

## POLITICS OF FUEL IMPORTATION: ITS CONSEQUENCE ON DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL REFINERIES

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### ABSTRACT

This paper compares the product from local refinery units otherwise called illegal refineries and the imported refined products in terms of its the flash points, density, boiling point and the relative density and they were found to be in close proximity with exception of the viscosity. The paper opines that certain level of politics has hindered the development and running of local refineries as well as capacity building of local refineries. It is imperative at this point of our development that the control of bigger institutions like NNPC be liberalized and the participation of locally developed refining technology springing up in the Niger Delta region be allowed to thrive based on the data collected which indicated similar physiochemical properties like that of the imported products with little variations. This can be appropriately refined to meet the American Petroleum Institute (API) standard. Stake holders and key players need to allow the participation of this local technology. Thus this will trigger the development of more advanced local refineries, create employment of the youths and reduce capital flight from the Nation.

**KEYWORDS: Subsidy, control, corruption, exploration, Oil, Production**

### 1.0. INTRODUCTION

Crude oil (Petroleum) prospecting began in the Niger Delta in 1958. In 1956, Shell British Petroleum (now Royal Dutch Shell) discovered crude oil at Oloibiri. The majority of Nigerian reserve are found along the country's coastal Niger River Delta. There are 606 oil fields in the Niger Delta of which 360 are on-shore and 346 are off-shore,[1]. These have been allocated to various oil multi-nationals for extraction. Over 3,000 kilometers of pipeline lie across the landscape of the Niger Delta, linking 275 flow stations to various export facilities,[1]. Worldwide economic growth has caused a significant increase in fossil fuel consumption in recent decades. The world production of crude oil in March 2008 stood at 37.4 billion barrels per annum, with Nigeria producing 2.3 million barrels per day,[2]. Recently, the world production of crude oil is estimated to be 83.6 million barrels per day with Nigeria being the sixth highest producer of 2.5 million barrels per day,[3].

Nigeria's petroleum industry is the largest in Africa, and exploration activity started as far back as 1937, but the downstream sector was not developed by successive governments over the years. All efforts were directed towards, exploring and exploiting crude oil as a raw material for international market vis-avis industries in Europe and America, following the old pathway designed by the colonial masters, much like agricultural produce from the nation. History has it that several efforts were made to find crude oil in Nigeria during the colonial days, but there are no records of any attempt to build refineries in Nigeria, until now, records available to us had not shown any interest from joint venture partners in investing in local refining of petroleum products. Traditional thinking in Africa is that, the continent is a base for raw materials production for the western world and a consumer of finished product from

the same region, any contrivance negates the principles or laws of international trade. For over 50 years of oil exploration in Nigeria, multinationals are spending trillions of dollars pursuing the same purpose without venturing into areas outside their traditional path way.

Nigerians on their part have not encouraged the local refining of petroleum products, much of lip services without a corresponding action has been the hallmark of successive governments. In 2012, the then minister of trade and investment raised the hopes of patriotic Nigerians, by announcing government plan of ending fuel importation in 2018, Olusegun Aganga, disclosed, the Goodluck Jonathan's administration plan towards ending the country's depressing regime of fuel importation in 2018 and highlighted its conscious efforts at making more non-oil exports to boost revenue, the excitement that follows was not surprising,[4]. However, few weeks later, the petroleum minister of the same administration announced the contrary, putting Nigeria among African nations that may not end fuel importation within the next 20 years.

Globally, petroleum generates about 57.% of world's energy output, both in developed and developing world, controlling energy output, both in developed and developing world, controlling energy is more of politics than business, therefore, it suffice to say that; petroleum means politics and politics is entrenched in petroleum. For over fifty years of oil and gas activities in this nation, only four outlets are available for local refining of products, namely;

- |     |   |      |
|-----|---|------|
| (a) | Port Harcourt Refinery I                | 1965 |
| (b) | Warri Refinery/Petrochemical            | 1978 |
| (c) | Kaduna Refinery/Petrochemical           | 1980 |
| (d) | Port Harcourt Refinery/Petrochemical II | 1987 |

Corruption of ruling class and other political elites have been blamed for the bane of our nation's Refineries, but how do we explain this in contemporary usage, when successive governments continue to make the same mistake over time? Nigeria Production stands at about 2 billion barrels of oil per day, while the four refineries can only produce 445, 000 L/day about 45% of local consumption. However, over the years these refineries had never performed on the average, currently, the capacity utilization remains at 20%. In 2010, Nigeria imported 8.1 million metric tonnes of petroleum products in the downstream sector while local production was 80,757 metric tonnes,[5] (Ogbuigwe, 2011) representing about 1% of local consumption. There is so much politics in the exploration, administration and operations of petroleum (otherwise known as black gold). Most wars are fought around this products, at the local front, commercial clashes, civil disturbances and other forms of violence are common place wherever petroleum is discovered. Within the political class, import license racketeering, turn around maintenance contract and oil bloc allocations are major reasons for loyalty, vendetta, and even upheavals.

## 1.2 Reasons for the study

As key player in the economy, it's important, that knowledge of policy directions and the reasons behind such decisions are critical analyzed as it affects all a sundry, with a view to have a co-ordinated effort to influence decisions in a positive manner. If

petroleum downstream activities preceded oil discovery and exploration in Nigeria, (1) How come it was relegated to the background and (2) Why had the approach remained the same, since 1905?

### 1.3 Importance of Local Refining of Petroleum

As Nigerians look towards industrialization, one key sector that can support such aspiration is availability of useful energy. Petroleum in its crude form is not easily accessible for energy generation, refining reduces it to usable forms to generate energy. Refining is a process used to separate hydrocarbon groups with specific hydrocarbon number using the physical and chemical properties that differentiate individual products from each other. Such products must have both energy and commercial values,[6] (Adeyinka, 2012)

Local refining of petroleum products is important for the following reason; it(s)

- (i) reduces the dependence of the nation on international market for price regulation
- (ii) makes the products available on time
- (iii) helps in building up the industrialization processes
- (iv) Is an avenue to create employment for the masses.
- (v) Creates the foundation for an improved technological base, because refining of petroleum products is a technological process.
- (vi) Local refining can improve with time and create export for the nation.

### 1.4 Objectives of the Study

The following are the objectives of this paper

- i To inform trade average Nigerian of the vagaries of fuel importation
- ii To create an avenue of to discuss fuel importation, an age long practice in Nigeria
- iii To encourage a co-ordinated approach to influence positive decisions in fuel importation having being informed
- iv To build the capacity of the population, to respond to fuel importation more convergently
- v. To critically analysed fuel importation in Nigeria the pros and cons

## 2.0 PROBLEMS OF LOCAL REFINING OF PETROLEUM PRODUCTS

Successive governments have presented the building more refineries to boost local refining of petroleum and eliminate importation. Though, this pronouncement is over three decades without results, more citizens are still clamoring for refineries to stop importation of fuel. Presently, Nigeria consumes of 8.1 million metric tonnes of downstream products, refining these quantity locally will reduce the corruption endemic in the importation process.

There is a lot of factors militating against the development of local refineries vis-à-vis local refining of products, such as;

- (i) Frequent policies reversal and corruption
- (ii) Poor maintenance of refineries
- (iii) Politics of crude oil supply
- (iv) JVC and government
- (v) Lack of political will
- (vi) Poor management or corporate governance
- (vii) Low infrastructural Development

## **2.1 Frequent Policies Reversal and Corruption**

Development of local refining capacity has suffered much due to frequent policy changes. Interest in oil and gas in Nigeria has grown so much that political big wings, presidency, traditional rulers, senior civil servants and youths, all have their focus on oil activities, hence pushing for decisions to sway in their favour. Subsequently, policy directions are reversed in accordance with strongest opinion at the time as well as links to the presidency. NNPC that is saddled with the responsibility of managing the interest of the Federation in the oil and gas sector has undergone several policy changes that are incoherent with initial terms of reference. The Nigerian political class and senior civil service have historically viewed the oil industry as too important a source of patronage sometimes conceived as and confused with national interest to be left in the hands of independent managers,[7]. Not surprisingly, therefore, the corporation's experience has been marked by struggles over what the corporation controls and over who controls it,[7]. This tendencies with the backing of corruption have influence policies, to the extent that every new political leadership and management have become victims of the cankerworm of revising previous policies without due consideration of its benefits. Nigeria's corruption index, according transparency international is 134<sup>th</sup> out of 187 nations, this alone could tell anyone the influence of this disease on decision making.

## **2.2 Poor Maintenance of Refineries**

Machines and other service facilities are prone to deterioration due to regular use, exposure to harsh chemicals and environmental conditions. This deterioration commonly referred to as wear and tear, requires regular maintenance to ensure efficient performance of such facilities. Refineries require constant maintenance in service equipment, especially turn around maintenance (TAM), to compliment the usual routine and preventive maintenance. Turn-around-maintenance activity is required to undertake work that cannot be accomplished while the plant is operating. The turn-around period is that time in a unit is off-stream, i.e between product cut out and unit being brought back on-stream,[8] (Ogbuigwe, 2012). The American Petroleum Institute (API) defines turn-around as a periodic shut down (total or partial) of a refinery process unit or plant to perform maintenance, overhaul and repair

operations and to inspect, test and replace process materials and equipment. The problem of turn-around maintenance is well known to the average Nigerian, the politics involved, accusation and counter accusation between the ministry, presidency and NNPC. As a by-product of corruption process, our refineries are mostly out of production. According to Tony Ogbuigwe (2012)[8], within the last five years, capacity utilization of Nigerian refineries has been sub-optimal in performance, at an average of 20%, as against international standard of 60-80%.

### **2.3 Politics of Crude Oil Supply**

Crude oil supply to refineries is another aspect of the problem in local production of petroleum products, the present arrangement in the Joint Venture Operation (JVC), follows the usual traditional arrangement of producing oil as a raw material for export. Our interaction with stakeholders in Port Harcourt and Warri Refining companies, indicates that, crude oil supply also adopts the well-known bureaucracy that characterize delays. Observers says that, the producing companies and some key government agencies prefer immediate exportation, due to accountability and corruption related problems.

Apart from corruption related problems, crude oil supply disruptions is another setback. High losses are experienced on supply lines. In 2016, about 30% of the crude oil supply to Warri and Kaduna was lost due to vandalisation and theft along the pipelines. NNPC has resorted to supplying crude oil to both refineries at a very high cost via ocean going vessels. This is both slow and expensive,[8] (Ogbuigwe, 2012).

### **2.4 Joint Venture Companies and Government Policy**

Records available shows that, most of the producing companies which are multinationals, have been in producing in Nigeria, since 1956 in commercial quantity, but none of these companies have invested in refining petroleum products locally. Whereas some have refineries abroad, they are focused on exploring and exploiting crude oil here in Nigeria. Some are major importers of the same products into the country on large scale at higher cost to poor Nigerians. Federal Government on his part has not shown much concern on local refineries development, the last refinery was built in 1987 (Port Harcourt refinery), until now, no serious efforts has been directed toward implementing, the proposal of building three new refineries in 2002. The inability of these refineries to satisfy domestic demands, led to the Federal Government approving, over ten years ago, 23 licenses for new refineries. Twenty (20) of these went to investors from the private sector, while the Federal Government and Chinese investors under took to build additional refineries in Kogi, Lagos and Bayelsa State respectively [9]. In spite of Federal Government concession over huge upfront payment, these investors still failed to show serious commitment, but the same investors show increased interest in fuel importation.

Other problems militating against local refining of petroleum products include;

- (a) Poor management of Refinery facilities
- (b) Low infrastructural development
- (c) Vested interest in fuel importation
- (d) Internal politics of refineries location.

### 3.0 PETROLEUM PRODUCTS IMPORTATION POLITICS

Fuel importation has several dimensions, there are arguments for and against, and even subsidy removal and payment has become part of National politics. The major argument in support of fuel subsidy, is the protection of Nigeria's developing economy against vagaries of the international petroleum market and effective control over transportation cost. Evidentially fuel subsidy abuse, by both local and multinational operators, lack of transparency and cross border smuggling have denied Nigerians of the anticipated benefits. Oil exploration in Nigeria commenced over half a century, reducing the economy into a monotonous one, yet no diversification of oil and gas industry, rather, petroleum products importation is the hall mark of the industry, because, of attitude of Nigerians, which has precipitated into:

- (a) Loss of employment opportunities
- (b) Poor image for the nation and citizens
- (c) Loss of tax income
- (d) Create a lot of emotional backlash due to long queues

Importation of petroleum products is a major discuss among political leaders and chief executives officer (CEO) of petroleum industries, particularly, active players in the downstream sectors. As a result of the manner it is being handled, research interest is high and the summary of the finding as identified are;

- (i) Corruption on large scale, including subsidy payment on locally refined products
- (ii) Foreign exchange fraud due to increase in amount payable
- (iii) Import license politics
- (iv) Collaboration between government officials and importing companies.

According to US State Department leaks; corruption was discovered before the Nigerian Civil war in the oil sector. Corruption is a global problem, it's not peculiar to Nigerian terrain, neither its practice in oil and gas carried out in isolation by Nigerians. However, the citizens have collaborated with foreigners to destroy our own economy. Wuam and Sunday,[10], defines; *corruption as the abuse of public office, for private gain. Public office is abused for private gain when an officer accepts, solicits or extorts a bribe. It is also abused when private agents actively offer bribes to circumvent public policies and processes for competitive advantage and profit. Public office can also be abused for personal benefit, even if no bribery occurs, through patronage and nepotism.*

Transparency international,[11], a non-governmental agency and watch dog on corrupt practices the world over, observed that;

*“Corruption is one of the greatest challenges on the contemporary world. It undermines good government, fundamentally distorts public policy, leads to the misallocation of resources, harms the private sector and private sector development and particularly hurts the poor.*

In Nigeria, corruption has misallocated resources, reduced confidence in the public sector, almost destroy private sector development and it is about to push the poor out of existence, if nothing is done in its true sense. Corruption has persist in Nigeria, because in fighting corruption, observers have identified corruption in fighting the menace.

### **3.1 Reasons for Continue Importation of Petroleum Products**

Despite its criticism at several quarters, importation of refined petroleum products still thrive and it is not likely to end in the near future. Fuel Importers will continue to benefit from the nation’s economy because;

- (a) **Nigerians Quick-Fix Mentality:** The average Nigerian believes in quick fix approach to solve his/her problem, be it in politics, economic management, banking, education etc. The get rich quickly mentality has penetrated government policies as most politicians and administrator wants to achieve major individual and political goals within few years in office. It has so penetrated the system to the extent that students can’t persevere in learning.
- (b) **Infrastructural Decay:** Decay in infrastructure has really hindered industrial development; the refineries are having their fair share of this problem. Major areas affected are public utilities such as electricity (power), roads (including railways and inland water transport) etc. Despite government approach in wooing foreign investors into the country, little or nothing has been achieved due to this menace.
- (c) **Poor Human Capacity Development:** Developing the capacity of human resources is a panacea to better performance and productivity. Technology changes rapidly in our world today, what is a major achievements or breakthrough in technology becomes obsolete within few weeks, thus, only those that can adapt to such changes shall remain competitive in business. Training has been mismanaged in several organizations, especially, training of technical staff. Most of these trainings are characterized by mis-match of personnel, poor resource handling /management and sometimes outright neglect of the needful. When the capacity of human resources is not enhanced, performance will definitely suffer. Practically, all researchers believe, that, there is a general decline in the level of technical efficiency at which Nigerian refineries operate. Naturally, inadequate system maintenance and technological obsolescence would lead to a general decline in technical efficiency of a system,[12]. Making deliberate efforts in adapting to technological changes through application of manpower development strategies can enhance performance of personnel and subsequently the system.

- (e) **Use of Obsolete Facilities and Technology:** Refineries and plants, which are normally designed to last 25 to 30 years,[13], for optional productivity needs upgrade, because most components, process units have become obsolete, especially for the nation’s refineries built (Port Harcourt 1 & II, 1965 and 1987, Warri 1978 and Kaduna, 1980). It’s obvious, that without system upgrade, (including soft wares), these refineries can no longer compete in this modern times, for a nation that has poor maintenance culture, in refineries systems where turn-around maintenance projects are delayed beyond the usual, a system upgrade will definitely be a far outcry. The latest of these refineries (Port Harcourt II), built in 1987, has outlived the minimum twenty-five years required for system upgrade, the obvious is that, both government and investors need to do an in depth study of the right technology to apply, considering environmental conditions and ensure proper upgrade is done to reduce frequent break downs, to enhance optimum productivity.

#### 4.0 THE LOCAL REFINING OF PETROLEUM PRODUCTS

The local refining of Petroleum products has shown remarkable similarities with that of the imported Petroleum products and samples from major illegal refining location were collected and analyzed. The table below shows diesel from Bodo community; Bodo kerosene, Bodo, Premium Motor Spirit, Gokana Kerosene as compared to the standard imported normal diesel, kerosene and Premium Motor Spirit.

Table 1: Samples of illegal refined products compared with standard imported fuel

S/N	Sample Parameters	B- diesel	Normal diesel	B - Kero	G - Kero	N - Kero	B - PMS	N - PMS
1.	Density (g/cm <sup>3</sup> )	1.336	1.342	1.387	1.363	1.367	1.356	1.389
2.	Relative density (g/cm <sup>3</sup> )	1.336	1.343	1.387	1.363	1.367	1.356	1.389
3.	Flash point (°C)	69.5	65.5	48	46.1	58.3	38.2	34.6
4.	Viscosity (mm <sup>2</sup> /s)	6.7532	4.6914	0.9121	1.7313	1.3354	1.9412	0.9637

Key : B – Diesel; Bodo diesel  
 B – Kero; Bodo Kerosene  
 G – Kero; Gokana kerosene  
 N – kero; Normal Kerosene  
 B – PMS; Bodo Premium Motor Spirit  
 N – PMS; Normal Premium Motor Spirit

#### 4.1: Results and Discussions

From the results on table 1, it obvious that illegal refinery products are getting better inequality, especially the premium motor spirit, otherwise known as petrol (pms). This is expected, because, illegal refinery adventure started with petrol, then later

move into production of diesel and kerosene. These are part of the much needed improvement, if given opportunities, more products can develop through this process.

## 5.0 PETROLEUM PRODUCTS IMPORTATION AND SUBSIDY

Refined petroleum products have for over three decades now, been supplied to the Nigerian market from two sources: domestic refineries and imports, records available show that whereas percentage of imported refined products are on the increase, local supply continue to decline. As at 2012, NNPC records shows that only 20% of refined petroleum products in the market are produced in local refineries, import makes the balance,[8]. This figure may have increased, considering the situation of our refineries. The inability of the NNPC refineries to meet local demand for petroleum products especially the premium motor spirit, has translated to a heavy reliance of the Federal Government of Nigeria on importation to meet local demand. In Table 1 the installed capacity of the four refineries which are presently running at 20% capacity are shown;

Table 2: Crude oil Refining Capacity in Nigeria

S/N	Plant	Date of commissioning	Installed capacity L/day
1.	Old Port Harcourt	1965	60,000
2.	New Port Harcourt	1989	150,000
3.	Warri	1978	125,000
4.	Kaduna	1980	110,000
	Total		445,000

Source: NNPC monthly Report Bulletin (2011).

According to NNPC Group Executive Director, Refining and Petrochemicals, Engr. Tony Ogbuigwe,[8], Nigeria's daily consumption of refined petroleum products is estimated (in litres) at; PMS – 35 Million, Kerosene 8 million and AGO, 12 million respectively, and this figure is increasing with the population. Whereas Nigeria population has almost double between 1989, when a refinery was last commissioned, the installed capacity remains the same and the natural process of depreciation has badly affected capacity utilization. Policy makers over time have not make serious efforts in reducing importation of refined petroleum products, even though they are well informed of the rising profile of consumption. The factors identified, apart from corruption which has eaten deep into our fabrics, shall be discussed below:

### 5.1 Causes of Increase in Importation and Subsidy

There are vested interest in Nigeria's petroleum industry, which has become a major reason for struggle for power and political maneuvers. Though, these problems have their root in corruption, they have manifested in various ways:

- (a) Struggle for the control of NNPC
- (b) Divergence views on the capacity of refineries to perform
- (c) Investors indifference towards diversifying the petroleum sector
- (d) Complacency of political leaders towards long term investments

**(a) Struggle for the control of NNPC**

Nigeria's monotonous economy has placed NNPC into a dilemma, either to operate as an oil corporation making vital technical and economic decisions for the survival of the oil and gas sector in Nigeria or to serve political interest and masters for their survival in office. History has it that no Group Managing Director (GMD) of NNPC has been retained by successive government. Managers at the apex of the corporation are usually under pressure from several quarters in policy decision making, regulation of petroleum industries, allocation of resources and even reporting. A former GMD, Edmund Dakoru said;

*We never seem to get it right. Something always seems to be missing between government policy, implementation and public expectation (or public perception of what constituted the common good). On one hand, policy and its implementation may be either too far or short in scope, lopsided or mistimed. On the other hand, public perception and expectation may be unrealistic, utopian and misguided or misinformed. As a result, we stagger from one confrontation to the next between policy makers, regulators, actors and customers (extract from vanguard Newspaper October, 2003).*

**5.2 Petroleum Subsidy Controversy**

Petroleum products subsidy is a major subject of controversy in this nation, no one seems to get it right, in terms of policy, payment, and handling and pricing. However, the obvious is that key players at that level have divergent views and most analysts are not well informed, but the consequences of all these decisions are on the poor masses,[14]. Executive Secretary of PPPRA Reginald C. Stanley mentioned some opportunities and challenges as follows:

- i. Serves as incentives to increasing investment inflow based on guaranteed full cost recovery
- ii. Allows effective control over transportation cost as there are no mass transit systems
- iii. Affords the government the opportunity to effectively monitor and protect the developing economy against vagaries of international market
- iv. Encourages effective regulatory controls to prevent consumers from being short changed
- v. Facilitates the development of healthy competition among operators

The challenges of petroleum fuel subsidy are;

- i. Inappropriate product pricing and price distortions: This has encouraged, product smuggling, black marketeering, acute shortage etc
  - ii. Abuse of fuel subsidy through various malpractices by operators
  - iii. Encourages waste of limited government revenues available for social services
  - iv. The mechanism for administering the fuel subsidy does not guarantee it reaching the intended low income earners of the economy.
  - v. It encourages cross border smuggling of refined products
- From the foregoing, it appears, there are pros and cons of the subsidy program, but who benefits most, will affect policy direction.

The proponents of subsidy removal agreed that;

- i. It will accelerate infrastructural and industrial development
- ii. It promotes sound economic strategies policy with high economic priorities
- iii. It reduces government extra budgets spending and makes revenue available.

However, the opponents of the removal of fuel subsidy believe that:

- i. It gives general benefits to all citizens\
- ii. The mismanagement experienced during fuel subsidy with continue after its removal
- iii. Even when such revenue is made available to government purse, corruptions in the system will still engulf it.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

Refined petroleum products importation into Nigeria is now a game that players know basic tactics, styles and approaches, it is characterized by high level politics from presidency, to NNPC, marketers and strong politicians and businessmen. Whoever controls political power controls this pipe that drains the economy, but information about its operation is mismanaged, unclear and many are misinformed. However, from this study, it's obvious that fuel subsidy and petroleum products importations is a product government mismanagement, in attitude, poor monitoring coupled with marketers and multi-national companies complicity. Refined petroleum product importation has been encouraged, especially by investors who received licenses for refineries construction to boost local production over 15 years and have refused to do the needful based on price politicking.

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