

AN APPRAISAL OF DEREGULATION AND LIBERALIZATION OF NIGERIA'S DOWNSTREAM OIL SECTOR: ITS IMPACT ON THE MASSES AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria sovereign nation, more than anything else, the greatest obstacle to the nascent democracy is the neglect of abundant human and material resources for nation building, as evidenced by the current spate of armed robbery attacks and political assassination. Nigeria's abundant wealth is sufficient to make it one of the effective states in the African continent. However, the excess resources, like the sugar in the blood stream of a diabetic patient, serve no positive purpose for the teeming population. Poverty and hunger are the principal characters of the Nigerian State with attenuated crises affecting the socio-economic well – being of the people. While Nigeria ranks among the highest producers of crude oil in the world market, it also leads in the classification of countries in distress. Corruption and mismanagement of the abundant resources, coupled with the insatiable appetite of the leaders to pillage the country of its potentials for rapid political and economic growth. We are in the days of debate. The somehow chaotic Nigerian political terrain has thrown up several challenges, has thrown up issues, many issues that are subjects of debate. Since the emergence of the nascent democracy in 1999, this nation has witnessed several deregulations of oil down stream for which few Nigerians has benefited from it and majority of others are languishing in abject poverty. Starting from January 1, 2012, the Federal Government has stopped subsidizing Premium Motor Spirit and jacked up the price from N65 per litre in 2012 to the present price of N591 and N640 in 2023. In some states, retailers dispense it at N670 per litre and there is already, widespread anger and resentment against the policy across the country. Therefore, any break in its chain of availability and price rationality, automatically follows a negative effect on the living standards of the citizens as their economic life shift downwards. An increase in fuel price essentially leads to increase in the cost of transportation of both persons and goods, and the final consumer bears the brunt through the purchasing of domestic food items or necessities. The focus of this paper is to Appraise the Impact of Deregulation and Liberalization of Nigeria's Downstream Oil Sector on the Masses with Developmental process in the 21st Century were brought to the fore while the objectives of the study were well spelt

out. Hypotheses were postulated and the Group Theory was used to explicate the works. Data were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. From the primary sources, the survey method, that is, the use of questionnaire were designed and adopted. Data obtained from this method were analyzed with the simple percentage.. This paper discovered that this malaise was responsible for the failing status of the Nigerian State.

Keywords: Deregulation, Economy, Exorbitant, Government, Landlords, Subsidy.

Introduction

Nigeria is Africa's largest oil producer, exporting about 2.5 million barrels of oil a day, almost entirely from the Niger Delta. It is the United States' fifth largest oil supplier and the proceeds from sales of crude oil made up 80 percent of Nigeria's national revenue and nearly all its foreign currency earnings. Petroleum product is crucial to the Nigerian Economy in two ways; crude oil earns over 90 percent of the nation's foreign revenue; and the processed oil provides the fuel (now in question) that powers the basic infrastructures to wit – transportation and electricity that run both the industry and the homes of Nigerians. Therefore, every aspect of the functioning of the Nigerian economy has a multiplier relationship with petroleum products, be it domestic or global. The Nigerian economy is basically run by petroleum products sourced energy unlike other western countries that supplements this with solar. Petroleum products do not only cover the importance of revenue generation to the Federal Government under which the political structure survives, but unavoidably relevant to the comfort of households (Okoro, 2020).

Basically, petroleum products include processed fuel for automobiles, minimum duty generators, etc; diesel for long and heavy trucks engine oil, gas and kerosene for domestic cooking. Every home in Nigeria in one way or the other uses either of the above or engages the manufacturing companies in the production of their goods. The cost of construction and award of contracts is dependent on the prevailing market price of petroleum products used in moving their heavy duty equipments, market prices of imported goods is determined by the cost of import duty and cost of flight etc. Also, jobs are created and employments effected as a result of market expansion subject to the nature of petroleum products in the economy. Services demanded and rendered have a direct effect on the availability of petroleum products in an economy, because its determined wage rate is subject to some other factors or expected expenses in the process of rendering such services (Okoro, 2020).

The significance of petroleum products in the economy is by no means exhaustive. Therefore, any break in its chain of availability and price rationality, automatically follows a negative effect on the living standards of the citizens as their economic life shift downwards. An increase in fuel price essentially leads to increase in the cost of transportation of both persons and goods, and the final consumer bears the brunt through the purchasing of domestic food items or necessities. These, Nigerians have suffered prior to the democratic governance from 1999 to date. Having perceived this downward mobility in the living standard of Nigerians, on the 23rd May, 1999 at an inter-denominational Church service to mark the beginning of the former President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's inauguration in Abuja, the President renewed his campaign pledge to alleviate the sufferings of Nigerians. He continued that no area of

national life would be neglected most especially electricity supply, water availability, fuel scarcity will disappear, roads that are impassable will be rehabilitated, corruption will be tackled (Adebiyi and Ojibor 2019). The above promises of the President was based on the live terrorizing factors inherited from the long military leaderships of President Babangida, late General Sanni Abacha and General Abdusalami Abubakar, resulting from acute fuel scarcity.

Problems

Always not moved by the impact of the fuel pump price increases on the living standard of the poor Nigerians, on Tuesday, 5th October, 2004, the former President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo in his address at the 34th Annual Accountants Conference declared that, the resistance to economic reforms in Nigeria following the recent fuel increase, would not move his government. The beauty of the new ideas of economic reform is that they come with teething challenges, which are surmountable. From the onset, we did not expect the process of adaptation to be smooth sailing. However, irrespective of the pockets of resistance and inevitable occasional operational hiccups, the government shall not waver (Ajani, 2017). Unmindful of time factor in policy changes, the Federal Government's termination of the Turn Around Maintenance contracts for the repair or servicing of the Port-Harcourt, Kaduna and Warri refineries, gave the picture that the country will survive only at the mercy of imported and constant increases in the prices of fuel. In 2004 also, the price of fuel was increased following the economic liberalization policy of the oil downstream sector, and the final and complete withdrawal of any fuel subsidy by the government to the Nigerian consumer. More hardship and hunger is inflicted on the masses, but the Federal Government will not waver for the time has come. According to Agbroko (2018), if previous increases in fuel pump price have reached the limits of what Nigerian workers and working families could endure, then the latest increase infact amounts to a moral equivalent of a death sentence inflicted on the people through an insensitive pricing policy.

However, government paid about ₦1.7billion (USD 4,461,942.23) on fuel subsidy yearly, a colossal financial waste of the country's capital. The subsidy programme initial aim was to ensure the prices of fuel in Nigeria are cheap for everyone to buying as the nation's four's refineries with full capability of 445,000 barrels per day are the total cumulative production capacity of the four (4) refineries which have not been functioning correctly due to many years of neglect, annihilation by vandals due to endless agitations for resources management by the militants in the Niger Delta areas owing to environmental degradation occasioned by oil exploration undertakings and the dearth of substructure that is proportionate with the worth of oil revenues made from the region (Olujobi, 2021). Also, over-reliance on imported petrol and failure to renovate the existing refineries to forestall disruption in fuel supply (Uhunmwuango and Aibieyi, 2017). Moreover, the difference in prices of refined petroleum commodities in the country inspires the transfer of fuel commodities to other nations, thus boosting corruption in the industry. It is undeniable that the government cannot persist in funding petroleum commodities, which is unjustifiable due to bribery and ineptness in the magnitude, distribution, and estimation and trading of fuel products in the country. The yearly financial plan for a subsidy of fuel should be utilized to improve another critical area, for instance, the power industry, to enhance the country's economy. Upgrading the current refineries could have ensured vigorous competition and enhanced the country's availability

and cost-effectiveness. However, these have occasioned corruption in the industry (Uhunmwuango and Aibieyi, 2017).

With the strong determination to correct the removal of fuel subsidy some years ago, while presenting the year's appropriation bill to the National Assembly in 1999, the President affirmed that his administration "would not participate in the determination of petroleum products prices" (Wabara, 2019). He stressed that in the past, pump prices reviews have not achieved any purpose other than making some people richer. But the then Chief Economic Adviser to the President Obasanjo, Chief Philip Asiodu once pointed out that the present administration cannot run away from an upward price adjustments. It will be a mere question of realism to contextualise price regimes because of the unique national variables that affect pricing. Hence, the President on the 23rd of August, 1999 had a meeting with members of the Senate House Committee on Petroleum Resources at the Government House, Abuja; where he pledged to turn around the fortunes of the beleaguered Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and make it solvent within three years, i.e. on or before 2003 (Nwankpa, 2020). He was mindful of the breakdown of the refineries in Nigeria and all their associational problems. Unfortunately, the intermittent scarcities in fuel availability and the serial increases in fuel prices have extended up to 2023, which the volcano of reactions is now championed by the Nigeria Labour Congress (Okoro, 2020).

Consequently, this paper would therefore seek to provide answers to the following questions:

1. Why is Government not thinking of fixing the four refineries?
2. Did Government actually carry out turn-around maintenance of refineries?
3. Is the Government sensitive to the plight of the masses?

Objectives

The specific objectives are:

1. To examine the relationship between government and not thinking of fixing the four refineries in the country.
2. To ascertain the nexus between Government and actually carrying out turn-around maintenance of refineries.
3. To find out if Government is insensitive to the plight of the masses.

Hypotheses

In order to achieve these objectives, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

1. There is no significant relationship between government and not thinking of fixing the four refineries in the country.
2. There is no significant relationship between Government and actually carrying out turn-around maintenance of Refineries.
3. There is no significant relationship between Government and its insensitive to the plight of the masses.

Theoretical Exposition

The particular theory that can sufficiently act as a guide for the analysis of issues in this paper is Marxist or classical theory. The classical or formal model of bureaucracy applies essentially

to Western Europe countries, which are the prototypes for developed or modernized political systems.

Karl Marx was in many respects the most influential political theorist of the 19th century and his expositions are still very relevant. He sought to combine factual analysis and political prescription in a thorough survey of the modern economic system. Arguing that “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of the class struggles” and that liberal governments and ideology were merely agents of the exploiting owners of property. Marx advocated the abolition of private property and predicted the demise of capitalization after a sense of receiving crises. The abolition of property and therefore of class exploitation would make possible a situation in which individual will contribute according to their abilities and take according to their needs. The state, following a transitional period in which the working class would rule, would eventually wither away. Marx’s view of human history is both profoundly pessimistic and profoundly optimistic. Its pessimism has in his belief that history reflects the oppression of the many by a small minority, who thereby secure economic power. First, Marx believed that technical innovations bring about new ways of meeting human needs and make it increasingly possible for people to satisfy their deepest wants and to develop and perfect their individual capacities. Second, Marx claimed to have proved that the long history of oppression would soon end when the masses rise up and usher in a revolution that will create a classless utopian society (Wodu, 2021).

Pluralist Theory

Classical pluralism has the belief that politics and policy decision making is located mostly in the governmental framework, but many on governmental groups are using their resources to exert influence. The central question for classical pluralism is how power is distributed in western democracies. Groups of individuals try to minimize their interests. Lines of conflict are multiple and shifting. There may be inequalities but they tend to be distributed and evened out. Any change under this view will be slow and incremental as groups have different interest and may act as “veto groups” to destroy legislation that they do not agree with. The existence of diverse and competing interests is the basis for a democratic equilibrium and is crucial for obtaining of goals by individuals. Pluralists stress civil rights, such as freedom of expression and organization and an electoral system with at least two parties. On the other hand, since the participants in this process constitute only a tiny fraction of the populace, the public acts mainly as by-standers. This is not necessarily undesirable: political issues require continuous and expert attention which the average citizens do not have. The important theorists of pluralism are Robert Dahl and Martins Lipset (Robert Dye, 2019).

Literature Exposition

Public Policy

Public policy according to Wayne Parsons (2019:15) is concerned with how issues and problems come to be defined and constructed and how they are placed on political and policy agenda. Public policy is also the study of how, when and to what effect governments pursue particular course of action and inaction. Just the way Robert Dye (2019) put it, public policy is what governments do, why they do it and what difference it makes. Therefore, the economic reforms on the downstream oil sector by the Federal Government here justify a

fundamental public policy. But the issue or problems attached to this paper are – Is the increases in fuel pump prices by the Federal Government over time actually necessary? The time frame of these economic reforms since 1999 ought to have been considered. The fact that Nigerians are managing to recuperate from long years of military political and economic retrogressions arising from corruption, required some consideration for improved living standard. One question which is eager for immediate answer is: has the Federal Government derailed in considering what appropriate timing its economic policy reforms are suitable for public acceptance? The economic reform policies of the Federal Government since 1999 have always attracted public resistance, the same way the aborted Local Government proposed reforms (political) delayed election into Local Government Councils as at when due. Timing seems to be a major problem of the former administration looking at the way and form its programmes and policies are packaged. Citing the opinion of Professor Afolabi in Ezigbo, (2017), the periodic disruptions to social and economic life of the people through the cutting back on the subsidies government was giving to fuel consumption thereby leading to price increases is attributed to lack of the need for detailed planning. Oghenero observed that:

“the latest increase in pump price of petroleum products is badly timed. The President should have known that Nigerian people are angry, frustrated and confused because the poverty level has increased as a result of previous and recent increase in price of fuel” (Oghenero, 2018).

Fusing the contributions of Chief Ebri Clement (2022:8) to the above in his publication titled “Nigerians are suffering”, predicted tougher times for the people of Nigeria arising essentially from frequent hikes in prices of petroleum products. Answering the question of how long the Nigerian masses will continue to prolong in the hardship, he further posited that pains and agony of the poor citizens have been based on patience and tolerance with the exercise of the leadership. The so called N30,000.00 salary increase have been made so much nonsense of and that is even when the government manage to pay it.

The Impact and Economics of Petroleum Pricing on the People

Each time the issue of Nigeria’s debt problem comes into the front burner of economic issues, internal price adjustments have always been the argument of the multilateral institution International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, Paris and London Clubs. In all cases of debt rescheduling, one of the conditions given to the Federal Government by these creditors above is the need to reduce the level of subsidy in the economy to cut down on wastage (their target is petroleum products). According to Alhaji Abubakar Alhaji – then Finance Minister under General Ibrahim Babangida’s administration disclosed that the Federal Government could not admit in public that external hands of the IMF and World Bank were manipulating the domestic prices. The desire of the Federal Government to reschedule Nigeria’s debt is the driving force behind price adjustments, leaving the government with no alternative than to swallow pills of petroleum price adjustments just as the Babangida’s administration did in 1988 that almost crippled the nation (Omoh, 2023). This is still as valid today as it was in 1988.

On the 23rd of September, 2004, after the National Executive Council meeting in Abuja, the new pump prices of petroleum products were increased from N42 to N53 per litre by the

President being the 7th increase in a series of five years (Time Series of Record) into democratic governance in Nigeria after sixteen (16) years of military dictatorships. Prior to September, 23 2004, Nigerians had cried for poverty eradication to reduce suffering, supporting a better Nigeria through loyalty and obedience to law, managing the economic difficulties arising in domestic petroleum products by the PDP led Federal Government.

Methodology

This paper adopted a descriptive survey method. The survey was based on selected Geopolitical Zones in Nigeria political system. The States are Abia (South East), Anambra (South East), Bauchi (North East), Borno (North East), Bayelsa (South South), Edo (South South), Kano (North West and Katsina (North West). The scope of the study is therefore restricted to years 2012 to 2022. The population of the study consist of 250 base on two categories (Senior and Junior) members of staff Public Service (See Table One Below). Out of this number, one hundred and seventy of them met our criteria and therefore form our sample size as can be seen in table one below:

TABLE 1: POPULATION OF STUDY

S/No	State/Geo-political Zone	Category of Respondents	No. of Returned Questionnaires	No. of Not Returned/Invalid Questionnaires	Total No. of Sampled Respondents
1.	Abia (South East) Ministry of Works	Senior Staff	16	6	31
		Junior Staff	5	4	
2.	Anambra (South East) Ministry of Health	Senior Staff	17	8	31
		Junior Staff	4	2	
3.	Bauchi (North East) Nigerian Television Authority	Senior Staff	18	7	32
		Junior Staff	4	3	
4.	Borno (North East) Ministry of Agriculture & Natural Development	Senior Staff	15	7	31
		Junior Staff	6	3	
5.	Bayelsa (South South)	Senior Staff	17	6	32
		Junior Staff	5	4	

	Bayelsa State Radio Corporation				
6.	Edo (South South) University of Benin Teaching Hospital	Senior Staff	17	8	31
		Junior Staff	4	2	
7.	Kano (North West) Kano State Ministry of Justice	Senior Staff	18	7	31
		Junior Staff	4	3	
8.	Katsina (North West) State Rural Water Supply & Sanitation Agency	Senior Staff	16	6	31
		Junior Staff	5	4	
TOTAL			170	80	250

Source: Field Survey 2023.

Both Primary and Secondary sources of data were explored in trying to generate data for this study. The specific information required for the study was Appraisal of Deregulation and Liberalization of Nigeria's Downstream Oil Sector: Impact on the Masses and Development Process. The questionnaire formed the main instrument used in generating primary data, while documented information on prints that are relevant to this study, constituted the secondary source of generating data. To compliment the information received through the questionnaire, respondents were also interviewed. As the research is based on attitude and opinions, the statistical tools employed in analyzing responses include, tables and simple percentages. All the one hundred and seventy copies of the questionnaire distributed to the respondents studied were duly completed and returned in a useable form. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for the data analysis.

Data Analysis

Of all the one hundred and seventy respondents, eighty (47%) of them are married; fifty (29%) are single while twenty one (13%) are divorced and the remaining nineteen (11%) are either widow or widowers. Thirty (18%) of them are within the age bracket of 18 – 25, Fifty (29%) are between the age bracket of 26-35; while eighty (47%) are within the age bracket of 36-45 and the remaining forty six years and above are ten (6%).

TABLE 2: Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between government and not thinking of fixing the four refineries in the country.

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	110	65
No	60	35
Total	170	100

Source: Statistical Analysis

Table 2 shows that 110 (65%) of the total respondents agreed that government is not thinking of fixing the four refineries in the country and conversely could be responsible for the lack of poor performance of the refineries and fragrant disregard for rules and regulations.

Therefore, the hypothesis one which states that there is no significant relationship between government and not thinking of fixing the four refineries in the country is accepted.

TABLE 3: Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between Government and actually carrying out turn-around maintenance of Refineries.

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	105	62
No	65	38
Total	170	100

Source: Statistical Analysis

Table 3 shows that 105 (62%) of the respondents agreed that there is correlation between Government policy and actually carrying out turn-around maintenance of the Refineries while 65 (38%) were not satisfied or disagreed.

TABLE 4: Hypothesis 3

There is no significant relationship between Government and its insensitive to the plight of the masses

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	120	71
No	50	29
Total	170	100

Source: Statistical Analysis

Table 4 shows that 120 (71%) of the respondents agreed that Government and its policies are insensitive to the plight of the masses and which will contribute substantially to alleviate the well-being of citizens and give the greatest hope while 50 (29%) disagreed with the opinion.

Therefore, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between Government and it's insensitive to the plight of the masses is accepted.

Findings Based On Hypotheses

Based on the analysis of the hypotheses, all the research hypotheses were positive which implies that

(H_r) 1-3 were accepted.

More so, the study revealed that respondents agreed that there is correlation between Government policies which are insensitive to the plight of the masses for which 120 (71%) respondents agreed that Government and its policies are unfair to the masses while 50 (29%) were not satisfied or disagreed and conversely will impact negatively on people enjoying the dividends of democracy in Nigeria.

Furthermore, this paper has highlighted an Appraisal of Deregulation and Liberalization of Nigeria's Downstream Oil Sector: Impact on the Masses and Development Process and solutions as per the findings in the hypothesis carried out in the research. In a nutshell, there is hardly any industrialized nation of today that never went through this kind of touch economic reforms. To achieve a strong economic base of a country against other countries, these reforms are necessary and good. But the empirical questions taking Nigeria as a case study are: Is the introduction and execution of these economic reforms through increases in price of petroleum products ideal and timely in a process of economic development? Is the total removal of government subsidy on essential economic product like fuel, go same time, period when the domestic refineries are closed of operations? Is there any hope that the evangelism of deregulation, liberalization and privatization of the oil downstream sector will drop the current price of fuel and other petroleum products in another three to five years? How long are the Nigerian people expected to achieve an improved life subject to reduced prices of food items in the market, as a result of government economic policy intervention? Do we access the Federal Government's track record of economic policies on deregulation and market liberalization since 1999-2023 on petroleum products, as ideal and timely?

Conclusion

We have justified the use of Time Dimension in Social Science Research as an approach to the study of the Federal Government policies of Deregulation and Liberalization of Downstream Oil Sectors, economic reforms since inception the present democratic dispensation in 2023. This we have done by briefly looking at the various years in which the pump prices of petroleum products were increased, and the reactions of the Nigeria people against the perceived idea and plans or targets of the governments. We equally discovered the reform tactics of the government by gradually withdrawing subsidies at one time over a sequence periods of time till its final termination. We also discovered the inefficiency of the Federal Government to genuinely repair and maintain the domestic refineries since 1999, until its final decision to hands off any further intentions to rehabilitate them. Increases in fuel prices over time since 1999, is associated with economic or relief packages to civil servants and/or citizens. Therefore, we recommend that all domestic refineries be put in productive capacity so that fuel from NNPC can check the inflated prices of imported fuel to achieve stable and lower price levels for domestic consumption (Adams, 2021).

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