

## Removal of Subsidy: a Question of Trust

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### Abstract

The paper demonstrates that the fierce opposition to the economic policy of removal of oil subsidy is largely explicable in terms of the Nigerian masses' loss of trust in the government's competence and supposed goodwill. This general distrust in government, it is analytically argued, is a product of the masses' accumulated unpleasant experience of incessant battering in the hands of past governments. It is suggested that for the current government to restore the lost trust and consequently win back the cooperation of the Nigerian people, there is need for it to fulfill most, if not all, of its promises to the masses, especially those associated with the newly implemented increment in the price of petrol. This implies deviating from the ill-standard (of promise and fail) set by the preceding administrations. Such move must be prefaced by the government's showing real commitment to the plights of its subjects by cutting down on the profligate lifestyle of its officials to reflect genuineness of purpose and strong will for positive change.

**Keywords:** oil subsidy, trust, government, masses, Nigeria.

### 1. Introduction

Nigerians woke up on the first day of the year 2012 to have the shocking news that the subsidy on petrol commodity had been removed. This removal implies that a litre of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS), popularly known as petrol, hitherto sold for N65 would thenceforth be sold for N141. Although after much ferocious agitation from the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), Trade Union Congress (TUC) and the civil society organizations, the price was later reviewed, putting the new price at N97/litre, the upward change in price of petrol has continued to generate diverse opinions from both Nigerians and concerned outsiders. It is the contention of the present paper that all the outrages generated by this action of the government are sufficiently explicable in terms of lack of trust relationship between the state and the masses. It is argued that if the state had demonstrated trustworthiness in its duties, the policy of removal of fuel subsidy would have received less resistance from the public in whose interest the former claims to have initiated it.

The paper, beside its introduction, is distributed along four sections. The first section examines the nature of the concept of trust, especially political trust. This allows us to reveal the significance of the concept in people-government relationship. In the second stratum of the paper, attempts are made at exploring the two levels of understanding of the upward review in the price of petrol product, namely, removal of fuel subsidy and increment in the pump price of petrol. It is argued that while government favours the former for the obvious reason of justifying its implementation of the policy, the masses prefer the latter for the fact that they bear the direct and practical consequences of the policy. The third section provides justification for the masses' distrust/doubt in government over the success of the policy of removal of subsidy, while the last section, the conclusion, suggests ways through which government can reclaim its trust from the people.

### 2. Conceptualizing Trust

Several attempts have been made to define the concept of trust by philosophers and socio-political theorists (Held, 1984; Tway, 1993; Blind, 2006). It hardly needs be said that these attempts are not of equal academic worth. As defined in the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2000:1284), trust is the belief that somebody or something is good, sincere, honest, etc. and will not try to harm or deceive you. According to *Encarta Dictionaries* (2009), to trust implies to have confidence in and reliance on good qualities, especially fairness, truth, honour or ability. In these senses, trust is a disposition (Held, 1984). It is a relational state of mind of one to another, whose integrity one can count on and, whose future behaviour one can predict to agree, with a fair degree of accuracy, to a predetermined expectation. Hence, in Wheelless and Grotz's (1977:251) estimation, "trust occurs when parties holding certain favourable perceptions of each other allow this relationship to reach the expected outcomes."

Before further clarifications are made, there is need to stress that the concept of trust, like democracy, comes in cluster of other defining concepts. It is in properly grasping the meaning of these other concepts that one can understand trust as a concept. These concepts are, but not limited to, confidence, integrity and

credibility. Although some use the terms confidence and trust interchangeably, other scholars have seen a significant distinction between the two related concepts, associating the former with a passive emotion accorded to the overall socio-political system, and conceptualizing the latter as a group of more dynamic beliefs and commitments accorded to people (Blind, 2006). Confidence is the belief in somebody, something or an institution; or in the ability of somebody, something or an institution to act in a proper, trustworthy or reliable manner.

Integrity, on its own part, means the quality of possessing and steadfastly adhering to high moral principles, not compromising one's moral standard, even in the face of compelling reasons to do so. The best historical demonstration of the quality of integrity can be found in the Socrates' heroic refusal to yield to the plot of his sympathizers to rescue him from the Athenian prison, for according to him, if the law which had hitherto protected him now demanded for his life, then so be it. This has justified the description of Socrates as the most morally upright person that ever lived.

While integrity expresses moral firmness, credibility is the ability to inspire belief in others. It is the quality that leads to the feeling of trustworthiness. Credibility, as defined by Blinders (2000:1431), is "living up to its words." To be credible is to have shown in the past that one is dependable, or that one can be counted upon. In political terms, credibility can be defined as an unquestioned criterion of a good policy (Blind, 2006:4). A credible government, for instance, is one that has consistently demonstrated a constant act of goodwill toward its subjects. In doing this, such government naturally builds in its people a tendency to believe in its good intentions and thus willingness for cooperation. In this regard, credibility becomes directly related to the notion of political trust because if a government agency makes policies that consistently produce successful results, trust develops over time. On the contrary, if a government agency produces policies that repeatedly lack credibility, distrust ensues, and is likely to persist (Blind, 2006).

Having defined it as the state of readiness for unguarded interaction with someone or something, Duane Tway (1993) goes further to describe trust as a construct; a construct because it is "constructed" of three major components: the capacity for trusting, the perception of competence and the perception of intention. The first of the components refers to one's total life experiences, which have consequently developed one's current capacity and willingness to risk trusting others. This implies a predisposition to certain historical antecedent that makes trusting other not only possible, but also easy. The perception of competence is made up of one's ability and that of others with which one relates to perform competently at whatever is needed in one's current situation. The last one, the perception of intentions, is one's perception that the actions, words, direction, mission, or decisions are motivated by mutually-serving rather than self-serving motives (Tway, 1993).

Trust is of two major variants (Blind, 2006:3). These are political and social trust. Simply defined, social trust is the trust that exists between citizens. According to Newton and Norris (2000:153), political trust is a central indicator of public's underlying feeling about its polity. Political trust occurs when citizens appraise the government and its institutions, policy-making in general and/or the individual political leaders as promise-keeping, efficient, fair and honest (Blind, 1993:3-4). Put in other words, it is the judgment of the citizenry that the system and the political incumbents are responsive, and will do what is right even in the absence of constant scrutiny (Miller and Listhaug, 1990:358). In the political sphere, trust is rooted in the assurance of the citizens in the ability of their government to make their life better (than it meets it) through promulgation of masses-friendly policies and programmes.

Trust, especially political trust, thrives in the atmosphere of mutual confidence between rulers and the ruled. It is the confidence of the citizens that those entrusted with political powers will do things they are voted or appointed to positions to do, and eschew things not expected of them. Normally, the phrases "expected of them" and "not expected of them" are couched in terms which denote making policies that will enhance the lives of the masses or promote the general welfare of the citizenry, on the one hand, and avoiding those not leading to that end, on the other. The purpose for establishing the institution of government is the realization of the happiness of the citizens. Hence, any government found wanting in this regard is adjudged not worthy of the trust and cooperation of those over whom it is a government.

### 3. **Removal of Subsidy or Pump Price Hike?**

A very crucial issue to be attended to at this juncture has to do with the proper nomenclature to be denoted by the much-publicized upward movement in the petrol pump price. This is pertinent to put the ongoing debate about the newly-intended fuel price in its proper perspectives. Is it to be conceptualized as the so-called removal of oil subsidy or simply a hike in the petrol price? It is important that one provides a satisfactory answer to this question mainly for at least three mutually related reasons. In the first place, such answer helps to understand the nature of the movement and perhaps the reason why it takes the direction it does. Two, in knowing the proper term to be used for

this upward movement in pump price, one begins to understand arguments for and against the movement; arguments which have now assumed pro-government and anti-government dimensions. And finally, determining the right name for this movement reveals the reason why it meets with so much antagonism from the majority of Nigerians.

Removal of subsidy sounds good and reasonable enough from the government point of view, especially as an explanatory alibi for implementing an economic policy, which, in most people's opinion, is considered the most anti-masses in the history of the country. There are a couple of reasons, however, why the employment of the term cannot be considered helpful in understanding the phenomenon of upward movement in the price of petrol.

In the first place, the working terminology (i.e. removal of subsidy) is couched in a technical economic language that is hardly understood by the Nigerian masses majority of whom are stack illiterates. The undeserved popularity of the term in recent media literature notwithstanding, the phrase 'removal of subsidy' has remained largely incomprehensible to a significant bulk of the Nigerian populace. This is because all attempts at explaining it by government spokespersons, including the Hon. Minister of Petroleum, Mrs. DiazeniAlison-Madueke, Hon.Minister of Finance, Dr. NgoziOkonjo-Iweala and the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN),SanusiLamidoSanusi, have been expressed in economic jargons that take expertise in international economics to understand. A good policy should be rendered in a language that could be easily understood by the generality of people for whom it is made. This helps to foster the culture of clarity/sincerity of purpose and promotes accountability in government.

In spite of the complexity inherent in the idea of removal of oil subsidy, at least from the point of view of the ordinary Nigerians, the government seems to have chosen the term for obvious reasons. These include the fact that it makes easy the task of explaining the nature of corruption that has marred the petroleum sector, which has not only actually made the payment of oil subsidy burdensome to the government, but also has called for its urgent removal. As the argument goes, the removal of oil subsidy will curb the fraudulent actsbeing perpetrated by some shady oil dealers, derogatorily referred to as cabals, who allegedly are the sole beneficiaries of the subsidy on petroleum product.Ben Oguntuase (2012) identifies three of such market malpractices. We shall here be contented with two of them for the purpose of the present discussion.

The first is fraudulent payment on phony import of Petroleum Motor Spirit, PMS. The product is fraudulently certified as imported into Nigeria but is actually diverted to other countries in West Africa....They not only collect the subsidy (which actually is outright theft), they also connive to collect demurrage on products that really never entered the Nigerian market. The reality is that what we actually consume in Nigeria may not be up to half of what the records or statistics say we consume.

There was also bridging the system whereby products are moved by road across depots as may be permitted in what was meant to be exceptional cases such as when repair is being carried out on the pipeline or at a depot. Over time and driven by fraudulent intent, what was designed to augment became the routine practice. Products would be released from Atlas Cove in Lagos ostensibly for bridging to say Kano or Sokoto but would actually be sold at nearby stations while the documentation is perfected and bridging allowance is paid.

In pointing out these anomalies in the oil industry, the government intends to bring to the fore the moral justification for the removal of the subsidy by demonstrating that the existence of the government's assistance in the price of fuel makes possible the diversion of its benefits away from those for which it is originally intended, i.e. the Nigerian masses. Thus the removal of subsidy on petrol protects the masses against the onslaught of a group of few super-rich businessmen who use smart means to enrich themselves at the costly detriment of the majority of the Nigerian populace.

Government thus sees in the phrase 'removal of subsidy' the best escapist argument to *shift* the blame of high ineptitude in handling economic matters, to some alleged scape-goats, the so-called cabals, who now bear the burden of evidence against them.The new victims, the cabals, now become the new enemies of the masses, the saboteurs of the government's efforts to make easy life affordable to all and sundry, and the reason why the removal of subsidy on petrol becomes expedient. Now government, by this shift (of blame),aims at achieving at least two ends. One, it intends to show to the Nigerian public that it means well, and not ill, for the masses by removing subsidy from petrol, thus portraying government as benevolent rather than malevolent. Two, the shift helps to intensify pressure from the Nigerian public to expose those behind the evil act of cabalism, the eradication of which leads the government to the best option of the removal of oil subsidy.

Whereas to a large extent, government has achieved the second objective, it is doubtful if same could be said of the first. The reason for this is not far-fetched. Majority of Nigerians judge government policies by their physical manifestations in their immediate environment. And when such manifestations are not favourable to their living condition, they feel no hesitation labeling the policy in question a negative one. This is exactly the case with the removal of oil subsidy.

It should be stressed that to the average Nigerian, removal of fuel subsidy is a hike in the price of petrol. Referring to it as removal of fuel subsidy, or as anything for that matter, is what the late FelaAnikulapoKuti would describe as Government Magic, a trick of turning white to black. It is in a nutshell the government's way of sugar-coating the bitter pill of pump price increase to ease its swallowing by the Nigerian masses. As William Shakespeare (2000) once remarked, that which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet. By the same token, that which is an increment in price, by any name, will stink as filthy!

There is another reason why the ordinary Nigerians prefer 'pump price increase' to any alternative terminology. It is easier to understand. This might be because such phrase describes the reality of the new price. Being largely illiterate, the Nigerian masses judge by sight and not by (what they read in) books (e.g. newspapers, magazines, news bulletins, textbooks, etc.). Although mostly unread, they are aware of the goings-on in their environment. They know the new price of the product. They know what the price used to be. Simple arithmetic has a way of telling them that the difference between the old price and the new one implies an increment. If experience still counts as the best teacher, then it becomes sheer waste of time and energy to start preaching the gospel of removal of fuel subsidy to a group of people whom experience has taught that whenever there is a change in the price of petrol commodity, it always is in the upward direction.

On a general note, therefore, whether it is called removal of oil subsidy, or increase in pump price, the reality of the new pump price of petrol product puts the Nigerian masses at the receiving end. It goes without saying that in all of these it is the poor masses that are the real victims (Akor, 2012). This is partly because each time the price of fuel rises, the price of every other thing jumps up correspondingly. The most affected areas include transportation, food commodities and security for human life, among others. Besides, the negative effects of such hike in the price of fuel on petty businesses and artisanship (of course, this is the territory of the poor, and can hardly survive in Nigeria without generator!) can only be imagined. It is in these terms that the poor masses understand the new policy of the government.

As would have been expected from a responsible and responsive government, one would have thought that the removal of fuel subsidy would come with a new salary structure, which gives a corresponding financial power to the grumbling cadre below, so as to enable them cope with the untold hardship that awaits them in every direction they turn – from their landlords, market women and men, taxi and bus drivers, etc. If the meager remuneration of the class cynically referred to as minimum wage earners is considered pathetic, the condition of those with no wage at all is even much graver. These are the people, who exist far below, and are untouched by, the much controversial minimum wage: the peasant scratching out a living in the deteriorating rural environment, the petty trader with all his wares on his head, the beggar under the fly-over and millions and millions that you cannot categorize (Achebe, 1983:24).

These are the real victims of our callous system, the wretched of the earth. They are largely silent and invisible. They don't appear on front pages; they do not initiate industrial actions. They drink bad water and suffer from all kinds of preventable diseases. There are no hospitals within reach of them; but even if there were they couldn't afford to attend. There may be a school of sorts which their children go to when there is "free education" and withdraw from when "levies" are demanded (Achebe, *ibid*).

The proposed palliative measures aimed at cushioning the contrived effects of the sudden increment by the government are equally considered a worthless massaging of the problem. The dictionary meaning of palliative is enlightening enough: alleviating pain and symptoms without eliminating the cause (*Encarta*, 2009). Such definition reveals the Nigerian government's insensitivity towards the plight of the common man. Consider the 1100 buses acquired for the purpose of the palliative programme. One may argue that it is a good gesture and a thoughtful one on the part of the government. The futility of this gesture, however, begins to surface when one considers the insignificance of 1100 buses in a country with a population of more than 167million people (NPC, 2011). It should be noted that with the bad condition of road network in the country, the action is indeed a drop in the ocean. Government may as well have to acquire thousands of cars, hundreds of thousand *okadas* (Nigerian slang for commercial motorcycles), and tens of thousands of *kekenapep* (Nigeria commercial tricycles) to complete its kind

gesture of palliative. This will be required to make people from rural and interior areas of the country to have a taste of their government's magnanimity.

It is worthy of note that beside the palliatives, the government has promised to spend the realized money from the removal of subsidy judiciously. These include the proposed improvement in infrastructural facilities, provision of affordable healthcare services and employment for the teeming youths, fixing of Nigerian electricity problems, building of more refineries, construction of more roads, etc. Such a good intension from a concerned government, one might be tempted to conclude. In spite of this long to-do list of the government, the Nigerian citizens seem to have had their mind made up on not falling for it. By this singular act, the cheated and robbed Nigerian masses show that they have outgrown their rulers and this was the reason no one was convinced by the many desperate antics the regime employed to force an unpopular policy, grown and luxuriated in corruption, down the throats of groaning Nigerians (Oparah, 2012). No promise made by the government falls on the fertile ground of their heart anymore. But how does one account for this general distrust among the masses? The next section is an attempt to answer this question.

#### **4. Grounds for the Masses' Distrust**

Citizens of different countries mistrust their governments for varied reasons. In the case of Nigeria, the citizens, especially the teeming masses, which constitute the larger half of the population, have learnt not to trust their government from experience. The citizens' loss of confidence in government can be substantiated with certain concrete historical examples. The Nigerian economic history is replete with failed attempts by government to put things right, and consequently bettering the lives of the citizens. The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) introduced by the military regime of Gen. Ibrahim Babangida is a very good point in view. The policy, which was meant for a total economic revitalization ended up plunging the Nigerian masses into unimaginable depth of miserable penury. For instance, one of the measures taken in realizing this economic agendum was the withdrawal of subsidy on fuel and fertilizer. This worsened the Nigerian living condition significantly. Anyanwu (1992:11) captures the inimical effects of the reduction or withdrawal of subsidies on these commodities.

Such oil subsidy withdrawals have fuelled the inflationary spiral in the country. Apart from the general and persistent increases in the prices of goods, transport fares have skyrocketed resulting in lower living standards and an increase in the suffering of commuters, while hunger and starvation are ravaging, given that families spend about 50% of their meager incomes (where they are employed at all) on fuel or wood and charcoal (Anyanwu, 1987c, 1990a). In addition, subsidies on fertilizer (NPK, Urea, and SSP) were reduced in both 1989 and 1990, resulting in higher farm production costs, lower output and higher prices of foodstuffs. Such a policy is contradictory for an administration that said to be committed to increased agricultural production as well as committed to increase 'non-inflationary growth'.

Having been battered by the series of infamous military juntas for those bleak years of the Nigerian history, the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1999 came with its hopes and aspirations from Nigerians and their outside sympathizers. Since Nigeria's return to democratic governance, however, nothing in the lives of the Nigerian people seems to have reflected this 'positive' change. In fact, the quality of life of Nigerians has been declining depressingly with successive civilian administrations, and the world is gradually giving up on the capacity of the Nigerian state to take care of its citizens (Ezeanah and Onyeacholem, 2012). The situation has deteriorated to a stage where Nigerians have become frustrated, fed up and unreceptive to government's policies, however morally cogent they are.

During the eight years of President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007), the price of petroleum products was increased about five times. Each time this happened, the Nigerian government, represented by the president and other public officers, employed several discourse strategies at their disposal to persuade the Nigerian public that it meant well (Salami and Ayoola, 2010:43). On each of these occasions, however, it is the Nigerian people (with the exception of those in control of the resources) that bear the brunt. This is because each of these increases in the petrol pump price bears a slash in the quality of lives of the average Nigerian. In all of these cases, what was intended to bring economic succor to the country ended up as woes to it.

This does not imply that the Nigerian masses do not challenge this increment, but their economic condition puts them at a disadvantaged position to fight it to a logical conclusion. As Salami and Ayoola (2010:43) have rightly observed,

The people, on the other hand, usually challenged the position of the government through media publications and public demonstrations. A few Nigerians especially commercial vehicle operators continued to buy, albeit grudgingly, at the new price with the expectation that the ongoing campaign

against the new price would make the government reverse its decision. The government allowed the debate to drag on for a while until most members of the public got used to the new price. Then peace and quiet returned and it would seem that the government had won the 'war'.

Thus the Nigerian people have not only become used to it, but it has also formed the basis of their distrust for government's credibility. A Chinese proverb has said it all: fool me once, shame on you; fool me again, shame on me! The Nigerian electorate by now should have sunk deep into the ground under the sheer weight of its electoral shame; for it has allowed itself to be fooled not twice but twice-two hundred times! (Achebe, 1983:52) The Minister of Finance and the Coordinating Minister for the Economy, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, in an interview on the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria's current affair programme, Radiolinks, admitted that Nigerians don't trust the government because of the failure of successive administrations to fulfill their promises to the people (*Sunday Punch*, on January 8, 2012). This point has received corroboration from a Lagos-based lawyer and human right activist, Femi Falana (quoted in Nnodim, 2012).

... we have lost trust because what we are hearing now that the government intends to do with the funds from subsidy removal is not new. We have been told the same thing in the past. What is the guarantee that we will not hear the same thing after the deregulation of the downstream sector? Build refineries, maintain the ones you have and let us see for ourselves what government has done in terms of development, instead of trying to remove subsidy. After that, you can then come in April to discuss subsidy and I think people will be ready to listen to your arguments then.

A personality like the Edo State governor, Comr. Adams Oshiomhole, has further confirmed the masses' ground for distrust in government as profound. As the erstwhile labour leader, Oshiomhole spent his entire labour presidency years leading campaigns and industrial actions against the Obasanjo government's planned deregulation of the downstream sector and increase in the pump price of PMS (Akor, 2012). He got so popular in the process that he won governorship election in Edo State. Now that he is on the side of government, he has suddenly made a *volte face*, and in the forefront leading the campaign for the removal of subsidy on petrol, a policy he once fought vigorously. He has lost public trust in the process.

It should be added that this duplicity is not restricted to Nigerian leaders alone. The case of John Attah Mills of Ghana validates this claim. Prior to his emergence as Ghanaian president in 2008, Mills had been a virulent critic of removal of subsidy preached by Kuffor-led administration. In fact, he is said to have ridden on the popularity he garnered from this criticism to the presidency of that West African country. Then Ghana was not an oil producing state. Now as the head of state in an era when Ghana has joined the league of oil producing states, President Attah Mills' administration has since cut down the fuel subsidy, setting the new price of the essential commodity at an obnoxious price of N186/litre. Reminded of his criticism of his predecessor on the same matter, he quickly recanted saying he now understands that it is a necessary and right action to take (Akor, 2012).

This way, the masses have lost confidence in any figure interested in political office, for in their opinion, *they are all the same*. This explains why there are so much electioneering irregularities within the Nigerian electoral system. All the corrupt practices associated with elections in Nigeria can be adequately accounted for in terms of the masses trying to get their own share of the 'national cake' (so they call it) before the intending members of the political class get elected into positions of power, and the access to this cake is shot behind them. For they (the masses) know that when they eventually emerge as winners of their respective political offices, they become different persons, and the opportunity to benefit from them is lost, except for when seeking re-election.

## 5. Conclusion

As things stand now, there seems to be no two ways of preventing the future from being a mere rehash of the past, except if the present government deviates from the prevalent political rule set by its predecessors. The past governments were characterized by promise-and-fail approach aimed at soliciting the masses' acceptance of policies, and thereafter, turning around to bite them. For as long as this trend continues, the masses are bound to remain in their distrustful attitude towards government. Meanwhile, it is the country that suffers. To forestall this, there is need for government to win back its moral virtue of trustworthiness, which previous governments lacked.

Trust thrives in an environment where there is willingness to respect and to rely on another person(s) or institution. It is based on mutual respect. According to Virginia Held (1984:63),

Persons who trust one another agree somehow not to take advantage of each another, not to advance their interests at the expense of the other's interests. As trust develops they are able to act cooperatively towards one another, to work together and not in competition with one another. Or, if they compete, they cooperate at higher level in "playing by the rule" if the rules are fair. And

they trust each other to respect the rules they have voluntarily agreed to and not to cheat or bend them to their own advantage. Persons who trust one another count on each other to keep their agreements, if agreements are made. A relation of trust is, then, a mutual willingness to cooperate.

The willingness to act cooperatively is a joint venture between the government and the people. In achieving this feat, both government and people should have the moral responsibility to cut down on their excesses. The timeless admonition of the English philosopher, David Hume (quoted in Held, 1984:63), is apposite here:

If there are two of us in a rowboat, and if I want the boat to go and you want the boat to go, and if the boat will go only if both of us row, then I will take an oar and row, and you will take an oar and row, and together we will make the boat move through the water.

If the masses have agreed to pay through their nose for the wealth of the nation (given the reduction or withdrawal of fuel subsidy), the government on their own part should also be willing to cut down on the profligate lifestyle of its officials. The current budgetary allocation to the political class does not reflect government's willingness in this aspect. A budget in which the President and his Vice are to spend a large sum of N2.8bn "maintaining" their existing furniture, generator, etc. and N238m on fuel is likely to spark off suspicion among citizens. The lives of the Nigerian political class should reflect the government's confessed commitment to the cause of truly developing the country.

The hallmark of good political representation and leadership is self-sacrifice. A trustworthy government should not feast when the people it governs have not eaten; should not sleep when its subjects have not known sleep; and should not show affluence when its people live in abject poverty. If government removes subsidies from the lives of the people, it would be morally unjust on its own part to live a highly subsidized life. In any country where such occurs, there is high tendency for the citizens to become extremely unpatriotic. Thus, that Nigerians are largely unpatriotic, as noted by Achebe (1983:15), is not because they are particularly evil or wicked, but because patriotism, being part of an unwritten social contract between a citizen and the state, cannot exist where the state reneges on the agreement.

The Nigerian citizens are not asking for too much. They want to be treated the same way citizens of other countries with natural endowments, such as oil and other mineral resources, are being treated by their governments. They want to enjoy basic social amenities such as stable electricity, portable water, functional telecommunication, security of lives and property, good health care services, result-oriented educational sector, employment for the youths and other such welfare packages expected of a responsive and responsible government. And above all, they want food on their table. It should be noted that past Nigerian governments had failed extensively in these responsibilities. Political regimes that are unable to supply low-cost food and affordable fuel to the people are seen as dangerously incompetent as failing to protect the interest of key elements of social order (Dike, 2003; Ogungbemi, 2007).

What the present Nigerian government should focus on, if it must change the people's existing negative perception of government's competence and intended goodwill, is the redemption of the political class through adequate and timely implementation of all its manifestoes to Nigerians. This seems one of the ways it can restore the much-needed public trust that the past opportunists in government, those that the late Fela Anikulapo Kuti would readily refer to as "vagabonds in power," had bastardized beyond repair. The government's cancellation of the proposed palliatives on the ground that the public did not allow the *full* implementation of the subsidy removal has not shown government as serious about its commitment to the masses' welfare. Subsidy or no subsidy, government has a responsibility to take palliative measures to allay economic asperity of the people it is a government over.

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