

FUEL SUBSIDY REMOVAL POLICY AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD ENHANCEMENT FOR RURAL WOMEN IN IKOT EKPENE

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Abstract

The study examined the impact of fuel subsidy removal policy and sustainable livelihood enhancement for rural women in Ikot Ekpene, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Survey-based descriptive research with a mixed-method approach of qualitative and quantitative research methods was adopted for the study. The social conflict theory by Karl Marx, which in this context sees fuel subsidy removal, by the dominant group (the government) imposes policies that may negatively impact the subordinate group (rural women) without considering their unique needs and challenges, was adopted as a theoretical framework. Comprehensive research hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to select six (6) rural communities of Amayam, Abiakpo Ikot Obio Nting, Nsiak, Itak Ikot Udo, Ikot Inyang and Ibong Ikot Akan, out of the 47 Communities in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, using a Taro Yamane's method to draw a sample size of 398 rural women from the population of 450,000 as projection of United Nation-World Population Projection of 2024, (UN-WPP, 2024), and used for the study. Findings of the study reveal that the policy of fuel subsidy removal plunged many women into untold hardship and abject poverty in most rural communities in Nigeria, and urgent action is needed to pull citizens in rural communities of the country out of chronic poverty, which have already enveloped them.

Keywords: Fuel Subsidy Removal Policy, Sustainable Livelihood, Rural Women, and Ikot Ekpene.

Introduction

Fuel subsidies, all over the world, have been a significant policy tool used by many governments to reduce the cost of fuel for consumers to promote economic stability. In Nigeria, the government has historically provided fuel subsidies to alleviate the economic burden on citizens, particularly in rural areas, where most women depend on small-scale agriculture and local businesses for their livelihoods. According to Tsaku and YarAdua (2014), fuel subsidy occurs when government assists customers in paying a proportion of the product's current price. The well-known goals of this fuel subsidy include promoting industrial development, wealth redistribution, and increasing domestic product consumption by households. This has led to calls for the saved funds to be channeled to assist the poor and vulnerable in need of humanitarian assistance, (Effiong, 2024).

Evidence-based research from Daniel, Udosoro and Effiong (2024), indicated that

government policies, had in most times, endangers multiplier effects on rural communities, such as limited access to education, employment opportunities and healthcare services, compelling most people, particularly, women to turn to self-help. To this end, Elemi, Akpan and Ntuen (2004) noted that the withdrawal of fuel subsidy lead to a corresponding increase in pump price of petrol. However, in as much as the policy proven worthwhile by weeding-off corruption from petroleum industry to boost our economy, it seriously threatens the livelihoods and welfare of women in most rural communities in Nigeria.

Observations by International Center for Investigative Research [ICIR] (2023) shows that some States Government took palliative measures, such as subsidizing cost of fertilizers, distribution of improved crops and seedlings, conditional cash transfer, distribution of food stuffs, to cushion the policy's effects. In spite of the government's effort to provide palliatives, the impact of fuel subsidy removal remains a significant challenge to women, who rely on affordable transportation to sustain their livelihoods from small scale agricultural farms produce in most rural communities in Nigeria. As further observed in James (2024), the removal of fuel subsidies policy in 2023, had posed profound effects on the cost of transportation, agricultural inputs, economic well-being of the women-headed rural households.

Worst still, studies in recent times have not assess the overall impact of the fuel subsidy removal policy on the rural poor in the country. Therefore, it is against this backdrop that this study aims to investigate the extent to which the policy influences the livelihoods of rural women in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State.

Literature Review

Impacts of Fuel Subsidy Removal Policy in Rural Communities

Transportation and Market Opportunities

The removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria has significantly impacted transportation costs and market opportunities in most rural communities in Nigeria. Following the subsidy removal in May 2023, transportation fares surged dramatically. This spike in transportation costs adversely affects the affordability and accessibility of transportation services for rural populations, who often rely on public transport for mobility. Raji (2018), observed further that, as the fuel prices rise, transportation costs for moving farm produce to markets can increase. These reduce farmers' profit margins and make their products less competitive in the market. According to the author, transportation costs increase day by day and have badly affected the effectiveness and efficiencies of businesses in the country due to this subsidy removal.

Farm Inputs of Rural Farmers

Many farm inputs, like fertilizers and machinery are dependent on fuel for their production and transportation. Theoretically, it is expected that the removal of fuel subsidy will influence the agricultural sector either positively or negatively. The negative effect is reflected in the increase in the cost of agricultural produce attributed to the high cost of transportation which is a crucial component of the logistics. Ansari, Salami and Veeman (2014) examined the distributional consequences of subsidy removal from the agricultural and food sectors and found that the low income rural households will be most affected when these categories of subsidies are removed due to high prices of food and agricultural produce which is capable of affecting welfare negatively. In spite of this data, there is little to no discussion on the effects of the recent removal of fuel in Nigeria in 2023. Concerns about how the loss of the fuel subsidy might

impact the Nigerian economy, were raised because the subsidy was eliminated without first offering some palliatives.

Higher fuel prices correspondingly led to increased costs for these inputs, which thus, may reduce usage of essential inputs or reduced agricultural activity which sometimes, could negatively affect productivity and yield. The Nigerian rural areas have always struggled in terms of their standard of living and increase in fuel prices has made this matter worse. This is evidenced by the high transportation cost which results in shortage of food in cities as these rural areas are unable to move their farm produce to where they can be sold. Thus, goods that are of perishable nature like tomatoes, mangoes, oranges among others can get spoilt which invariably leads to increase in poverty level of rural dwellers.

Women-headed Households

Women-headed households in most rural communities face significant challenges following the removal of fuel subsidies, particularly in the context of rising fuel prices and economic strain. The removal of fuel subsidies has led to increased costs for essential fuels like kerosene, which many women rely on for cooking and household energy. Women often bear the brunt of these price hikes, as they typically manage household budgets and are more likely to purchase fuel. The economic burden can strain family relationships, with female heads of households experiencing increased tensions with children who may resist authority due to cultural norms favoring male leadership. This dynamic can lead to conflicts and undermine the mother's role within the household.

Women-headed households often lack access to social support programs that could mitigate the effects of subsidy removal. Research indicates that these households prioritize social and financial support over energy subsidies, highlighting the need for targeted policies that empower women and improve their economic conditions.

Small Scale Farming

Fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria has had profound implications for small-scale farming in rural communities. The removal of subsidies has led to a significant rise in fuel prices, which directly increases the cost of farm inputs such as transportation and machinery operation. This has strained the income of small-scale farmers, making it difficult for them to sustain their operations (Raji, *et al*, 2018). The rise in fuel prices has contributed to overall inflation, exacerbating poverty levels among rural dwellers. Many farmers find it increasingly challenging to afford basic necessities, which affects their productivity and economic stability, (Ozili, 2023). Rural farmers take advantage of economies of scale by decreasing their expenses of obtaining inputs or acquiring services like storage and logistics. They also allow farmers to enhance product or services quality and lower risks (Fernando, Garnevska, Ramilan and Shadbolt (2021).

Livelihoods Enhancement

The removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria has significantly impacted the livelihoods of rural women, particularly those involved in agriculture. Following the subsidy removal, fuel prices surged, leading to increased transportation costs that directly affect agricultural productivity. Women, who constitute about 43% of the agricultural workforce, face heightened challenges in accessing affordable transport for moving agricultural inputs and produce to markets, exacerbating food insecurity.

The rise in fuel prices has also led to inflation in food costs, with reports indicating that food prices have risen sharply, affecting the ability of families to afford basic nutrition. This situation is compounded by the high percentage of income that rural households spend on

food—around 65%—which has intensified the financial strain on women and their families.

Empirical Literature

Several literatures on subsidy removal have shown that Nigeria is not the only country to remove fuel subsidy. In 1997, Indonesia removed fuel subsidy after the Asian financial crisis. The removal of fuel subsidy increased the domestic price of fuel, (Chelminski, 2018). In empirical literature, there is limited number of studies on the impact of fuel subsidy removal on the performance or output of the agricultural sector, even for Nigeria, with the exception of the study of Atoyebiet *et al.* (2012) which found that the low-income rural households will be most affected when fuel subsidies are removed due to high prices of food and agricultural produce which is capable of affecting welfare negatively. Fathurrahman *et al.* (2017) observed that the reallocation of subsidy payments to low-income households could slow down economic development but improve social welfare, (Kyle, 2018). In instances such as this, entrepreneurial education in rural areas, according to Umoh, Ekpo, Effiong and Asangausung, (2023) can help enhance as many livelihoods in households as possible.

Other international studies had analysed the effect of fuel subsidy removal. In Malaysia, Chatri (2014) assessed the economy-wide effect of gas subsidy removal in the power sector and found that gas subsidy reduction led to increase in the price of electricity followed by a decline in demand for electricity by other economic sectors and a decrease in gross domestic product. Antimiani *et al.* (2023) and Sampedro *et al.* (2017) argued that fuel subsidy is a barrier to tackling climate change in the European Countries. In a related study, Lin and Li (2012) and Ouyang and Lin (2014) showed that the economic benefits of renewable energy subsidies were lower than the economic benefits of fuel subsidies in China.

Theoretical Framework

The social conflict theory by Karl Marx (1818-1883) had been adopted and used to guide the study. Theory posits that social order is maintained by domination and power, and that social change occurs as a result of conflict between dominant and subordinate groups. Class struggle is the center point of this theory as Marx reiterated that there are two classes facing each other in every society and these two classes compete for limited resources (power, wealth and prestige).

The theory argues that conflict arises when status, power and resources are not evenly distributed among members of the society, (Crossman, 2017). In the context of fuel subsidy removal, the dominant group (the government) imposes policies that may negatively impact the subordinate group (rural women) without considering their unique needs and challenges. The theory therefore implied that government has a responsibility to protect the welfare of the masses, by making rightful policies that will guide against the effect of subsidy removal.

The study therefore aimed at examining the extent to which policy of fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria has significantly impacted on the livelihoods of women in rural communities in Akwa Ibom State. In the light of the foregoing, the following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study.

- H0₁: The fuel subsidy removal has no effect on the activities of rural women on small scale farming in Ikot Ekpene.
- H0₂: The fuel subsidy removal has no effect on access to transportation, farm inputs and market opportunities of rural women in Ikot Ekpene.

H0₃: The fuel subsidy removal has no effect on the gender – specific coping strategies of women-headed household in rural communities of Ikot Ekpene.

H0₄: Government palliative measures have no mitigating effects of fuel subsidy removal on in rural women in Ikot Ekpene.

Method

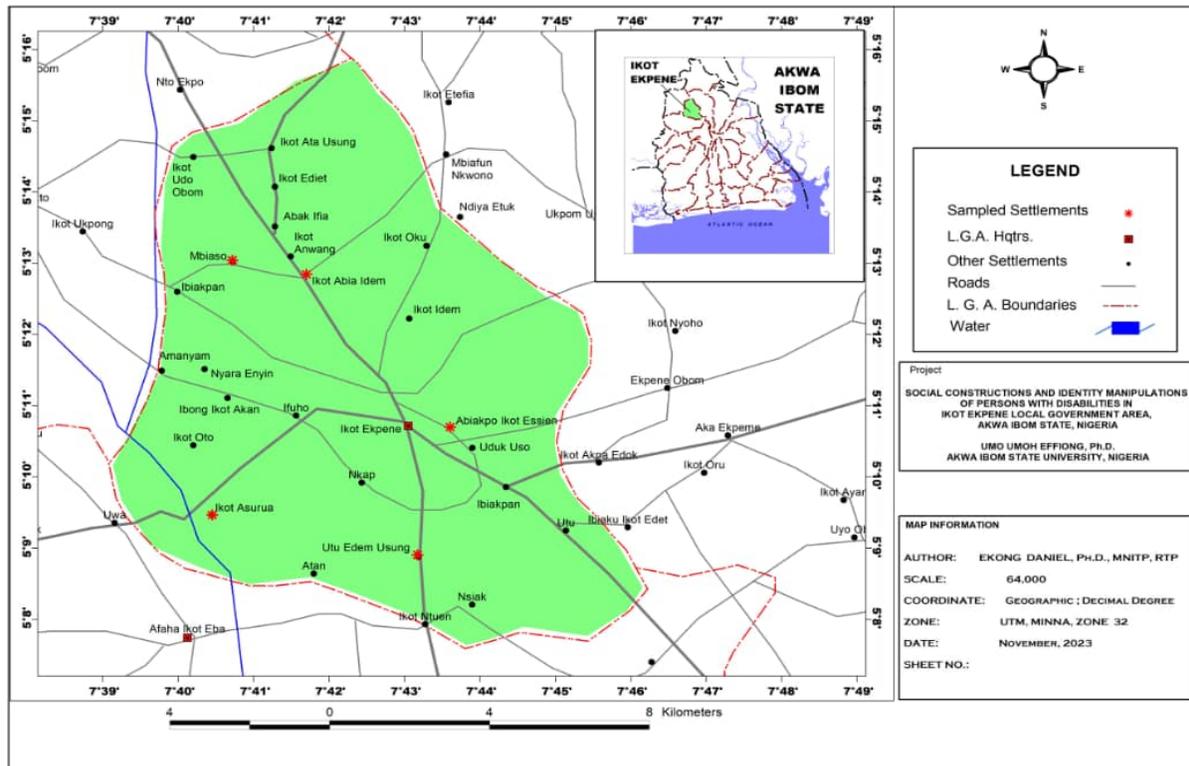
The study adopts a survey-based descriptive research method with a mixed-method approach of qualitative and quantitative research methods. The population was stratified in accordance with the entire 47 Villages in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area with a population projection of 450,000 people (UN-WPP, 2024), while a purposive sampling technique was used to select six (6) rural communities of Amayam, AbiakpolkotObionting, Nsiak, ItakIkot Udo, Ikot Inyang and IbongIkot Akan, using the simple random sampling technique to select responses for the study. In determining the sample size for the study, 398 respondents were drawn using Taro Yamane’s method with data gathered from a 15 item self-report Likert-typed scale instrument with structured questions at a 4-point continuum of agree, strongly agree, disagree and strongly disagree constructed for the study. A sample of 398 rural women or respondents was drawn from the population of 450,000 and used for the study.

S/N	NAMES OF VILLAGES	SAMPLE	PERCENTAGE (%)
1.	Amayam	60	15.1
2.	AbiakpolkotObionting	70	17.5
3.	Nsiak	58	14.5
4.	ItakIkot Udo	72	18.1
5.	IkotInyang	64	16.1
6.	IbongIkot Akan	74	18.5
	Total	398	100

Source: Field Survey, (2024)

Study Area

The study area is Ikot Ekpene Local Government area, locally known as "Raffia city" or "IK". Ikot Ekpene being an historic town in the South-South Zone of Nigeria, in Akwa Ibom State is located on a high way that parallels the coast, between Calabar to the South East, and Aba to the West, with the State capital, Uyo. Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area is bounded on the North and West by Udoanwanquo River, very close to the Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic and St. Joseph major seminary both in Ikot Osurua. The river is a dividing line between Essien Udim Local Government Area and Abia State on the South by Utu village, which serves as a boundary between Ikot Ekpene and Essien Udim Local Government Area as shown in the map below.



Source: Ekong, (2023). The Map of Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, cited in Effiong, et al, 2023.

From Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia, IkotEkpene has been noted as a regional centre of commerce, with notable exports of palm products especially palm oil, kernels, including raffia fibers and it's sweet palm wine as well as, ground crops of yams, cassava and corn.(Ekanem, 2020). Ikot Ekpene is very rich in land, although the area does not qualify as a forest zone.

According to the information brochure of Ikot Ekpene, as published by the ministry of information and culture (1994), the area known and called Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area was the traditional headquarters of the Annang people in Akwa Ibom State. The people of this local government are predominantly made up of the Annang with about 450,000 people (UN-WPP, 2024) and with a landmass of 643,477 square kilometers. There are two (2) clans (Ikot Ekpene Urban and Amayam), Eleven (11) wards and 47 Villages manned by respected and recognized Chiefs/ Heads with paramount Ruler His Royal Highness Akuku Okon Udo Ukut as the superintending Head supported by the two (2) clan heads.

Ikot Ekpene has the potential and ability of meeting the standard befitting of its creation. Many foreign organizations and churches are present in the area including three notable institutions, Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, St. Joseph major seminary and School of Nursing along Abak road, and others private institutions which have added richness to the town.

The people of Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area communicate in Annang dialect and predominantly Christians. Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area has undergone significant development, with various infrastructural and socio-economic advancements shaping the area. However, rural communities within the LGA still face challenges related to economic stability and access to essential services (Akaninyene, 2019).

Results and Discussion

4.1.1 Respondent's socio-Demographic Data

Respondents' socio-demographic data in this study include age, gender, marital status, education, religion, location/ residence, trade/business/occupation and monthly income.

Table 4.1.1 Percentage Distribution of Respondents Age

AGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
25-34	96	24.1
35-43	118	30.0
44-52	127	31.9
53-Above	57	14.3
Total	398	100

Source: Field survey (2024).

Table 4.1.1 shows a majority of the respondents (31.9%) were aged 44-52 years, 30% aged between 35-43 years, followed by those in the range of 25-34 years who had (24.1%) representation and only 14.3% were aged 53 and above years. This clearly shows that adults constituted the highest number of respondents in the study.

Table 4.1.2 Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Marital Status

MARITAL STATUS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Single	79	19.8
Married	70	17.5
Cohabiting	71	17.8
Divorced	52	13.1
Separated	82	20.6
Widowed	44	11.1
Total	398	100

Source: Field survey (2024).

Respondents' marital statuses are shown in Table 4.1.2. It reveals that a majority of the respondents (20.6%) were separated, 19.8% were single, 17.8% were cohabiting, 17.5% were married, 13.1% were divorced and only 11.1% were widowed. It is important to note here that it is a common practice among women in rural communities to cohabit with the opposite sex,

hence, the inclusion as an important Marital Status of the respondents in this study.

Table 4.1.3 Percentage Distribution of Respondents Educational Level

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Primary	192	48.2
Secondary	134	33.7
Tertiary	72	18.1
Total	398	100

Source: Field survey (2024).

Table 4.1.3 contains the percentage distribution of respondents' educational level. It shows that a majority of the respondent's (48.2%) had primary education, 33.7% had secondary education and only 18.1% had tertiary education. Thus, it is obvious that respondents with primary school qualifications constitute the greatest number in the study.

Table 4.1.4 Percentage Distribution of Respondents Religion

RELIGION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Christianity	370	93.0
Islam	3	0.8
Traditional	17	4.3
Others	8	2.0
Total	398	100

Source: Field survey (2024).

The religious affiliations of respondents are shown in Table 4.1.4. It reveals that a majority of the respondents (93%) were Christians, 4.3% were traditional religion worshippers, 2% were members of other religions and only 0.8% was Muslims. Obviously, Christians constituted the greatest number of respondents in the study.

Table 4.1.5 Percentage Distribution of Respondents Location/Residence

LOCATION/RESIDENCE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Amayam	60	15.1
AbiakpolkotObionting	70	17.5
Nsiak	58	14.5
Itaklkot Udo	72	18.1
IkotInyang	64	16.1
Ibonglkot Akan	74	18.7
Total	398	100

Source: Field survey (2024).

Table 4.1.5 reveals the location or residence of respondents. It shows that 15.1% of the respondents were from Amayam axis, 17.5% were from Abiakpo IkotObio nting, 14.5% were from Nsiak, 18.1% from Itakl kot Udo, 16.1% of the respondents were from Ikot Inyang while the majority of the respondents in the study were drawn from Ibong Ikot Akan community.

Table 4.1.6 Percentage Distribution of Respondents Trade, Business or occupation

BUSINESS/OCCUPATION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Trading	78	19.6
Craft work	31	7.8
Farming	120	30.2
Hair dressing/tailoring	76	19.1
Civil/Public Service	53	13.3
Computer Business Centre	40	10.0
Total	398	100

Source: Field survey (2024).

Respondents' trade, business or occupations are shown in Table 4.1.6. It shows that the a majority of the respondents (30.2%) were farmers, 19.6% were involved in trading, 19.1% were hairdressers and Tailors, 13.3% were civil/public servants, 10% were involved in computer business while only 7.8% were ventured into buying and selling of craft, such as Raffia fibres, art works.

Table 4.1.7 Percentage Distribution of Respondents' monthly income

MONTHLY INCOME	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Less than ₦20,000	70	17.6
₦20,000 – 59,000	88	22.1
₦ 60,000 – 99,000	123	30.9
₦ 100,000 – above	117	29.4
Total	398	100

Source: Field survey (2024).

Respondents' monthly income is shown in Table 4.1.7 thus; 30.9% of the respondents earned between ₦60,000 and ₦99,000; 29.4% earned ₦100,000 and above; 22.1% earned between ₦20,000 and ₦59,000 and only 17.6% earned less than ₦20,000. This reveals the extent to which women in rural communities in Ikot Ekpene have been financially empowered the aftermath of fuel subsidy removal by the government.

Data Presentation and Analysis of substantial issues

Respondents' opinions on substantial issues concerning fuel subsidy removal and sustainable livelihood Enhancement of rural women in Ikot Ekpene, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria are presented and analysed on this section.

Respondent's opinion on small scale farming

S/N	SMALL SCALE FARMING	RESPONSES				TOTAL
		SA	A	D	SD	
1	Fuel Subsidy removal has reduced income level of rural women in Ikot Ekpene.	49 (12.3%)	239 (60.1%)	43 (10.8%)	67 (16.8%)	398 (100%)
2	Most rural farmers could not access the palliative/support care from governments.	152 (38.2%)	131 (32.9%)	91 (22.9%)	24 (6.0%)	398 (100%)
3	Most farmers have not been accessing fertilizers, seeds, pesticides and other farm inputs distributed rural farmers by government.	203 (51.0%)	125 (31.4%)	41 (10.3%)	29 (7.3%)	398 (100%)
4	Rural farmers in Ikot Ekpene are experiencing low crop yields and productivity after fuel subsidy removal.	132 (32.2%)	166 (41.7%)	48 (12.0%)	52 (13.1%)	398 (100%)

Source: Field survey (2024).

Table 4.2.1, responses on the subsidy removal and reduction of income of rural women in Ikot Ekpene shows that 60.1% and 12.3% respectively agreed that the situation has to some extent reduced the income level of rural women in Ikot Ekpene. However, 16.8% and 10.8% had respectively disagreed and strongly disagreed with the view. Also, on access to palliative/support care from governments, 71.1% have agreed that majority of rural farmers could not accessed palliative/support care from the governments, while 28.9% disagreed on the issue.

More so, 82.4% of the farmers have agreed that they could not have access to most agricultural inputs, like fertilizers, seeds, pesticides, etc. distributed to farmers to mitigate fuel subsidy removal effects in the area. But, however, only 17.6% of the respondents disagreed on these views.

Furthermore, 74.9% of the respondents agreed with the views that rural farmers in Ikot Ekpene mainly constituted by women has now experienced poor crop yields and low agricultural productivities as against the well-known improved yields of crops in the area before the fuel subsidy removal regime, whereas, 25.1% of the respondents disagreed on these views.

Table 4.2.2 Percentage Analysis of the Responses on Fuel subsidy removal Effects rural farmers transportation.

S/N	TRANSPORTATION	RESPONSES				
		SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
5	Removal of fuel subsidy has lead to increase cost of transporting farm products of small scale farmers to urban markets in Ikot Ekpene.	121 (30.4%)	150 (37.7%)	70 (17.6%)	57 (14.3%)	398 (100%)
6	High cost of transportation directly reduced profit margin of marketable products.	99 (24.9%)	180 (45.2%)	48 (12.1%)	71 (17.8%)	398 (100%)
7	High cost of transportation limits the supply of farm products to distant markets from their rural communities	132 (33.2%)	192 (48.2%)	44 (11.1%)	30 (7.5%)	398 (100%)

Source: Field survey (2024).

Table 4.2.2 shows that 68.1% of respondents agreed that the removal of fuel subsidy lead to corresponding increase in transport cost of conveying farm products of small scale farmers to major markets in Ikot Ekpene, whereas, 31.9% of the respondents show divergent views on the issue.

Again, on the issue of reduction of profit margin of marketable farmers' products, 70.1% of the respondents are of the views that high cost of transportation directly responsible for this. While 29.9%, did not agreed in this regard. In addition to this, 81.4% of respondents are of the view that this situation limits the supply of farm produce not only to major markets around urban areas, but also, to the distance markets, with 18.6% posing different views on the issue.

Table 4.2.3: Percentage Analysis of the Responses on Fuel subsidy removal and Effects on Livelihood of rural women

S/N	LIVELIHOOD ENHANCEMENT	RESPONSES				TOTAL
		SA	A	D	SD	
8	Removal of fuel subsidy hinders investment and livelihood opportunities of rural women in Ikot Ekpene.	183 (46%)	171 (43%)	15 (3.8%)	29 (7.3%)	398 (100%)
9	Fuel subsidy removal limits access to healthcare services with increase maternal and morbidity rate in Ikot Ekpene rural communities.	197 (49.4%)	85 (21.3%)	78 (19.6%)	38 (9.5%)	398 (100%)
10	Most rural households experienced increased cost of living, spend more money on food and children's education.	203 (51%)	14 (3.5%)	90 (22.6%)	91 (22.7%)	398 (100%)

Source: Field survey (2024).

In table 4.2.3 shows that 100% of respondents had agreed on the views that the removal of fuel subsidy hinders investment and livelihood opportunities of rural women in Ikot Ekpene and 11.1% of respondents had disagreed. Additionally, 70.7% of the respondents reacted positively on the views that fuel subsidy removal limits access to healthcare services with increased cases of maternal and morbidity rate in the area while 29.1% responded on the negative. 54.5% respondents agreed on the views that most households experience increased cost of living, spend more money on food and children's education while 45.3% are of the opinion that the subsidy removal on fuel has not posed any effects on the issue in rural communities especially in Ikot Ekpene. Observations from the study, reveals marginal contrary views on the issues.

Table 4.2.4 Percentage Analysis of the Responses on Fuel subsidy Removal on Government Intervention measures to cushion the Attendant Effects on Rural Women.

S/N	GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION	RESPONSES				TOTAL
		SA	A	D	SD	
11	The palliative /support care programmes for the rural poor have improve the livelihoods of women in Ikot Ekpene.	48 (12.1%)	73 (18.3%)	141 (35.4%)	136 (34.2%)	398 (100%)
12	Many rural women are beneficiaries of conditional cash transfer, food	78 (19.6%)	56 (14.1%)	130 (32.7%)	134 (33.7%)	398 (100%)

	and fertilizer distribution programmes of the governments.					
13	Rural women in IkotEkpene do not have advocates to represent them during the government distribution of palliative.	211 (53%)	73 (18.3%)	58 (14.6%)	56 (14.1%)	398 (100%)
14	Many rural women are not aware of government Assisted programmes.	198 (49.7%)	47 (11.8%)	63 (15.8%)	90 (22.6%)	398 (100%)
15	Government policy on fuel subsidy removal has thrown many rural women in IkotEkpene into poverty and untold hardship.	252 (63%)	83 (20.9%)	57 (14.3%)	6 (1.5%)	398 (100%)

Source: Field survey (2024).

Table 4.2.4 has 30.4% of the respondents agreed on the views that government palliative care distribution programme have improve women livelihoods in rural communities whereas 69.6% of the respondents disagreed on this views, implying that the government palliative measures have not been effectively implemented in rural communities.

About 33.7% of respondents had agreed that many rural women were beneficiaries of the conditional cash transfer and fertilizer distribution programme of the government while 66.4%d disagreed on these views. 71.3% of the respondents disagreed on the views that rural women do not have good advocates to represent or speak for them whenever government distributes palliative care while 28.7% agreed on this. 61.5% of the respondents agreed that most women are unaware of government assisted programmes to rural women while 38.4% disagreed on these views. Out of 100%, 83.9% of the respondents have agreed that the government policy on fuel subsidy removal had thrown many rural women into abject poverty and untold hardship while 15.8% have a divergent view.

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

H₀: The fuel subsidy removal has no effect on the activities of rural women on small scale farming in Ikot Ekpene.

H₁: The fuel subsidy removal has effect on the activities of rural women on small scale farming in Ikot Ekpene.

Questions1 * Responses Cross tabulation

Count	Responses				Total
	Sa	A	D	Sd	
question1	49	239	43	67	398
question2	152	131	91	24	398
Questions question3	203	125	41	29	398
question4	132	166	48	52	398
Total	536	661	223	172	1592

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	200.132 ^a	9	.000
Likelihood Ratio	207.275	9	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	23.799	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	1592		

The p-value of the Pearson Chi-square and the Likelihood Ratio are less than 0.05 level of significance, therefore the null hypothesis H_0 is rejected. Hence, the fuel subsidy removal has effect on the activities of rural women on small scale farming in Ikot Ekpene.

Hypothesis 2

- H_0 : The fuel subsidy removal has no effect on access to transportation, farm inputs and market opportunities of rural women in Ikot Ekpene.
- H_1 : The fuel subsidy removal has effect on access to transportation, farm inputs and market opportunities of rural women in Ikot Ekpene.

Questions2 * Responses2 Cross tabulation

Count		Responses2				Total
		SA	A	D	SD	
Questions2	questions1	121	150	70	57	398
	question2	99	180	48	71	398
	question3	132	192	44	30	398
Total		352	522	162	158	1194

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	33.945 ^a	6	.000
Likelihood Ratio	35.045	6	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	10.957 1194	1	.001
N of Valid Cases			

The p-value of the Pearson Chi-square and the Likelihood Ratio are less than 0.05 level of significance, therefore the null hypothesis H_0 is rejected. Hence, the fuel subsidy removal has effect on access to transportation, farm inputs and market opportunities of rural women in Ikot Ekpene.

Hypothesis 3

H_0 : The fuel subsidy removal has no effect on the gender-specific coping strategies of women-headed household in rural communities of Ikot Ekpene.

H_1 : The fuel subsidy removal has effect on the gender-specific coping strategies of women-headed household in rural communities of Ikot Ekpene.

Questions3 * Responses 3 Cross tabulation

Count	Responses 3				Total
	SA	A	D	SD	
question1	183	171	15	29	398
Questions3 question2	197	85	78	38	398
question3	203	14	90	91	398
Total	583	270	183	158	1194

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	234.273 ^a	6	.000
Likelihood Ratio	265.179	6	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	34.496	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	1194		

The p-value of the Pearson Chi-square and the Likelihood Ratio are less than 0.05 level of significance, therefore the null hypothesis H_0 is rejected. Hence, the fuel subsidy removal has effect on the gender-specific coping strategies of women-headed household in rural communities of Ikot Ekpene.

Hypothesis 4

- H_0 : Government palliative measures have no mitigating effects of fuel subsidy removal on in rural women in Ikot Ekpene.
- H_1 : Government palliative measures have some mitigating effects of fuel subsidy removal on in rural women in Ikot Ekpene.

Questions 4 * Responses 4 Cross tabulation

Count	Responses4				Total
	SD	A	D	SD	
Question 1	48	73	141	136	398
Question 2	78	56	130	134	398
Questions 4 question 3	211	73	58	56	398
Question 4	198	47	63	90	398
Question 5	252	83	57	6	
Total	787	332	449	422	1990

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	436.309 ^a	12	.000
Likelihood Ratio	505.151	12	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	336.041	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	1990		

The p-value of the Pearson Chi-square and the Likelihood Ratio are less than 0.05 level of significance, therefore the null hypothesis H_0 is rejected. Hence, Government palliative measures have some mitigating effects of fuel subsidy remove on rural women in Ikot Ekpene.

Discussion of Findings

Four null hypotheses were formulated and tested in the study using the Pearson chi-square technique. The first hypothesis which states that, the removal of fuel subsidy has no significant relationship on small scale farming by rural women in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area is rejected. Rather, it was found out from the study that removal of fuel subsidy had posed significant effect on Small scale farming in most rural communities in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area. The revelation by this hypothesis had confirmed similar studies conducted by international monetary fund (IMF, 2020) on small scale farming and government policies in rural areas.

The second hypothesis which states that, the fuel subsidy removal has no effect on access to transportation, farm inputs and market opportunities of rural women in Ikot Ekpene

was rejected. This further confirmed study by Ering and Akpan, 2012; Atoyebi, et al, 2012. Instead, the alternate hypothesis which state that the fuel subsidy removal has a significant effect on access to transportation, farm inputs and market opportunities of rural women in Ikot Ekpene, thus confirmed previous research on Subsidy removal effects on Rural transportation according to Antimiani et al, 2023; Kyle, 2018.

The third hypothesis of the study which states that fuel subsidy removal has no effect on Gender-Specific coping strategies of women-headed households in rural communities of Ikot Ekpene was further rejected confirming studies by Chdminski, 2018; Dartanto, (2013) conducted in Indonesia to ascertain fuel subsidy removal effects on women-headed households in rural communities. Rather, the alternate hypothesis which states that the fuel subsidy removal has some effects on Gender-Specific coping strategies of women-headed households in rural communities of Ikot Ekpene. Again, this confirm a similar studies by Egbe, 2014; Nyaba, 2009 and Crossman, 2017)

Conclusively, the fourth hypothesis revealed that government palliative measures have no mitigating effects of fuel subsidy removal on rural women in Ikot Ekpene was completely rejected, and thus, confirmed studies by Gough, 1978; Erickson, et al 2017; Ouyang and Lin 2014) and Chatri, 2014) which strongly upheld that government palliative measures have had strong mitigating effects of fuel subsidy removal on rural women. Thus, this is applicable to rural communities in Ikot Ekpene, where women are part of the integral member of the Nigerian society, and should be made to enjoy equal access to available services with their male counterparts, (Udoh and Ekanem, 2023).

Conclusion

The findings of this study reveals that a strong relationship had existed between fuel Subsidy removal policy of the federal government of Nigeria and the livelihood Enhancement of women in most rural communities in the country. Based on these findings, it is concluded that the policy of fuel subsidy removal plunged many women into untold hardship and abject poverty in most rural communities in Nigeria. It is therefore the evident from the findings of the study that an urgent action is needed to pull citizens in rural communities of the country out of chronic poverty and untold hardship, which have already enveloped them.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following are recommended for enhancing sustainable livelihood of women in rural communities particularly in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area, and generally in Nigeria;

- i) There is need for the federal government to re-formulate policies and legislation for sustainable development of small scale farming in rural communities in Nigeria to improve the quality of life of rural people, including women in Nigeria.
- ii) There is need for government to provide effective and affordable transportation, farm inputs and market opportunities of women in rural communities in Ikot Ekpene

Local Government Area.

- iii) There is need to encourage some existing government palliative programmes to expand their activities to mitigate gender-specific challenges experienced by women headed-households in rural communities in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area.
- iv) Government should create the conditions for multi- sectoral collaboration to advance the existing palliative measures of cash transfer, food and transport vouchers, fertilizer distributions, seedlings, other farm inputs, etc., for effective rural communities' development in the area.
- v) All levels of government- Federal, State and Local should have inclusive development policy and strategy relevant to human Right and poverty reduction for rural women in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area.
- vi) There should be policy formulations for equalization of opportunities for socio-economic inclusions of rural women in government development frameworks.

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