

THE IMPACT OF **FUEL SUBSIDY REMOVAL**

ON PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

IN NIGERIAN'S FEDERAL
CAPITAL TERRITORY



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This study was conducted by ADIE Forum co-hort with funding support from the National Democratic Institute (NDI) Nigeria as part of its Accelerating Disability Inclusion in Emergencies (ADIE) Forum project in 2024.

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About AIDE Forum

The ADIE Forum is a consortium of leading organizations of persons with disabilities set up to identify the priorities of PWDs and serve as the entity for engaging the government and other stakeholders.

The Forum's advocacy drive and the project's goal align with the objectives of the National Social Protection Policy which aims to 'reduce poverty among the people vulnerable to being poor, empower the poor and people vulnerable to economic shocks, promote social cohesion, equity, and growth inclusiveness; ensure citizens have access to basic social services and infrastructure; and provide social welfare and improve food security and nutrition among others



Executive Summary

Historically, fuel subsidy removal has sparked protests and social unrest due to its immediate impact on the cost of living (Onyeiwu, 2024). For persons with disabilities, who often face barriers to employment, education, and social participation, these disruptions can exacerbate feelings of marginalization and exclusion (WHO, 2020). Moreover, the disproportionate burden of increased fuel prices on low-income individuals and families, including those with disabilities, underscores the importance of targeted social support mechanisms to mitigate adverse effects (World Bank, 2020). The fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria has been a subject of intense debate, with implications spanning economic, social and environmental domains (Naidoo, 2023). Amidst these discussions, the impact on marginalized groups, particularly persons with disabilities, deserves closer examination.

The purpose of the survey is to measure the impact of the removal of fuel subsidy on Persons with Disabilities within the FCT. It provides insights into how the removal of fuel subsidies is impacting the lives and day-to-day activities, of persons with disabilities, their coping and adaption strategy to subsidy removal, and their awareness of and benefit from government interventions targeted at Persons with Disabilities, including any forms of assistance or relief, specific expectations from the government, among other indicators.

The study was conducted using a participatory rapid appraisal that employed mixed methods, which included observation, consultations/ key informant's interviews and in-depth interviews with target groups. The review of relevant literature was also carried out from open sources for the sake of understanding the contextual background of the issues around fuel subsidy removal and living standards as well as the rights and privileges of persons with disability.

Keys Findings

- The findings from the research reveal that higher fuel prices have increased the transportation cost for both individuals and businesses which has resulted in the increased cost of transporting various sectors of the economy, leading to a chain reaction ultimately contributing to inflation. The prices of goods and services have risen, affecting the purchasing power of consumers. Persons with disabilities appear to be worse hit particularly because disability comes with inherent cost and different types of disability also require different needs for goods and services.
- Nigerians at different levels both individuals and businesses are devising several means of survival to cope with the current realities of the fuel subsidy removal. To some individuals, it involves walking on foot to make up the distance. To others, it is to find some other menial jobs as side jobs to their main income stream such as bricklaying, motorbike riding at weekends and off official work hours. For some businesses, it is safer to lay off some staff members in order to reduce the cost burden of running the business. To the Persons with Disabilities, the options are limited both for employment opportunities and for income diversification thus making them more vulnerable to such situations and more negatively affected.
- Since the removal of the fuel subsidy, both the state and Federal governments have made efforts to cushion the effects and these efforts are commendable. However, there have been criticisms around its implementation. Often, the distribution process appears to have limited coordination leading to injuries and sometimes death from overcrowding and stampede. For persons with disability, it is a challenge to access the palliative items in such circumstances., thereby reinforcing the perception that the removal of the fuel subsidy may be too sudden to allow for careful planning and implementation of government interventions targeted at persons with disabilities.
- The research concludes that there is a need for accurate/verifiable data on Persons with Disabilities in the FCT, and other parts of the country to improve documentation and reduce complexity in accountability. It is suggested that all Persons with Disabilities are identified and registered at the Area Councils [and Local Government Area in the States] level similar to generating population census data. Such data should also be disaggregated by age, sex, and type of disabilities to facilitate proper planning and coordination of interventions.
- There is also the need for synergy among the various Ministries, Departments and Agencies of government related to or responsible for the planning and implementation of interventions targeted at Persons with Disabilities for optimization of efforts and to enhance or improve the effectiveness of such interventions.

1.0 Background and Context:

The removal of petroleum subsidies in Nigeria has sparked considerable scholarly inquiry and debate, driven by its profound ramifications for both the economy and the well-being of its citizens. Yakubu et al. (2023) undertook a comprehensive investigation into the effects of subsidy removal on the standard of living amidst the backdrop of escalating poverty rates in Nigeria. By probing the intricate interplay between subsidy elimination and poverty dynamics, their study illuminated the nuanced socio-economic consequences of this policy transition. Through empirical analysis and theoretical frameworks, Yakubu et al. shed light on how subsidy removal exacerbates existing economic vulnerabilities, particularly among marginalized populations, thus underscoring the imperative of holistic policy responses to mitigate adverse impacts.

Similarly, Ozili (2023) noted the broader macroeconomic implications of fuel subsidy removal on the Nigerian economy. Through meticulous examination of economic indicators and stakeholder perspectives, Ozili's research elucidated the complex web of factors influencing and influenced by subsidy elimination. From inflationary pressures to fiscal sustainability concerns, his analysis provided valuable insights into the multifaceted economic ramifications of this policy shift, informing ongoing policy debates and strategic decision-making processes.

From a fiscal perspective, fuel subsidy removal can alleviate pressure on government budgets and create opportunities for investment in critical infrastructure and social services (IMF, 2022). However, the extent to which these investments benefit Persons with Disabilities depends on their inclusion in decision-making processes and the prioritization of inclusive policies (ADB, 2021). Without adequate safeguards and accountability mechanisms, there is a risk that subsidy removal may exacerbate existing inequalities and marginalize vulnerable populations (UN, 2019). In addition to macroeconomic considerations, there is a burgeoning recognition of the need to assess the differential impact of subsidy removal on vulnerable and marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities (Persons with Disabilities). A rapid assessment study conducted by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank in 2020 sought to bridge this gap by directly engaging with the PWD communities to ascertain the localized effects of subsidy elimination on their daily lives, coping mechanisms, and access to essential services. Through participatory research methodologies and community-driven approaches, the study unearthed invaluable insights into the lived experiences of Persons with Disabilities in the wake of subsidy removal, thereby advocating for more inclusive and equity-oriented policy interventions tailored to their specific needs and realities.

While the removal of fuel subsidies may incentivize energy efficiency and investment in renewable energy sources, its implications for individuals with disabilities merit careful consideration (IEA, 2022). Higher fuel prices could discourage the adoption of assistive technologies and accessible transportation options, hindering efforts to promote environmental sustainability and inclusive development (UNDP, 2023). Policymakers must ensure that environmental initiatives incorporate disability-inclusive approaches, recognizing the interdependence of environmental and social justice (UNCRPD, 2006).

Collectively, these scholarly endeavours underscore the multifaceted nature of the fuel subsidy removal issue in Nigeria, transcending mere economic considerations to encompass broader socio-economic and distributive justice imperatives. By interrogating the intersecting dimensions of policy, poverty, and inclusivity, these studies not only contribute to a deeper understanding of subsidy removal's impacts but also underscore the urgency of adopting holistic and inclusive policy frameworks to navigate the complex challenges facing Nigerian society. While subsidy removal presents opportunities for reform and development, it also poses risks of exacerbating inequalities and marginalizing vulnerable populations. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that prioritizes the needs and rights of Persons with Disabilities, ensuring their full participation in decision-making processes and equitable access to the benefits of economic reforms.

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1.1 Objective and Scope of the Exercise:

- The purpose of the survey is to measure the impact of the removal of fuel subsidy on Persons with Disabilities within the FCT. In specific terms, the survey focuses on the following:
- Assessing how the removal of fuel subsidy is impacting the lives and day-to-day activities of Persons with Disabilities
- Assessing How Persons with Disabilities are coping and adapting to subsidy removal,
- To ascertain the level of awareness of persons with disabilities of targeted government interventions, receipt of any form of government assistance or relief, and specific government expectations, among other indicators.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Method of data collection:

The study was conducted using a participatory rapid appraisal that employed mixed methods, which included observation, consultations/ key informant's interviews, and in-depth interviews with target groups. The review of relevant literature was also carried out from open sources for the sake of understanding the contextual background of the issues around fuel subsidy removal and living standards as well as the rights and privileges of Persons with Disabilities.

2.2 Sample size and procedures:

A total of 49 persons were interviewed across the six area councils of the FCT cutting across persons with different types of disabilities (including those with albinism, physical disability, hearing-impaired, visually impaired and intellectual disability). Others interviewed include disability cluster heads, executives of organizations of persons with disabilities, and government officials responsible for developing and implementing interventions targeted at Persons with Disabilities. Respondents were selected through a purposeful sampling technique and based on availability and willingness to be interviewed.

Table 1: Sample size and procedures

S/N	Category of Respondents	Type of Interview	No. of interview
a	CSOs /NGOs	KII	2
b	JONAPWD FCT	KII	1
c	JONAPWD Area Council Representative	KII	6
	Disability Cluster Managers	KII	1
g	Physical Disability Cluster	KII	1
h	Albinism Association of Nigeria	KII	1
l	Persons with Disabilities (Employed)	KII	1
j	Legal Practitioners	KII	2
k	Others	KII	2
2.	Persons with Disabilities (unemployed):		
a	Physical Disability	Mini FGD Men	6
b	Visually Impaired	Mini FGD	3
c	Persons With Albinism	KII	3
	Persons with Hearing Impairment	KII	1
	Government Agencies related to Persons with Disabilities		
a	National Commission for Persons with Disabilities	KII	1
b	Ministry of Education-Special education dept.	KII	1
	TOTAL INTERVIEWS PER STATE	KII	KII=22
		FGD	FGD= 9

2.3 Limitations of the Survey

There are inherent limitations in a rapid assessment exercise of this nature. The breadth of coverage for example is limited especially in this exercise where limited days were available for fieldwork. In this circumstance, the respondents were limited to those who were available and willing to take part in the exercise at the time. Also, the fact that the government programmes intended for cushioning the impact of the subsidy removal was still in progress or unfolding limited the gathering of specific data relating to the success and/or effect of such programmes. However, where there are notable plans and efforts in that direction, such plans were acknowledged.

3.0 Findings

3.1 Fuel subsidy removal and Persons with Disabilities

The impact of fuel subsidy removal on Nigerian citizens is in diverse ways. It has affected the day-to-day life of the citizens. For Persons with Disabilities it appears complex and multidimensional, different types of disabilities present different types of needs. For instance, the subsidy removal has led to a general hike in transportation costs for the general public. In the Federal Capital Territory for example, citizens have found the reintroduction of the City Buses to be helpful as they cover long distances and are priced at a fee slightly lower than regular vehicles and taxis. Some civil servants and other workers have also devised several other means including having to commute together in each other's vehicles at a considerable charge to cover for cost of fuel. Still, others decide to make up the distances by jogging or walking to cover a reasonable part of the journey to their destination.

Some offices also have rescheduled their working hours to reflect 3-4 days physical working days while during the other days of the week, they work remotely all in a bid to cushion the effect of the high cost of transport. However, for physically challenged persons, it presents limited options for mobility or transportation. Often, the scenario around the bus stations is characterized by an intense rush to catch the bus and to secure a seat or seats. Also, a person with physical disability [even with an aid] may find it rather uncomfortable and challenging to want to walk a long distance to shorten the distance to his/her place of work to save cost. For those in a wheelchair, the challenge is a lot more. Often times the buses do not have the facilities to accommodate the wheelchairs, such as adjustable ramps and handrails. The drivers of the buses and vehicles may become impatient to allow the Persons with Disabilities time to sort out the walking aid and get on the bus. There is also a crowd of anxious passengers who may not have enough time to offer the desired help to a Person with Disability. And there is also the extra cost of commuting to cover the caregiver of the Person with Disability where necessary. One of the respondents narrated his experience when he described the situation he

“These days I don't go out with my wheelchair. I remember the day I had to take a taxi to be able to get to the opposite side of the road because I couldn't use the pedestrian bridge with the stairs, and there wasn't any provision for me to go up the bridge with my chair. I paid N400 for a taxi to cross me to the side where I would take another taxi to my destination. Others could easily just get on the stairs and get down on the other side of the road. It hurts really”.

For a person with hearing impairment, or visual impairment who manages to get on the bus, but has no interpreter or hearing aid, he or she may have gone past the bus stop before realizing that he has missed his stop point as these vehicles are not fitted with audio announcement facilities, signage or electronic display for directions. The situation makes transportation unaffordable and inaccessible for Persons with Disabilities and is reflective of a non-inclusive scenario. It is also not in tandem with the National Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act which also mandates that a person with disability has the right to access the physical environment and buildings on an equal basis with others. The law also stipulates a five-year transitional period for modifying public buildings, structures and automobiles to make them accessible and usable for Persons with Disabilities. This, however, has not been the case as most public facilities in Nigeria are still not accessible to Persons with Disabilities, despite the expiration of the moratorium.

With higher fuel prices, transportation costs for both individuals and businesses have risen and have resulted in the increased cost of transporting various sectors of the economy, which has triggered a chain reaction ultimately contributing to inflation. The prices of goods and services have risen, affecting the purchasing power of consumers. Nigeria has seen a consistent rise in the price of food especially. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2024, The Consumer Price Index (CPI) which measures the rate of change in prices of goods and commodities further increased to 33.20 per cent in March Compared to 31.70 per cent in February. Year-on-year, the headline inflation rate was 11.16 per cent higher compared to 22.04 per cent recorded in March 2023. For the period under review, food inflation rose to 40.01 per cent year-on-year in March, 15.56 per cent higher than the 24.45 per cent recorded in March 2023. For the average Nigerian, the current realities present obvious challenges of being able to afford food and other essential commodities. Persons with Disabilities appear to be worse hit as disability comes with inherent costs. A person with albinism for instance would require certain medication for skin care and eye care. As the prices of medication continue to increase, it is becoming increasingly challenging to keep up the medical bills and stay well. According to a respondent in this category,

“Almost all the eye drops I buy have doubled in price and I really don't know how I will manage. I have tried to source for cheaper brands as alternatives but I run the risk of using either substandard brands or fake medicine”. And I need the drugs. I cannot also stop the sun from shining, and as you are aware it has been pretty hot these days. The sunscreen cream as well as my glasses are my most valued companion. Every day I pray that my glasses shouldn't fall or crack for any reason because I don't even want to think of a replacement because even the insurance only covers the frame and not the lens'.

The scenarios above mostly apply to Persons with Disabilities who are employed and have to keep routine schedules daily. There are others who are unemployed and depend on others to care for them both financially and physically. For these group of Persons with Disabilities, the current economic realities present a significant level of challenge(s). The shrinking disposable income of their caregivers also has an impact on the quality of life available to them at this time.

A respondent describes the situation by saying: Anybody who is willing to take care of another person in any way now is a kind person because to feed an extra mouth now is a huge favour. Nothing is cheap, even Paracetamol and vitamin C that we consider to be among the cheapest drugs are now expensive. On my own part, I try not to make unnecessary demands. I am grateful to my sister for whatever she is able to offer me at this time.

The observation is consistent with the findings that the effect of the removal of fuel subsidy often results in immediate spikes in fuel prices, which reverberate throughout the economy and bring about economic, social, environmental and financial impacts (Onyeiwu, 2024). For persons with disabilities, who may rely heavily on transportation services for mobility and access to essential services, such increases can pose significant financial burdens. The findings from the assessment also reflect the results of the International Labour Organisation that the reallocation of government resources from fuel subsidies to other sectors presents both challenges and opportunities for individuals with disabilities. While increased investment in healthcare and education could benefit this demographic, inadequate attention to their specific needs may perpetuate existing disparities (ILO, 2020).

This kind of feeling of vulnerability robs a person of his/her voice to speak with any certainty and can affect the self –worth or esteem, making one feel less of a human with rights. For a Persons with Disability who feels right and strong in the face of these challenges, there is still the realization that your rights as a citizen are not met and the system that governs your space has not made an inclusive decision to accommodate Persons with Disabilities. So rather than feel the same as a citizen with rights and obligations to society, the Persons with Disabilities feel that society does him/her a favour by accommodating and caring for them. These kinds of emotion if not managed, could stimulate the feeling of neglect and isolation leading to negative energy such as aggression and violence towards other members of the society.

3.2 Coping and adaptation strategies to economic realities

Nigerians at different levels both individuals and businesses are devising several means of survival to cope with the current realities of the fuel subsidy removal. To some, it involves walking on foot to make up the distance. To another, it is to find some other menial jobs as side jobs to their main income stream such as bricklaying, motorbike riding at weekends and off official work hours. To the Persons with Disabilities the options are limited both for employment opportunities and for income diversification; and where businesses decide to lay staff off staff as a strategy to reduce cost and burden, Persons with Disabilities may be more vulnerable to such situations. A respondent with physical disability describes how he had to resign from his job due to the high cost of commuting and discomfort in recent times. According to him,



"It was getting too expensive to move around. Although I was not asked to resign, my current input into the job was not satisfactory as I could not cope with coming to work daily which affected my performance/output at the workplace. The reason is that I am paying double for transportation now, but I also know that this is the wrong time to ask for a pay rise. The business outfit itself is struggling. If they continue to run at a marginal profit level as they are now, they may either pack up or lay off staff. So, I decided to take a bow and hope for another job. And I am positive about getting another opportunity".

Another respondent who previously used to sit at the bus stop to ask for arms now contributes to the cleaning of the pedestrian bridge as a way to earn income to support his family since people are also not able or willing to give arms in amounts as much as they used to give. According to him,

'In the past, before the current administration, I receive up to N3,000 to N4000 in a day from generous Nigerians. Now I can hardly get up to N1,000. So, I decided that in addition to the money I receive from passersby, I would also sweep the pedestrian bridge. Anyone who appreciates the fact that I am contributing to the neatness of the bridge will try to reward me. So far, I get an additional N1,500 daily. Even that is not sufficient as I spend N600 daily on transportation to get to the bridge from my house. And every day, I am here from 9:00 am to 6:00 pm. Recently also my wife asked for a divorce. Although she didn't say specifically why she wants to leave, I suspect it is due to the situation of things right now. I can hardly keep up with the family responsibilities. And she is also not employed. So, I cannot fault her.



3.3 Government interventions targeted at persons with Disabilities.

Since the removal of the fuel subsidy, there have been a series of efforts by both the State and Federal governments to cushion the effects. The ICIR reports that the Federal government had in August 2023, approved an N5 billion palliative for the 36 states of the federation and the FCT, which amounts to N185 billion. Of note also is the distribution of free 25kg bags of rice to indigent Nigerians in Lagos by the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) in February 2024. Although these and other efforts are commendable, there have been criticisms around its implementation. Often the distribution is characterized by a rowdy and chaotic atmosphere leading to injuries and sometimes death from overcrowding and stampede. For persons with disability, it is almost impossible to access these items in such circumstances. The situation does not seem to reflect a deliberate design of a plan of action that is inclusive, but rather a progressive realization or an afterthought of what needs to be done. It therefore allows one to imagine that the removal of the fuel subsidy may be too sudden to allow for careful planning and implementation of government interventions targeted at persons with disability. One of the respondents expressed his disappointment when he said:

“You do not expect me to go and endanger my life in the name of getting palliative. Are persons with disabilities beggars or citizens? We do have a disability law, don't we? Is diversity and inclusion considered in such a plan?”

Another respondent also explained his frustration when he said:

“Some people consider giving to the Persons with Disabilities to be an act of charity. Others think it is a religious obligation- to give arms to Persons with Disabilities who are considered to be among the poor and vulnerable so as to obtain God's blessings. Others think that if they don't give, the Persons with Disabilities or the poor and vulnerable will disturb them. Persons with Disabilities are hardly thought of as persons with a right to access goods and services like every other human being, and it seems as though the government is also beginning to think in a similar direction otherwise, why give fish to Persons with Disabilities and not the hook to catch the fish”?

Another respondent also opined that if the government is truly committed to the needs of Persons with Disabilities it could identify specific programmes suitable for the different types of disabilities. According to him,

‘A person with albinism for instance can be given a credit facility to operate a small kiosk without having to queue under the sun for palliative items. A person with hearing impairment may be a good farmer but may not be a good salesperson. But if we continue in this way without a clear plan, persons with Disabilities are bound to face isolation.



It is tempting to think that the challenge with planning interventions targeted at persons with disabilities is the absence of disaggregated and updated information or data gap on the number of Persons with Disabilities in Nigeria. However, data is sometimes available in bits and pieces that can be referenced or useful in planning. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) records in 2019, 1 in 10 households have at least a, while the proportion of the entire population with disabilities is 6%. This amounts to about 11 million people in Nigeria living with disabilities. Also, the Commission for Persons with Disabilities in 2023, [sighting a WHO report in 2023] confirms that there are 35.1 million persons with disabilities in Nigeria. Perhaps one of the major challenges in designing intervention revolves around inadequacy of verifiable data, and poor synergies among the various agencies responsible for the same. It is therefore not out of place to think that the absence or unsatisfactory level of synergy and coordination between the different related agencies rather than the data gap may be a significant factor in the coordination or implementation of interventions and programmes targeted at Persons with Disabilities. The current situation does not seem to portray that such agencies are central to the designs and implementation of programmes. In an Ideal situation, the mandated departments and agencies would be part of any such design and implementation as well as the monitoring and evaluation of programmes targeted at Persons with Disabilities.

4.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings from the assessment suggest that the Persons with Disabilities have been worst hit by the current economic realities resulting from the removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria. The Persons with Disabilities also do not seem to have found alternative ways or coping mechanisms that reflect a best option scenario reason being that the opportunities available to them both in terms of earning capacities and income diversification are limited compared to a person without a disability. Nonetheless, the ongoing or unfolding interventions of cushioning the effect of the subsidy removal do not yet seem to reflect a deliberate design/plan on the inclusive strategies and implementation of any relief measures taken by the government, but rather it is a progressive realization of what needs to be done, giving the impression that the sudden removal of the subsidy did not allow for proper planning and implementation of interventions that are beneficial to Persons with Disabilities.

There is also the challenge of accurate/verifiable data on Persons with Disabilities in the FCT, and other parts of the country making documentation and accountability even more complex. It is suggested that all Persons with Disabilities are identified and registered at the Area Council [and Local Government Area in the States] level similar to generating population census data. Such data should also be disaggregated by age, sex and the type of disabilities to facilitate proper planning and coordination of interventions.

There is also the need to take into account the cost that comes with disability in planning any intervention targeted at Persons with Disabilities to allow for a soft landing in times of humanitarian risk situations as a way of enhancing coping and adaptation strategies for Persons with Disabilities. This may, however, have budget implications or additional/special facilities/amenities in the course of design and implementation such as comprehensive health insurance to facilitate access to mobility and other medical facilities, tax waiver for companies/establishments to encourage the recruitment and employment of Persons with Disabilities, cover cost of training for skills and enterprise development for related agencies [Small and Medium Enterprise Development Agencies for instance], creating priority markets through the Trade and Investment agencies for Persons with Disabilities who have acquired certain skills and can contribute to the production of goods and services, to sell their products and improve/increase their earning capacities.

There is also the need for synergy among the various Ministries, Departments and Agencies of government related or responsible for the planning and implementation of interventions targeted at Persons with Disabilities for optimization of efforts and to enhance or improve the effectiveness of such interventions

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