

# Gendered Communication and Demographic Perspectives on Fuel Subsidy Removal in Nigeria: Lessons for Policy Formulation

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## Abstract

This study examined the gendered communicative implications of fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria using insights from Feminist Economics, Gendered Vulnerability and Adaptive Capacity theories. These frameworks explain why subsidy reforms, though fiscally necessary, produce unequal outcomes because women's unpaid care roles, limited access to resources, and restricted economic mobility heighten their exposure to fuel-price shocks. A qualitative, interpretive mixed-method review design was adopted. The study analysed 35 academic articles, policy reports, NGO publications, and demographic datasets published between 2005 and 2024. Sources were drawn from major scholarly databases and institutional repositories. An intersectional feminist lens guided thematic analysis, while secondary datasets supported demographic profiling and triangulation. Findings show that fuel subsidy removal intensifies household energy burdens and inflationary pressures, disproportionately affecting women, informal workers, and low-income households. Women's limited financial buffers, caregiving responsibilities, and dominance in the informal sector reduce their adaptive capacity and deepen economic strain. Communication analysis reveals that government and media messaging is largely gender-neutral, urban-centred, and inaccessible to many vulnerable groups, limiting understanding and engagement. Demographic data identify female-headed households, rural populations, informal traders, and youth in precarious employment as the most affected. Overall, the study demonstrates that subsidy removal has deeply gendered consequences and highlights the need for gender-responsive policymaking, inclusive communication strategies, and targeted social protection to ensure equitable reform outcomes.

**Keywords:** Adaptive capacity and resilience; Communication and media framing; Feminist economics; Fuel subsidy removal; Gendered vulnerability.

## **Introduction**

The elimination of fuel subsidies is not unique to Nigeria, but it reflects a larger global policy change that is also driven by fiscal constraints, energy market volatility, and international economic governance frameworks. The world witnessed a massive growth in fuel subsidies in the 1970s' oil shocks as governments tried to cushion households and industries against the sudden rise in energy prices (Victor, 2009). However, since the 1980s, most nations have started to reduce or abolish such subsidies due to their increasing fiscal cost, lack of efficiency, retrogressive distributional impacts, and adverse environmental impacts (Coady et al., 2015).

Multilateral organisations like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have actively advocated fuel subsidy reform, claiming that these subsidies benefit the higher-income groups disproportionately and divert state resources to other sectors of the economy, including health, education, and social protection (IMF, 2013; World Bank, 2017). Thus, subsidy elimination or fuel-price deregulation have been implemented in countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, such as Indonesia, India, Egypt, Mexico, Ghana and Iran, accompanied by compensatory policies, such as cash transfers or wider social safety nets, to cushion vulnerable populations (Inchauste & Victor, 2017).

In developed economies, rising fuel prices are typically absorbed by market forces and offset by stronger welfare and transportation infrastructure, rather than through blanket fuel subsidies. Therefore, the Nigerian fuel subsidy reform fits a global trend; however, its social consequences are exacerbated by domestic structural factors, such as fragmented social protection, informality, and feminized economic positions that heighten exposure to fuel price shocks. By the mid-2000s, subsidy payments had increased significantly due to rising domestic consumption and the country's reliance on imported refined petroleum products (Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative - NEITI, 2022). Between 2005 and 2021, Nigeria reportedly spent more than ₦13 trillion on petrol subsidies, undermining fiscal sustainability and diverting funding from critical development sectors (NEITI, 2022).

During multiple fiscal years, subsidy spending outweighed the combined spending on health, education, and infrastructure, which supports the long-term thesis that the subsidy regime was economically distortionary (BudgIT, 2023). The analyses of BudgIT also show that petrol subsidies were retrogressive because the better-off households, which own personal vehicles,

benefitted more than poorer households, which use public transport or buy petroleum in less amount (BudgIT, 2022).

From an international standpoint, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have consistently described fuel subsidies as a major contributor to fiscal imbalance and economic inefficiency in Nigeria. The IMF's Article IV Consultations highlight that subsidy payments exacerbated deficits, weakened the naira, and constrained federal capital expenditure, thereby limiting long-term growth prospects (IMF, 2025). It has also been similarly noted that subsidy payments reinforced inequality by diverting scarce public resources away from productive investments that disproportionately benefit women, children, and low-income communities (World Bank, 2024).

Although it has been a longstanding pattern that fuel subsidies have benefited households in the higher income bracket, a growing body of research based on both international and nation-specific research indicates that the resultant fiscal imbalances have gender-differentiated effects. When the cost of subsidies replaces social investment, women particularly suffer the negative impact of decreased government expenditure on health, education, transport, and social protection (Coady et al., 2015; International Monetary Fund, 2013; Razavi et al., 2012; Uzobo, 2025).

Feminist economists go on to contend that the overrepresentation of women in unpaid care labour and in low-income informal jobs increases the vulnerability of women to the indirect impact of subsidy regimes and their consequent elimination. This manifestation is especially noticeable in the form of higher household energy spending, an extension of care time, and a decrease in access to state services (Elson, 1995; UN Women, 2018).

The long-term gender disparities in income, assets, and credit distributions limit the ability of women to absorb sudden fuel-price shocks, and this increases their exposure to post-reform inflationary pressures (World Bank, 2024). Besides material consequences, the elimination of subsidies re-forms the communicative strategies and information-processing behaviours of women and thus, the way women understand policy announcements, evaluate government credibility and participate in public debates on reform. This creates a gendered policy-interpretation landscape where women, who are often the main budgetary managers in the household, respond to price changes as well as to the perceived validity, understandability, and credibility of reform messaging.

Comparative experience suggests that fuel subsidy reforms usually fail or become a source of social disturbance when the governments fail to communicate the rationales of reforms or do not enjoy the trust of the people. In Indonesia, initial subsidy withdrawal in the 2000s sparked demonstrations because of the lack of effective communication with the population; subsequent reforms (2014-2015) were more widely accepted as the government clearly articulated subsidy withdrawal as a redistribution to social protection and infrastructure, and accompanied by effective communication and cash-transfer programmes (McCulloch et al., 2021). Likewise, in Iran, the 2010 fuel subsidy reform was initially effective due to the presence of transparent communication and universal cash compensation, but further increases in price without the same messaging and trust-building efforts, however, led to nationwide protests in 2019 (McCulloch et al., 2021).

In developed economies, the Yellow Vest movements in France (2018) also demonstrate how fuel-price policy changes can become legitimacy crises when the population feels that the policy is technocratic, exclusionary, or socially unjustified. Fuel-price rises, despite being framed as an environmental tax, were perceived by a significant number of low- and middle-income households, especially women in peripheral and care-intensive jobs, to have no relationship with the realities of everyday economic life, thus sparking long-term opposition (McCulloch et al., 2021). These examples show that transparency, fairness and accountability as perceived by society, rather than the economic rationality of reforms per se, can often define whether subsidy elimination will be socially acceptable or met with violent opposition.

Newspaper framings according to Ojo and Azeez (2024) show that the Nigerian media often communicates subsidy removal through lenses of political contestation, hardship, and elite interests. These narratives influence demographic groups differently, with women frequently appearing in media reports as the most affected, yet least engaged in policy consultations. Understanding this communication dynamic helps explain varying levels of public acceptance and resistance across age, gender, and socio-economic categories. Thus, the combination of fiscal pressures, historical communication failures, and gendered economic vulnerabilities creates a context in which subsidy removal is best understood through a gender-sensitive, communication-focused analytical framework.

## **Theoretical Framework**

To determine the gendered implications of the removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria, it is imperative to combine Feminist Economics, the Gendered Vulnerability Framework, and Adaptive Capacity Theories based on the social resilience literature. Taken together, these theoretical views explain why fiscally justified economic reforms often have unbalanced gender impacts in reality. Feminist economics arose as a critical reaction to the traditional economic theories that significantly overlooked unpaid domestic and care work, which is an area that is mostly filled by women. The most important contributions include the work of Marilyn Waring in 1988 in her book titled *“If Women Counted”* where it is shown that the standard national accounting measures (such as GDP) deliberately do not recognise the contribution of non-market labour by women, making the basic economic contribution of women invisible. Feminist economists argue that the market economy is gendered in nature; it favours paid work, which is usually male-dominated and undermines unpaid care and household labour. The result of this neglect is the economic policies and macroeconomic indicators that do not reflect the full scope of human labour and welfare, especially the costs incurred by women.

The main principles of feminist economics can therefore be summed up as follows: the acknowledgement of the economic significance of unpaid care labour; the critique of the gender-blind economic models; and a call to the policy that would take into consideration the gendered division of labour, time utilisation and resource distribution. According to the famous quote of Diane Elson, to decrease gender inequality by economic and social policy, one should conduct the processes of Recognise, Reduce, and Redistribute unpaid care and domestic labour. Feminist economics can be used to critically analyse the situation in Nigeria with the removal of fuel subsidies: even though the fuel pricing policy can be justified at the macro (fiscal) level, they have disproportionately asymmetric social effects. Women, who are the traditional users of the household energy, cooking and transportation requirements, suffer more negativities due to rise in the cost of fuel and transportation. The economic costs are therefore passed on to their free and underpaid labour, and the traditional macroeconomic models are silent on such expenses.

The Gendered Vulnerability Framework (GVF) is closely connected to feminist economics and is based on the literature on social vulnerability and livelihood analysis. In the vulnerability-resilience scholarship, the concept of vulnerability has been defined by scholars like W. Neil Adger and P. M. Kelly as the ability or inability of individuals or social groups

to react to external stresses, shocks or structural changes. According to GVF, vulnerability is not uniformly distributed; social roles, gender norms, resource access and institutional constraints determine which actors will be more vulnerable to economic or environmental shocks. In case of a shock (removal of fuel subsidies), the shock is moderated by existing differences in access to resources (income, assets, mobility), care demands (household, children, dependents), and bargaining power. This, in practice, entails that women, low-income families, and informal workers are disproportionately affected.

This model can be used to understand why, although fuel subsidy reforms are universal, the social cost is gendered. Increases in transport fares, generator fuel, or cooking fuel are examples that disproportionately impact households headed or supported by women. Similarly, informal traders, most of whom are women, lose their incomes because of increased costs of operation. To put it briefly, the process of subsidy removal can be considered a shock that increases the social vulnerability along gender lines.

The idea of adaptive capacity of the social resilience theory can be helpful to better comprehend how disparate groups react to shocks. Social resilience is the capacity of communities or social groups to take, adjust, or change with the external stress, whether economic, environmental, or political. According to Adger, social resilience can be defined as the capacity of groups or communities to endure external stresses and disturbances. Adaptive capacity is a key concept of the resilience theory that highlights the fact that the capacity to adapt to a change is determined by the availability of resources: financial, social, institutional, mobility, information, and social networks. The limited access to such resources by groups or individuals makes them less adaptable and therefore more vulnerable.

When the adaptive capacity theory is applied to the removal of fuel subsidies, it is implied that women (who tend to have less income, less formal jobs, less access to credit or assets, and who bear the burden of household care) have a lower adaptive capacity than men. As a result, they have much less capacity to absorb or absorb the impact of subsidy withdrawal. Instead of fast recovery, they can experience long-term suffering, decreased well-being, and increased poverty. Through the synthesis of feminist economics, gendered vulnerability and adaptive capacity, an effective, multidimensional approach to the analysis of the social consequences of fuel subsidy elimination in Nigeria is formed as demonstrated below:

- (a) Feminist economics also makes sure that the unpaid labour and caregiving, which are mostly performed by women, are included in the economic life, thus exposing the marginalisation of the traditional measures and policies.
- (b) The Gendered Vulnerability Framework emphasises that economic reforms can never be gender-neutral; the weight of such reforms is disproportionately on already marginalised or vulnerable groups due to structural inequalities in access to resources, social roles and institutional power.
- (c) The theory of adaptive capacity and social resilience is the reason why certain groups, particularly women, informal workers, and households with low incomes, experience more challenges in absorbing shocks, reorganizing livelihood strategies, and rebounding from price increases related to subsidy removal.

Thus, a judgment of subsidy removal has to go beyond macroeconomic variables of fiscal savings, inflation rates, and currency stability to include gendered behavioural reactions, disparate vulnerabilities, family-level coping approaches and equity-driven social safeguarding.

## **Methodology**

This paper adopts a qualitative and interpretive orientation with a mixed-method review design in order to capture both the structural patterns and the meaning-making processes surrounding fuel subsidy reforms. A systematic literature review is justified because the study seeks to synthesize dispersed empirical, policy, and theoretical evidence across economics, gender studies, political communication, and development research, rather than generate primary data. The inclusion of demographic analysis of secondary data is warranted to contextualize these interpretive insights within observable population-level patterns, particularly gendered inequalities in income, labour participation, and care responsibilities that condition exposure to fuel price shocks. Combining interpretive qualitative synthesis with descriptive demographic analysis strengthens analytical depth by linking macro-level structural trends to micro-level social experiences, while remaining consistent with the study's non-positivist and theory-driven objectives.

## **Research Design**

The research is based on the systematic review method, which is an organised way of finding, analyzing, and synthesizing the currently available research on the subject (Gough et al., 2017). The design is appropriate to the exploratory and interpretive character of the research

questions, which seek to integrate various evidences in terms of gender, communication, and demographics. The analysis of secondary data in the form of national surveys and demographic reports contributes to the review. The analysis can be used to put findings into perspective and determine which populations were the most impacted by the reform.

### **Data Sources and Selection Criteria**

The review is based on a range of different types of data, such as academic journal articles, policy reports, grey literature, and demographic databases published in 2005-2024. The beginning date encompasses significant efforts to eliminate fuel subsidies in Nigeria, especially the Occupy Nigeria protests of 2012 and various changes in policy by various governments thereafter.

The sources were located in such scholarly databases as JSTOR, Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar and African Journals Online (AJOL). To capture both scholarly and policy perspective, grey literature by the International Institute of Sustainable Development (IISD), World Bank, UN Women and the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) was also incorporated.

The main search terms were the following: fuel subsidy Nigeria, gender and fuel subsidy, sub subsidy removal and women, communication and policy reform Nigeria, demographic impact of fuel price, and intersectionality Nigeria policy. Inclusion criteria were the following:

- i. Research or articles about Nigeria or involving it as a case in point.
- ii. The sources concerning the gender, communication, or demographic effect of fuel subsidies or economic reforms larger in scale.
- iii. Published peer-reviewed articles, or official and working papers or NGO documents in English.
- iv. This process was done in three steps: Title screening, abstract screening and full-text screening. The final synthesis consisted of 58 sources.

### **Procedural Framework and Procedure.**

An intersectional feminist framework was used to conduct the analysis as indicated in the theoretical framework section. Findings of the literature were categorized and interpreted using thematic analysis in accordance to important themes that align with the research objectives (Crenshaw, 1991).

### **Information Mining and Synthesis.**

A structured evidence matrix was used to ensure systematic, transparent, and replicable extraction of comparable information across diverse studies included in the review. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the literature on fuel subsidy reforms—spanning economics, gender studies, development policy, and political communication—the matrix enabled consistent identification of key analytical dimensions relevant to the study’s objectives. Specifically, documenting author/year and research design allowed assessment of the temporal scope and methodological orientation of existing evidence, while geographical focus facilitated cross-regional comparison beyond a single national context. Narrative synthesis techniques were used in order to merge extracted themes, and thus identify overlapping patterns, differences, and gaps (Popay et al., 2006).

The synthesis process was done as follows to be comprehensive:

- i. Triangulation, the comparison of data of two different types (academic articles and NGO reports).
- ii. Reflexivity, in view of the background of the authors and the social-political background of the studies.
- iii. Iterative coding: This method involved the review of the codes and categories and validation against new information.

**Table: Summary of Reviewed Literature**

S/N	Author(s) & Year	Country/ Region	Title / Focus	Journal / Source	Design/ Method	Key Findings / Contribution
1	IISD & Spaces for Change (2023)	Nigeria	Gender and fossil fuel subsidy reform	IISD	Mixed-method policy analysis	Shows subsidy removal increases costs for women; reveals gender gaps in policy communication.
2	McCulloch, Moerenhout & Yang (2021)	Nigeria	Fuel subsidy reform & social contract	<i>Energy Policy</i>	Survey & political economy	Public attitudes depend on trust & fairness; vulnerable groups (incl. women) resist reforms more.
3	Raifu (2024)	Nigeria	Inflation effects of subsidy removal	<i>Energy Research Letters</i>	Econometric simulation	Fuel subsidy removal sharply increases food & transport inflation affecting low-income households.
4	BudgIT (2022)	Nigeria	Nigeria's fuel subsidy inefficiencies	BudgIT Foundation	Fiscal analysis	Subsidies crowd out health & education; system inefficient and regressive.
5	BudgIT (2023)	Nigeria	Fiscal pressures & subsidy reform	BudgIT Foundation	Public finance review	Reform needed for fiscal stability; vulnerable groups must be cushioned.
6	NEITI (2022)	Nigeria	Oil & gas audit / cost of subsidies	NEITI	Audit review	Over ₦13 trillion spent (2005–2021); highlights corruption and inefficiency.
7	IMF (2025)	Nigeria	Updated Article IV	IMF	Macroeconomic review	Calls for targeted transfers to

			reports			offset hardship after subsidy removal.
8	World Bank (2023)	Nigeria	Development update	World Bank	Economic monitoring	Nigeria must rebalance spending; subsidy removal essential but costly for poor households.
9	World Bank (2024)	Nigeria	Reforming through inflation	World Bank	Poverty & inflation analysis	Fuel-linked inflation worsening poverty; highlights need for social protection.
10	Spaces for Change (2023)	Nigeria	Community impacts on women	S4C	Qualitative field reports	Women face heavier energy burdens, time poverty & reduced income.
11	Kebetkache Women Centre (2023)	Nigeria	Women's testimonies	KWC	Focus groups & testimonies	Women report lower purchasing power, longer market hours, poor policy communication.
12	WFP (2023)	Nigeria	Food security impacts	WFP	Rapid assessment	Fuel price increases drive food inflation; worsens vulnerability for women-headed households.
13	Ojo & Azeez (2024)	Nigeria	Newspaper framing (2023)	<i>Journal of Media &amp; Social Studies</i>	Content analysis	Media emphasises hardship & politics; limited gender framing.
14	Okon & Effiong (2023)	Nigeria	The Guardian vs Punch reporting	ILMA Journal	Comparative analysis	2012 vs 2023 reportage shows recurring "public suffering" and

						“government insensitivity” frames.
15	Multidisciplinary JCRR (2025)	Nigeria	Communication strategies & perceptions	ASP Journals	Behavioural change & communication study	Shows weak government messaging & low public trust.
16	Premium Times (2023)	Nigeria	Investigative coverage of subsidy removal	Premium Times	Investigative journalism	Fact-checks reveal gaps in official information.
17	The Punch (2023)	Nigeria	Socioeconomic impacts reporting	Punch Nigeria	News analysis	Highlights hardship and citizens’ lived experiences.
18	The Guardian (2023)	Nigeria	Editorials on subsidy policy	The Guardian Nigeria	Opinion & policy analysis	Focuses on macroeconomic justifications & elite discourse.
19	Reuters (2023)	Nigeria	Fuel subsidy removal impacts	Reuters	International reporting	Shows global framing; confirms economic hardship at household levels.
20	Associated Press (2023)	Nigeria	Transport & subsidy impact	AP News	News reporting	Captures transport sector disruptions.
21	Afrobarometer (2023)	Nigeria	Public opinion on reforms	Afrobarometer	National survey	Citizens sceptical; many oppose subsidy removal citing hardship.
22	Reuters (2024)	Nigeria	WB assessment summary	Reuters	Data-based reporting	Highlights worsening poverty due to fuel-linked inflation.
23	Elson (1999)	Global	Gendered labour markets	<i>World Development</i>	Theory paper	Labour markets shaped by gender norms; unpaid work undervalued.

24	Elson (2000)	Global	Social content of macro policies	<i>Feminist Economics</i>	Conceptual analysis	Shows macro policy ignores unpaid care work.
25	Elson (2017)	Global	Recognize–Reduce–Redistribute	<i>New Labor Forum</i>	Theoretical model	Framework for addressing unpaid care work.
26	Folbre (2018)	Global	Care economy & development	PERI	Review study	Documents global evidence on care burdens.
27	Kelly & Adger (2000)	Global	Vulnerability assessment	Climate Research Unit	Vulnerability theory	Vulnerability varies by assets, access & social roles.
28	Adger (2000)	Global	Social & ecological resilience	<i>Progress in Human Geography</i>	Resilience theory	Explains social capacity to absorb shocks.
29	Adger (2003)	Global	Adaptive capacity	UEA Research Portal	Conceptual chapter	Social groups adapt differently based on resources & power.
30	Samtleben (2022)	Global	Gender & unpaid work	<i>Journal of Comparative Employment Patterns</i>	Empirical analysis	Shows gender inequalities in time & unpaid work.
31	Esquivel (2013)	Global	Care economy & gendered inequality	CARE International	Theoretical review	Unpaid work reinforces structural gender inequality.
32	Jozaei et al. (2022)	Global	Social vulnerability & governance	<i>Global Sustainability</i>	Case-based resilience study	Underscores role of governance in vulnerability.

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**Source: Compiled by author, 2025**

### **Ethical Considerations**

All the studies are based on secondary sources and are based on publicly available data, which is why human subjects are not involved in the study. Nevertheless, there were very strict ethical norms that were observed with regard to the credibility of sources used, clarity in the interpretation of data, and bias. All the sources are also cited correctly, and information in sensitive policy reports was treated with sensitivity concerning its possible limitations and political bias.

### **Limitations**

The primary weakness of the proposed methodology can be explained by the fact that it uses secondary data that might not capture the latest or the most specific features of the fuel subsidy reforms that have been implemented in 2023. Also, demographic information does not always have the specifics to support in-depth intersectional analysis, e.g. the combination of gender, income, rurality, and ethnicity. Moreover, the body of knowledge of gendered communication in Nigeria is still rather limited and diffuse.

### **Results**

This section provides the results of an extensive review of 58 academic and policy-oriented documents with the help of thematic analysis and demographic data. The findings are categorised based on three primary objectives namely, the effect of removing fuel subsidies on gender and associated power relations, how gender influences the structure of communication and information about the reform to the people, and the demographics of the groups that have been impacted most by the subsidy removals.

## **Gendered Socio-Economic Vulnerability to Fuel Subsidy Removal in Nigeria**

The literature consistently shows that the removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria has generated profound socio-economic shocks with clearly gendered dimensions. Evidences demonstrate that women are disproportionately burdened by the reform due to their central roles in household energy management, caregiving, and informal-sector trading. As fuel and kerosene prices rise, women spend a larger share of their income on transportation and household energy, reducing disposable income and increasing financial strain. Their limited access to savings, credit, and formal safety nets further weakens their ability to absorb these shocks, thereby amplifying gendered disparities (IISD & Spaces for Change, 2023; Razavi et al., 2012; Victor, 2009).

This unequal impact is further contextualized by broader political-economy analyses. McCulloch, Moerenhout, and Yang (2021) highlight that public attitudes toward subsidy reform are heavily shaped by perceptions of fairness, trust, and vulnerability. Their findings show that female-headed households and low-income groups exhibit heightened concerns about subsidy withdrawal, reflecting long-standing structural inequalities. The withdrawal of subsidies therefore intersects with and exacerbates existing socio-economic disadvantages, particularly for women whose livelihoods depend on stable transport and energy prices.

The inflationary consequences of the reform deepen this vulnerability. Raifu (2024) finds that fuel subsidy removal triggers sharp increases in food and transport costs—two expenditure categories that disproportionately affect informal workers and female-led households. These inflationary pressures diminish real incomes and reduce the profitability of women’s micro-enterprises, especially in sectors such as petty trading, market sales, and home-based production where women are overrepresented. As a result, the gender gap in economic insecurity widens.

While fiscal analyses from BudgIT (2023) and NEITI (2022) justify subsidy removal on grounds of inefficiency, corruption, and unsustainable public expenditure—with over ₦13 trillion spent between 2005 and 2021—these assessments also imply that the greatest adjustment costs fall on economically fragile populations. The International Monetary Fund (2025) adds that although subsidy withdrawal improves fiscal balance and market efficiency, the absence of strong compensatory mechanisms places significant short-term hardship on vulnerable households. These macroeconomic evaluations reinforce the need for gender-sensitive social protection measures to mitigate reform-related shocks.

Gender-focused field-based evidence provides further insight into how macro-level subsidy reforms translate into everyday lived experiences. Community-based documentation and civil society monitoring reports across several low- and middle-income contexts consistently show that women in low-income urban and peri-urban settings adopt coping strategies such as reducing meal frequency, substituting paid transport with long-distance walking, and reorganising domestic consumption patterns in response to rising fuel and living costs (Spaces for Change, 2023–2024). These adjustments reflect escalating economic stress and deepening time poverty, particularly for women who combine unpaid care work with informal or precarious income-generating activities.

Grassroots testimonies collected by the Kebetkache Women Centre (2023–24) in Nigeria show similar patterns: women traders report collapsing purchasing power, longer market hours due to falling patronage, and persistent difficulty accessing reliable information about government relief programs. These communication gaps further marginalise women, limiting their capacity to make informed economic decisions during periods of transition.

Broader welfare impacts also emerge in food security assessments. World Food Programme (WFP) and UN partner briefs (2023–24) indicate that rising fuel prices amplify food inflation, disproportionately affecting female-headed households and compromising children’s nutrition. Since women typically manage household food provisioning, the burden of adjusting meal size, frequency, or quality falls heavily on them.

The swarm of mini-scale qualitative studies and policy briefs issued by non-governmental organisations in the timeframe between 2023 and 2025 supports the already existing empirical trends and shows that urban informal traders, especially women, are more vulnerable after fuel subsidy reforms. Statistics based on civil society organisations and development agencies reveal that the growing transportation and energy costs have reduced profitability of women in petty trade, food vending, and home-based businesses, thus increasing their reliance on informal credit, rotating savings, and high-interest loans (Spaces for Change, 2023-2024; International Labour Organization, 2024). Similar results can be observed in gender-specific evaluations of UN Women (2023) and the World Bank (2024); these sources indicate that women in informal urban economies are moving more towards lower-return activities, reducing market activity or leaving trading altogether in response to increasing operational costs and liquidity constraints. These livelihood recalibrations have long-term effects of poverty persistence, income insecurity and loss of livelihood resilience.

Together, these qualitative and policy-oriented streams of research define a repeatable trend in different settings: although the abolishment of fuel subsidies can be economically justifiable and even beneficial to the macroeconomic stability in the long term, it creates unequal and highly gendered socio-economic consequences. Women, particularly those in the low-income, informal, or female-headed households, face increased adjustment costs, reduced economic resilience, and increased vulnerability because of their disproportionate position in informal markets, asset buffer, and increased care responsibilities (UN Women, 2023; World Bank, 2024; ILO, 2024). These lessons highlight the urgent need to have gender-sensitive social-protection policies, inclusive communication policies that promote trust, and equity-based policy models that can help to handle the disparate effects of subsidy reform in various demographic units.

### **Communication Patterns and Media Framing of Fuel Subsidy Removal in Nigeria**

The reviewed communication literature reveals notable asymmetries in how information regarding fuel subsidy reforms is framed and communicated to the public. Content-analysis studies show that news coverage of the 2023 subsidy removal often emphasised economic hardship, political controversy, and public resentment, with variations in framing shaped by newspaper audience and editorial orientation (Ojo & Azeez, 2024). These patterns suggest that media narratives frequently highlight tension and governmental insensitivity, a theme also reflected in comparative analyses of reportage from 2012 and 2023, where frames such as “elite capture” and “public suffering” dominated the discourse (Okon & Effiong, 2023).

Further examination of communication dynamics across major outlets demonstrates that news framing is far from uniform. A study by Elegbe and Adeyemo (2024) comparing *The Guardian* and *The Punch* found that although both outlets covered the policy intensively, their emphasis differed substantially: *The Punch* foregrounded grassroots voices and everyday struggles, while *The Guardian* prioritised policy explanations, elite commentary, and macro-economic interpretations (Elegbe & Adeyemo, 2024). This divergence indicates that rural, low-income, and gender-marginalised groups—especially women—are not consistently represented in dominant narratives.

A broader synthesis of multiple content-analysis studies reinforces these concerns. A Research Gate meta-analysis shows that mainstream media treatment of subsidy reforms frequently centres on governance failures, economic pressures, and public outrage, while gendered perspectives remain underrepresented in national coverage (Research Gate

Compendium, 2024–25). The limited visibility of women’s voices is especially concerning given that women often face the harshest livelihood disruptions following subsidy removal.

Investigative reporting by Premium Times further highlights gaps between official government narratives and realities experienced by ordinary citizens. Their fact-checking and timeline analyses reveal inconsistencies in government communication, including delays, ambiguities, and conflicting statements that contributed to public confusion and mistrust (Premium Times Analyses, 2023). Such weak communication structures can disproportionately disadvantage women, who may have fewer formal information channels and rely more heavily on accurate, community-relevant messaging.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that communication concerning fuel subsidy reform is frequently top-down, elite-centred, and insufficiently responsive to gendered vulnerabilities. While the media provides extensive coverage, its framing patterns often fail to capture the lived experiences of women and other marginalised groups, reinforcing long-standing inequalities in policy communication.

### **Key Observations:**

- a. **Gendered Impact:** Women, particularly in rural regions, low-income families and the informal sector, have a greater impact when it comes to the loss of fuel subsidies in the case of women. Numerous works emphasize that the role of women in the process of housekeeping and petty trading makes them more susceptible to the growing fuel prices.
- b. **Communication Strategies:** majority of the studies indicate that the governmental communication strategies have remained gender-neutral and, most of the times, have not been suited to the needs of women and marginalised groups. Effective communication is lacking that considers gender and results in ineffective interactions and comprehension particularly among the rural women.

### **Cross-Cutting Patterns**

There are a number of patterns that arise out of the synthesis. First, academic discussion and administration regimes do not ever consider the gendered and demographic implications of subsidy withdrawal. Second, low citizen participation in reforms, mistrust and misunderstandings have occurred due to the lack of gender sensitive communication strategies. Lastly, although the arguments supporting subsidy abolition are mostly economic in nature, the social and demographic impacts are frequently not well-supported through policy debate, as in the forms of targeted cash transfer or inclusion dialogue.

In general, the findings indicate the unfair and gendered taxonomical load of the fuel subsidies removal in Nigeria. Systemic inequality, poor communication and lack of social protection are further challenges to women, especially poor, rural and informal women. These results highlight the impending necessity of gender mainstreaming and inclusion in policy communication in the next reform.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings of this study on gendered communication and the demographic implications of fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria align closely with existing national and global literature, which shows that energy pricing reforms tend to have uneven social and gendered effects. Evidence from IISD & Spaces for Change (2023) confirms that women, especially those responsible for household energy management and informal-sector livelihoods, experience the most severe consequences of rising fuel costs. This mirrors broader global patterns documented by feminist economic scholars who argue that labour markets and household responsibilities are structured in ways that systematically expose women to higher economic vulnerability (Elson, 1999; Esquivel, 2013; Samtleben, 2022).

Similarly, the heightened economic pressure faced by low-income households in Nigeria is consistent with theoretical work on vulnerability and adaptive capacity, which shows that groups with fewer assets, weaker social protection and limited mobility bear the harshest consequences during economic shocks (Kelly & Adger, 2000; Adger, 2000; Adger, 2003). This framework helps explain why, as Raifu (2024) finds, fuel-price increases generate disproportionate inflationary effects on food and transportation—two sectors central to women’s economic survival, especially among informal traders and female-headed households.

Nigeria’s fiscal context further reinforces this dynamic. BudgIT (2022, 2023) and NEITI (2022) document the inefficiencies and corruption that characterised the subsidy regime, noting that its removal was economically necessary. However, these institutions also acknowledge that the costs of transitioning away from subsidies fall disproportionately on vulnerable groups. IMF Article IV reports (2023, 2024, 2025) echo this assessment, emphasizing that while subsidy withdrawal improves macroeconomic balance, it places immediate hardship on poor households unless accompanied by targeted compensatory measures. These macro-level arguments highlight the conflict between fiscal stability and social equity, which is the problem that is at the center of the gendered implications that were

discovered in this study. Communication and media framing patterns are parallel to the rest of the literature. Ojo and Azeez (2024), Okon and Effiong (2023), and the Research Gate meta-analysis (2024-25) studies show that mainstream newspaper reporting on subsidy removal is dominated by foregrounding the economic hardship, governance issues, and political confrontation, and the voices of women are limited or marginalized. This validates the lack of communication that was identified in the present study, where gender-specific issues were not properly integrated into societal messages about the reform. Additional findings in the *Multidisciplinary Journal of Current Research and Review* (2025) also state that government communication efforts often lack trust building, which leads to a lack of behavioural change and increased levels of scepticism. *Premium Times* (2023), *The Punch* (2023), and *The Guardian* (2023) consolidate these communication issues, all of which report inconsistencies, disjointed messages, and lack of community interaction during the reform process.

On the grassroots, *Spaces for Change* (2023), *Kebetkache Women Centre* (2023), and the *World Food Programme* (2023) findings are consistent with the results of this research on gendered vulnerabilities. These sources show that women in low-income communities have more time poverty, less purchasing power, and food insecurity is rising due to the elimination of subsidies. The experiences of those who are impacted show how an increase in the cost of fuel leads to a series of events, such as the increase of market hours, diminished availability of fundamental products, and increased burden to household food provisioning. These gendered implications reflect the larger theoretical insight that unpaid care labor, household provisioning, and informal labour (which is disproportionately borne by women) exacerbates the impact of energy price shocks (Elson, 2017; Folbre, 2018). Where Nigeria differs from many global contexts is in the degree of dependence on petrol for both household and economic activities, limited diversification of energy sources, and the structural weakness of social protection systems. *World Bank* (2024) and *Reuters* (2024) note that fuel-linked inflation sharply worsened poverty following the reform, underscoring the limited buffers available to Nigerian households. Furthermore, *Afrobarometer* (2023) shows that most citizens—particularly vulnerable groups—oppose subsidy removal due to the immediate hardship it creates, highlighting a public perception landscape shaped by distrust and economic Precarity rather than long-term fiscal considerations.

Another distinguishing feature is the intensity of civic response. While international literature on resilience often describes institutional or community-based adaptation (Jozaei et al.,

2022), Nigeria's response has been marked by strong grassroots mobilization, including extensive media critique (Premium Times, 2023), civil society resistance, and gender-informed activism at local levels (Spaces for Change, 2023; Kebetkache WDC, 2023). This reflects a political environment in which civil society plays a more assertive role in contesting economic reforms—particularly those that threaten women's livelihoods.

In summary, while the Nigerian experience reflects global theoretical patterns of gendered vulnerability, social inequality, and communication gaps during subsidy reforms, its unique economic dependence on petrol, limited social protection infrastructure, and politically active civil society shape a distinct national trajectory. These findings emphasize that policy design and communication strategies must be grounded in the specific gendered, socioeconomic, and political realities of Nigeria, even as they remain informed by global insights into vulnerability, resilience, and feminist economic analysis.

### **Implications of the Findings**

The findings of this study have significant implications for fuel subsidy reform, gender-responsive policymaking, public communication, and broader socioeconomic governance in Nigeria. First, the results underscore that fuel subsidy removal disproportionately affects women, especially those in low-income, rural, and informal-sector settings. Evidence from IISD & Spaces for Change (2023) and community-level reports shows that women—who are primarily responsible for household energy management, food provisioning, and caregiving—face sharper increases in transport and energy expenses. This reinforces the need for gender-sensitive policies, as reforms that ignore gendered labour roles risk deepening pre-existing inequalities and undermining women's economic empowerment.

Second, the study highlights a critical communication gap. Analyses of media framing (Ojo & Azeez, 2024; Okon & Effiong, 2023; Research Gate 2024–25) show that most government messaging around subsidy removal was delivered through elite, urban, and gender-neutral communication channels. These strategies failed to reach or meaningfully engage women and other vulnerable groups, many of whom rely on community networks rather than formal newspapers or digital media. Weak communication not only widens the information gap but also reduces public trust, fuels misunderstanding, and marginalises those most affected. Inclusive, accessible, and gender-responsive communication is therefore essential to the legitimacy and effectiveness of subsidy reforms.

Third, the demographic analysis shows that certain population groups—particularly rural households, informal workers, female-headed households, and low-income earners—experience compounded vulnerabilities. Findings from Raifu (2024), WFP (2023), and the World Bank (2024) reveal that inflationary effects triggered by subsidy removal disproportionately affect these groups through rising food, transport, and market prices. Without targeted mitigation measures, reform outcomes risk reproducing poverty cycles and widening socioeconomic disparities, especially for women who already carry a disproportionate share of unpaid and informal labour.

Fourth, the findings reveal a serious deficit in gender-disaggregated and socioeconomic data. The absence of reliable evidence on how women and marginalised populations specifically absorb fuel price shocks limits the government’s ability to design effective safety nets or evaluate unintended consequences. This aligns with global vulnerability frameworks (Elson, 1999; Kelly & Adger, 2000) that emphasise the danger of policy blind spots when gender and social roles are not adequately captured in data systems. Strengthening national data collection to include gender, income group, and geographic vulnerabilities is therefore essential for evidence-based policymaking.

Economically, the results affirm that subsidy removal generates short-term inflationary shocks that disproportionately burden women and low-income households, as highlighted by IMF (2023–2025) and BudgIT (2022, 2023). Women—who spend a larger share of income on essential goods—experience more severe reductions in purchasing power, threatening household welfare and long-term livelihood stability. Rising transport and energy costs increase dependency on unstable informal work and deepen financial precarity for already vulnerable households.

Politically, the findings suggest that excluding women and marginalised groups from policy dialogue heightens the risk of social discontent and civic resistance. Evidence of media critique (Premium Times, 2023) and grassroots testimonies (Kebetkache Women Centre, 2023) indicate that communities perceive reform processes as top-down and insensitive to household realities. Such perceptions can erode trust in government institutions, fuel public frustration, and potentially trigger unrest. Effective policy reform must therefore prioritise representation, consultation, and participatory governance.

Overall, the Nigerian context demonstrates that subsidy reform cannot be treated solely as an economic adjustment. Its success depends on addressing gendered vulnerabilities,

strengthening communication, improving demographic targeting, and integrating robust social protection mechanisms. Policies must combine short-term cushioning with long-term strategies that promote energy diversification, poverty reduction, and inclusive governance. In the absence of these measures, subsidy reforms risk entrenching inequality and undermining both the economic and social stability they are intended to support.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study show that fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria produces uneven social and economic consequences, with women and low-income groups bearing the greatest burden. Women's roles as household energy managers, food providers, caregivers, and informal-sector traders expose them more directly to fuel-related inflation, leading to increased household expenditure, reduced business profitability, and greater time poverty. These impacts are further intensified by limited access to credit, weak social protection systems, and structural gender inequalities. The study also found that communication around the subsidy reform was largely gender-neutral, urban-centred, and insufficiently responsive to the information needs of rural and marginalised women. Media framing tended to emphasize economic hardship and political narratives rather than the lived realities of affected groups, limiting the ability of women and vulnerable populations to fully understand or engage with the reforms. The demographic analysis emphasises that female-headed households, rural communities, and informal workers experience compounded vulnerabilities, suggesting that the success of subsidy reforms depends not only on fiscal considerations but also on how reforms account for differentiated social experiences.

## **Recommendations**

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Fuel subsidy reforms be designed and implemented with explicit gender-responsive considerations by the Federal Government of Nigeria, particularly through the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning, and the Ministry of Women Affairs, in collaboration with state governments. These institutions should recognise that women disproportionately shoulder the consequences of subsidy withdrawal and therefore require targeted support to mitigate the resulting financial and social pressures. Policy instruments such as gender-sensitive cash transfers, targeted support for women in informal work, and expanded access to social protection schemes should be operationalised through existing platforms such as the National Social Safety Nets

- Coordinating Office to stabilize household welfare and prevent the deepening of gender inequalities.
- ii. Secondly, communication strategies around subsidy reforms should be led by the Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation, working jointly with state and local governments, civil society organisations, and community-based institutions. Government messaging should move beyond formal mass media to actively engage women’s associations, market unions, religious and traditional leaders, and other informal communication networks. The use of local languages, culturally appropriate formats, and trusted interpersonal channels will help bridge existing information gaps and ensure that women and other marginalised populations understand the rationale for reforms, available mitigation measures, and potential long-term benefits.
  - iii. Finally, strengthening demographic and gender-disaggregated data systems should be the responsibility of the National Bureau of Statistics, in partnership with sectoral ministries, state statistical agencies, and development partners such as UN Women and the World Bank. Improving the routine collection and use of gender-disaggregated data is essential for identifying the households and occupational groups most affected by subsidy reforms, designing precise and equitable interventions, and enabling systematic evaluation of policy impacts over time. Without such institutionalised data capacity, subsidy reform efforts risk remaining fiscally sound but socially uneven.

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