

# Bleak Christmas beckons as soaring costs of Fuel, food scare consumers

[By Isaac Asabor](#)



**A**s the festive season approaches, a cloud of anxiety looms large over many Nigerian households. For years, the Christmas and New Year holidays have been times of joy, marked by family gatherings, sumptuous meals, and travel to hometowns. But this year, as the Christmas lights start to twinkle and the scent of holiday cooking begins to drift through the air, the mood across the nation feels different, tense, uncertain, and restrained.

The removal of fuel subsidies in May last year and subsequent and continuous increment in the price of

premium motor spirit has cast a long shadow on the upcoming festivities, creating a situation where the traditional joys of the season seem out of reach for many. The sharp rise in transportation costs, food prices, and other essential goods have left Nigerians grappling with the harsh economic realities, diminishing the celebratory spirit.

Nigerians are known for celebrating Christmas and New Year with flair, especially in the Southern and Eastern regions. These festivities typically involve large family reunions, complete with feasts featuring rice, chicken, and local delicacies, alongside the clinking of drink-filled glasses as families exchange gifts. Not only that, travel is an integral part of the holiday ritual, with many leaving the bustling cities for their country homes in a nostalgic pilgrimage that has become synonymous with the holiday season.

For most, December has traditionally meant more than just religious observance or seasonal joy, it is a time to reconnect with families, bask in the warmth of community, and celebrate the end of another year. But in 2024, these time-honored traditions are under serious threat.

One Lagos resident, Mrs. Bola Adeyemi, shared her concerns, saying, “Last year, we could at least afford to travel to our village in Ondo. This year, the transport fares alone are enough to wipe out my entire savings. I don't know how we will celebrate Christmas this year. Things have become unbearable.” The most immediate impact of the removal of fuel subsidies has been the drastic increase in transportation costs. With fuel prices tripling in some cases, public transport operators have hiked fares to unprecedented levels, making travel out of reach for many. A journey from Lagos to Enugu, which once cost between ₦7,000 to

₦10,000, now ranges from ₦25,000 to ₦35,000. For a family of five, the cost of simply going home for the holidays could amount to over ₦100,000; a sum that is unfathomable for many Nigerians in the current economic climate. James Iwu, a commercial bus driver in Lagos, explained the situation, “We can't run at a loss. Fuel prices are higher than ever, and if we don't increase fares, we won't make any profit. I feel bad for the passengers, but we have no choice. I know many people will not travel this year because it's just too expensive.”

The spike in transportation costs has left many consumers

worried about how they will manage holiday travel, a cornerstone of the Nigerian festive experience. The increased fare is a reflection of broader inflationary pressures that have been building in the economy, exacerbated by the fuel subsidy removal. Beyond the cost of travel, food prices have also risen dramatically, leaving consumers feeling the pinch. Items like rice, which is a staple at Nigerian Christmas dinners, have seen price hikes that are making holiday planning difficult for families. A 50kg bag of rice, which used to sell for around ₦25,000, and then rose to between ₦40,000 and ₦50,000, and consequently rose to between ₦70,000 and ₦80,000 and now has risen beyond ₦100,000. This spike has been compounded by supply chain disruptions, currency devaluation, and insecurity in the agricultural sector, making local food production less reliable. For families like the Okojies in Benin City, Christmas meals are looking slimmer this year. “We usually buy a whole chicken for Christmas,” said Mrs. Okojie, a mother of four. “But now, even a small chicken costs ₦10,000. We are thinking of just buying fish or even cutting down on the number of people we invite for Christmas dinner. It's so sad.” Market women, too, have felt the brunt of the inflation. In Lagos' Ogba market, Iya Wale, a foodstuff seller, expressed her frustration thus: “We nor know how we go take buy rice, groundnut oil, tomato, and chicken for Christmas, because, price of everything dey go up every day,” she said in pidgin.

Without a doubt, the broader economic context in Nigeria has weakened consumer purchasing power significantly. The removal of the fuel subsidy came alongside other economic pressures, including rising electricity tariffs, higher taxes, and a weakened naira, all of which have contributed to higher costs of living. The average Nigerian's income has not kept pace with inflation, leaving many households stretched thin financially. One of the major indicators of this diminished purchasing power is the decline in consumer spending on non-essential items. Retailers, particularly those dealing in luxury goods or items associated with holiday celebrations, have noted a significant drop in sales as people focus more on essential spending.

“People are holding onto their money tightly,” said Chinedu Okoro, a retailer in Mowe, Ogun state who specializes in electronics and festive decorations. “In previous years, particularly by this time, my shop would be buzzing with customers buying Christmas lights, hampers, and new gadgets for the holidays. This year, I'm hardly seeing any foot traffic. Everyone is talking about how to manage fuel, food, and rent.”

The impact of these economic pressures goes beyond the material aspects of Christmas and New Year celebrations. For many Nigerians, the holiday season is a psychological relief, a time to escape the grind of everyday life and indulge in moments of joy. The current economic climate, however, has drained much of that hope.

Psychologists warn that the stress of dealing with financial difficulties during a traditionally joyous time

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can have long-term mental health effects. “The festive season is meant to bring happiness, but when people are overwhelmed with financial anxieties, it can lead to depression and feelings of inadequacy,” said Dr. Chioma Okafor, a clinical psychologist based in Lagos. “We are seeing more people seeking therapy because they cannot meet the expectations they have for the season, especially when it involves children and family.”

Despite these overwhelming challenges, some Nigerians are determined to make the best of a difficult situation. Mr. Eze Madu, a trader in Onitsha, offered a note of optimism. “Christmas is about more than just food and gifts. It's about family, togetherness, and love. Yes, things are tough this year, but we'll find a way to celebrate, even if it means doing it on a smaller scale. The most important thing is that we are alive and together.”

For others, this year's difficulties have sparked conversations about sustainability and community support. Non-governmental organisations, churches, and local groups are ramping up efforts to distribute food, clothing, and other essentials to those in need.

Pastor Chris Iwu of Redemption Light Ministry, Surulere, Lagos, noted, “We are working with local businesses and the community to ensure that no one goes hungry this Christmas. It's a challenging time, but as a community, we have to come together and help each other.”

In fact, as the countdown to Christmas continues, Nigerians are faced with the reality that this year's festivities will likely be less lavish than before. With transportation and food costs soaring, many families will be forced to scale back their celebrations, opting for simpler meals and limited travel. Yet, amid the bleak outlook, the enduring spirit of resilience that has always defined the Nigerians remains.

Pastor Chris Iwu added: “This Christmas may not be one filled with material abundance, but it offers an opportunity for reflection, community, and finding joy in the little things” as he pontificated that the true meaning of Christmas has always been about love, faith, and togetherness, and values that no economic hardship can take away.”