 2023, during the inaugural speech of the incoming President of Nigeria, Ahmed Bola Tinubu, he claimed that the administration of former President Muhammadu Buhari did not make any provision for petrol subsidy, and thus declared that the subsidy was gone (Ocheni, 2015).

The implication of fuel subsidy removal has affected household livelihood, as espoused by Ogwuche, Adejoh, Dabish, Garba, and Dole (2024), as it culminated in shifting government spending away from subsidies and towards infrastructure development and other initiatives that directly improve citizens' quality of life. According to Allwell (2012), smugglers and saboteurs in the country contributed greatly to the further development of the fuel subsidy scam, subversion of regulation and squandering national resources. On the same note, Yemi (2012) stated that the subsidy scandal has caused pain, anguish, and disruption in most sectors of the economy. The economic turmoil caused by the mismanagement of the subsidy regime had to affect individuals, industries, institutions, and organisations in the same way. The thoroughness of the scam showed that there were endemic inefficiencies and no accountability in the fuel allocation and pricing systems (Khumalo, 2012). These academic visions highlight the dire necessity to change the structure and introduce open governance to regain the confidence and financial stability of the population. The fuel subsidy dilemma, thus, is not only a matter of fiscal challenge but also indicative of institutional flaws at large (Onwioduokitanda, & Adenuga, 2012).

Fuel subsidy removal has no doubt decreased household income, increased household

expenditure, increase in fuel prices, led to high inflation, fall in the saving rate, increase in prices of goods and services which has also eroded about half of Nigeria's present middle-class citizens and further dampen the negative effects that higher prices would ordinarily have had on the economy in the short run (Osogie, 2012). In a bid to cushion the harsh effect of the subsidy, the removal government introduced palliatives in the form of releasing trucks of grains, a promise of CNG Buses, cash transfer, student loans, among others. While palliatives may offer temporary relief to vulnerable households, identifying and adequately reaching those most affected remains a challenge, especially due to the absence of reliable demographic data (Oyedele et al., 2023). Nigeria's fuel subsidy has long been plagued by corruption and inefficiency, and palliatives have been proposed by some as a way to ease the hardship resulting from its removal. These measures, such as cash transfers, provision of buses to the Labour Union, and other support schemes, may help cushion the immediate effects of rising costs. Yet, the success of such interventions depends on multiple variables. The agricultural sector, in particular, has been significantly impacted by the subsidy removal, with rural farmers in Benue State's Zone C Senatorial District bearing the brunt. This district includes several local government areas where farming is the predominant occupation. These communities rely heavily on fuel for irrigation, transportation, and market access. Without targeted support, their productivity and livelihoods face serious threats. Addressing these gaps is essential for inclusive and sustainable recovery (Mustapha, 2022).

The rural farmers, no doubt, are at the receiving end of the subsidy removal programme, given their low socio-economic constraints. Nwakeredu et al., (2024) emphasised that fuel subsidy removal

decreased household income and triggered excruciating economic pains for citizenry. Also, Gyoh (2012) wrote that such a huge increase in the current Nigerian economic environment is without a doubt a process that is either being driven inadvertently or purposely, with over 70 per cent of Nigerians living below a dollar a day, being the ultimate losers. In an actual sense, anyone can never fail to commit money on transport expenses, with the rest supposed to address feeding the family, health, education and other social expenses. Therefore, there is a need to amplify such nagging problems enumerated above, which have necessitated the need to research into the impact of fuel subsidy removal on the livelihood activities in the study area, to examine its consequential Policy implications. A sustainable rural farmer's livelihood is significant for agricultural development revenue diversification in the country. This can help in ameliorating poverty, crime and over-dependency on government (Kidochukwu, 2022). The purpose of the study is to examine the impact of fuel subsidy removal on the livelihood activities of rural farmers in Southern senatorial district of Benue state, with specific objectives are to; identify livelihood activities, perceived impact of fuel subsidy removal on rural farmers livelihood and challenges faced by farmers in southern senatorial zone, Benue State as a result of fuel subsidy removal on their livelihood. The research hypothesis was tested at 5% significance level and states that there is no significant impact of fuel subsidy removal on the livelihood of rural farmers in the Southern Senatorial zone, Benue State.

Materials and Methods

Area of study

Benue South senatorial district, popularly known as Zone "C" is comprised of Ado, Agatu, Apa, Obi, Ogbadibo, Ohimini, Oju,

Okpokwu and Otukpo Local Government areas of Benue state. Otukpo is the administrative capital of zone C, and the two dominant tribes in the zone are Idoma and the Igede people. Zone C has high forest and Guinea savannah vegetation, and it is a rich agricultural zone. Some of the predominant crops cultivated are Yam, cassava, maize, soya beans, guinea corn, rice, and groundnuts.

Sampling Procedure

Sample size is the proportionate representation or subset of the total population to be used in the study. The sample of the study is made up of three local government LGA randomly selected from all the local governments in the Zone C Senatorial Zone, Benue State. The areas, including Ogbadigbo, Okpokwu and Obi LGAs, were used as the sampling area. Forty (40) farmers were randomly selected from each local government to fill out the questionnaire on the impact of fuel subsidy removal on the study area. This was done to give every household an equal opportunity of being selected in the study without bias. Community, associations and groups formed the majority of the respondents from the study area.

Method of Data Collection

The research design adopted in this study was a descriptive survey, that is, a research mode of study that is conducted with the purpose of describing qualities of variables in a situation. The survey refers to an endeavour to gather data from people belonging to a population to establish the prevailing condition of a population regarding one or more variables. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire. The data was analysed using simple percentages to answer the research objective 1, and weighted mean to answer objectives 2 and 3. The chi-square will be used to test the hypothesis.

$$\text{Percentage} = \frac{\text{observed frequency}}{\text{Total frequency}} \times 100\%$$

Weighted Mean = Where:

$$\Sigma = \text{summation sign. } \frac{\Sigma fX_i}{N}$$

F= Frequency of observation

X_i = individual observation

N = Total Number of Observation

$$\text{Chi square } \chi^2 = \sum \frac{(FO - FE)^2}{FE}$$

Where:

X² = chi-square

FO = Frequency observed

FE = Frequency expected

FE = $\frac{RT \times CT}{GT}$

GT

RT = Row Total

CT = Column Total

GT = Grand Total

Results and Disussions

Livelihood Activities by Rural Household in Zone C Senatorial District

Table 1. Livelihood Activities by Rural Household in Zone C Senatorial District

Livelihood Activities	Yes (%)	No (%)
Crop farming	120(100%)	-
Animal rearing	101(84.2%)	19(15.8%)
Farm wage income	103(85.8%)	17(14.2%)
Food Processing	61(50.8%)	49(49.2%)
Transportation	26(21.7%)	94 (78.3)
Trading	99(82.5%)	21(17.5%)
Hair salon/beauty shop	14(11.7%)	106(88.3%)
POS/monetary services	9(7.5%)	111(92.5.%)
Craftsmanship	41(34.2%)	79(65.8%)
Teaching	17(14.2%)	103(85.8%)
Medical services	6(5%)	114(95%)

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The results of livelihood activities engaged by rural households in Table 1 indicate that the majority of 120 respondents, representing 100% were involved in crop farming in the study area. Also, it was found that the majority of 101 respondents, representing 84.2% were engaged in animal rearing. In addition, a greater number of 103 respondents representing 85% were discovered to be involved in farm wage income. With regard to food processing, the majority of 61, representing 50.8% agreed to be involved in one form of food processing in the area. It was also found that the majority of 94 respondents, representing 78.3% reported not being engaged in transportation activities. With regard to trading, the majority of 99

respondents representing 82.5% were involved in one trading or the other. More so, the Hair salon/beauty shop shows that the majority of 106 respondents, representing 88.3% do not engage in the activity. It was also found that the majority of 111 respondents, representing 92.5% were not involved in POS/Monetary services. The result also shows that the majority of 79 respondents, representing 65.8% were not engaged in craftsmanship. The majority of 103 respondents, representing 85.8% were not engaged in teaching activities. Finally, the majority of 114 respondents, representing 95% were not engaged in medical services. This finding indicates that the majority of respondents in the rural area were

engaged more in on-farm activities in the study area.

Table 2: Perceived Impact of Fuel Subsidy Removal on Rural Household Livelihood in Zone C Senatorial, Benue State

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Remark
i.	Decline in farm income	66(264)	50 (150)	4(8)	0(0)	3.5	Accept
ii.	Skyrocket cost of transportation	41(164)	55 (169)	10(20)	14 (14)	3.1	Accept
iii.	High cost of food	38(152)	32(96)	27(54)	23 (23)	2.7	Accept
iv	Increase in cost of farm input	61(244)	52 (156)	7(14)	0(0)	3.5	Accept
v	Increased cost of Medication	39(156)	61 (183)	11(22)	9(9)	3.1	Accept
vii	Increase in poverty rate	53(212)	44(132)	16(32)	13(13)	3.2	Accept
viii	Decline in output	47(188)	51(153)	12(24)	16(16)	3.1	Accept
vix	Decrease in land cultivation	39(156)	45(135)	17(34)	25(25)	2.8	Accept
Grand Mean						3.1	Accept

Source: Field Survey, 2024, Weighted mean $\geq 2.5 =$ Accepted

Table 2 shows responses to the perceived Impact of fuel subsidy removal on rural livelihood. Items i, ii, iii, iv, v, vi, vii and viii were accepted to have impacted households in the study area. It therefore means that farm income, transportation, food, farm input, medication, poverty rate, output and land cultivable among rural households have been impacted by fuel subsidy removal in the study area. The study aligns with findings by Fueki, Higashi, Higashio, Nakajima, Ohyama, and Tamanyu, (2018) and Nwakeredu et al., (2024) who found that subsidy removal had altered the prices of food and led to escalating inflation of other items in the study areas.

Table 3 shows responses to challenges faced by rural households as a result of fuel subsidy removal. The ranking of challenges shows that high cost of inputs, inadequate opportunity in the non-agricultural sector, poor access road, lack of access to credit, low level of education, lack of electricity, poor training facilities and increased activities of banditry were some of the challenges aggravated by the removal of fuel subsidy in the study area. This study aligns with findings by Idisi et al., (2024) and Ojo et al., (2025) as a major challenge impacting the livelihood of the rural households in the study area.

Table 3: Challenges Faced by Rural Households in Zone C Senatorial District as a Result of Fuel Subsidy Removal

S/N	STATEMENT	Very Severe	Severe	Moderate	Not Severe	Mean	Ranking
i.	High cost of inputs	66 (264)	50 (150)	4 (8)	-	3.5	1
ii.	Lack of access to credit facilities	41 (164)	55 (169)	10 (20)	14 (14)	3.1	4
iii.	Poor training facilities	38 (152)	32 (96)	27 (54)	23 (23)	2.7	7
Iv	Inadequate opportunity in non-agricultural sector	61 (244)	52 (156)	7 (14)	0(0)	3.5	2
V	Low level of education	39 (156)	61 (183)	11(22)	9 (9)	3.1	5
Vi	Poor access road	59(236)	42(126)	14(28)	11(11)	3.3	3
Vii	Lack of electricity	43(172)	47(141)	23(46)	13(13)	3.1	6
Viii	Increased in activities of Banditry	31(124)	39(117)	24(48)	26(26)	2.6	8

Source: Field Survey, 2024, Weighted mean ≥ 2.5 = Accepted

Table 4: HYPOTHESIS

There is no significant effect of fuel subsidy removal on livelihood of rural households in Southern Senatorial zone

Statement	N	Df	Z _{Cal}	Z-Critical	Remark
Livelihood	120	119	101.89	24.01	<i>Reject</i>

The chi-square calculated is at 101.89

Degree of freedom (R-1)(C-1) (4-1) (4-1) = (3)(3) = 9

Critical value of chi-square = DF at 0.05 level of significance

Tabulated value is 24.01, Therefore Chi-square (X²) calculated > tabulated

The above indicates that the chi-square calculated is greater than the tabulated value. It therefore means that the hypothesis, which states that there is no significant effect of fuel subsidy removal on the livelihood of rural households in the Southern Zone of Benue state, is rejected. Alternatively, it means that there is a significant effect of fuel subsidy removal on the livelihood of rural households in the study area.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that farming activities such as crop farming, animal rearing, processing, and wage income were the livelihood activities that rural farmers engaged in more in the study area. It was also concluded that while removing subsidies may accrue long-term benefits, it could constrain the financial resources of already marginalised households. Subsidy removal affected rural households' income, cost of inputs, land cultivability, food, and medication, among

others. Also, it was concluded that rural households are challenged by the high cost of inputs, low level of education, poor access to credit and roads, increased activities of banditry and many more. It was recommended that farmers' cooperatives or village associations can play a significant role in organising themselves to better access credit or loans from financial institutions for their members at a low interest rate. This can help in a sustained livelihood. More so, rural households should diversify their livelihood in areas of non-agriculture so that during off-farming seasons they can derive income from other means for survival. Also, the government can make inputs such as fertilisers, insecticides and herbicides affordable to lessen the impact of subsidy removal on rural farmers in the study area.

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