Rise in fuel prices push food, transport costs higher

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Boda cyclists jostle for fuel at Shell Ankole Mbarara. Some filling stations had run out of fuel in parts of the country last week. PHOTO/JULIUS BYAMUKAMA

BY MONITOR TEAM

The high fuel prices across the country are pushing up the cost of transportation and also goods and services.

Since the start of the US-Israel war with Iran that resulted in the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, some filling stations in different cities and urban areas as across the country have gone out of business due to a lack of fuel.

For stations with fuel, a litre of petrol costs between Shs6,900 and Shs7,000, while diesel ranges from Shs5,780 to Shs6,000 per litre in some cities. The prices were under Shs5,600 per litre of petrol and diesel before the war in Iran broke out on February 28.

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The produce dealers in Nebbi District are already feeling the impact of the hike in the prices of foodstuffs in response to the fuel price increase.

This has forced customers to move longer distances in search of food items at lower prices.

Some of the traders who are unable to foot the transport costs have abandoned the produce business since transport costs are passed on to produce dealers.

West Nile traders speak out

In Nebbi's main market, a bunch of matooke that used to cost Shs10,000 at the beginning of the month now goes for Shs18,000, while a kilogramme of beans now costs Shs 5,000, up from about Shs3,000.

Speaking to the *Daily Monitor* last Wednesday, Ms Beatrice Otim, who has been in the produce business for the last 15 years, said she used to get beans, maize, and other produce from the DR-Congo, but transportation remains a challenge.

Ms Otim added that on market days, she previously bought produce stock around Shs2 million, but she can only afford to pay Shs1 million at the moment. This has affected her income.

She said before the fuel price shot up, transport fares had already been hiked.

"They are now charging a sack of beans and maize at Shs15,000 from Shs 10,000 for transportation. This is making it hard for us to move to and from different marketplaces," Ms Otim said.

Ms Agnes Akumu, a resident of Nebbi town, said feeding big families has become difficult because of the high prices of food items.

She said a kilogramme of cassava flour has also risen from Shs600 to Shs1,000, and posho is being sold at Shs 3,000 per kilogramme, up from about Shs2,500.

"The government needs to find workable solutions to address the current fuel prices since it is the driving factor to livelihoods and an engine to spur development," Ms Akumu said.

Most districts in West Nile are facing the fuel crisis due to supply disruption caused by the US-Israel-Iran war that broke out on February 28.

Similarly, the boda boda riders and truck drivers said they are trapped in their transport businesses because of the fuel prices, and the fuel cost has eaten all their profits.

A boda boda rider who operates between Nebbi District and Paidha Town Council in Zombo District, Mr Charles Ongom, said he has increased the fares from Shs10,000 to Shs20,000 because a litre of fuel goes for Shs8,000 from local fuel dealers.

"While at the filling stations, a litre of petrol is being sold at Shs5,999, which makes it difficult to rely on the old transport fares. Much as customers are complaining of the high fares, we are trying to avoid losses," he said.

One of the truck drivers, Mr Mike Osaga, said traders are now fearing to move regularly, and this has affected the businesses.

"It is through the transportation of traders that we earn money. If traders are not moving, then it will be difficult because we are paid a percentage [commission] by our bosses," he said.

He said some drivers have since parked their vehicles because of high fuel prices, for fear of incurring losses.

A local dealer, Mr Emmanuel Ocowun, said they used to smuggle fuel from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo), but the Congolese are nowadays running to Uganda to find cheaper fuel.

Mr Ocowun said in Mahagi District in DR Congo, a litre of petrol costs between Shs10,000 and Shs12,000 depending on its availability.

"Now, we cannot access fuel from DR Congo because Congolese are also buying fuel from Ugandan filling stations. We are now buying fuel in jerry cans at the pump's price and selling it locally in the rural areas to our customers," Mr Ocowun said.

CURRENT STATUS

Available stock levels as of April 20

Petrol:	70.5m litres (19 days cover)
Diesel:	43.2m litres (12 days cover)
Jet Fuel:	32.0m litres (53 days cover)
To be delivered from May 1 to June 2026	
183m litres of petrol (49 days more of cover)	
258m litres of diesel (74 days more of cover)	
23m litres of jet fuel (37 days more of cover)	

SOURCE: ENERGY MINISTRY/UNOC

Elsewhere

In Kabale, the traders have attributed the increase in prices of some house items to the hike in fuel prices in the area.

Ms Margaret Guma said she has increased the price of charcoal from Shs33,000 to Shs40,000 per bag because of the increase in the cost of transporting the bags to her stall.

"Since transport costs have increased from Shs2,000 to Shs5,000 per bag of charcoal, we have also increased the price of a bag of charcoal from Shs33,000 to Shs40,000. All this increase is as a result of the increased prices of fuel in the area," Ms Guma said.

Prices of transporting building materials such as bricks, stones, and sand in Kabale Town have been increased by Shs20,000 because of the ever-increasing fuel prices.

"We have increased the cost of transporting stones, bricks, and sand from Shs120,000 to Shs140,000 because of the increased fuel prices," Mr Musa Karengye, a truck lorry driver, said.

In Kisoro District, Mr Baker Batamukoraho, the general secretary of the Kisoro United Boda-boda Operators Association, said the recent hike in fuel prices has forced about 30 percent of association members riding hired motorcycles to abandon the business and return the motorcycles to their owners.

"We are worried that boda boda riders who are leaving the industry due to high fuel prices may resort to criminal activities, such as waylaying people at night. This industry employs more than 5,000 people, especially the youth, including university graduates. It is a very important source of livelihood for many families," Mr Batamukoraho said.

In Kabale District, the chairman of the Kabale Central Taxi operators, Mr Saturday Byamugisha, said operators have increased transport costs by Shs5,000 due to a hike in fuel prices.

"Transport cost from Kabale Town to Mbarara Town has been increased from Shs15,000 to Shs20,000, while that of Kabale to Ntungamo has been increased from Shs10,000 to Shs15,000 per person. A traveller from Kabale to Kisoro is paying Shs15,000 instead of Shs10,000. These changes have come as a result of increased fuel prices," Mr Byamugisha said.

The price of petrol in Kabale Town on Friday ranged between Shs5,800 and Shs8,000 per litre, while diesel prices ranged between Shs5,343 and Shs5,680 per litre.

In Mbale City and neighbouring districts, locals are also feeling the pinch as fuel prices soar, and transport operators are passing the cost on to passengers.C

Mr Robert Muboolo, a boda boda rider in Mbale, said they have almost doubled the fares due to the rising cost of fuel.

"Where we have been charging Shs2,000, we are demanding Shs4,000, and if the fuel prices hike further, we will escalate the transportation fares," he said.

Ms Aminah Nambozo, a market vendor at Kumi Road Market, expressed fear, saying prices of foodstuffs and other items have started to rise. "It has started to have repercussions on all other products," she said.

A kilogramme of beef now costs Shs18,000, up from Shs16,000 in Bugisu Sub-region.

In Mbale, the pump prices ranged from Shs5,400 to Shs6,000 for petrol and Shs5,000and Shs5,000 to Shs5,500 for diesel.

The Jinja Central Market Chairperson, Mr Henry Mujimba, said traders have also increased prices of some commodities due to high fuel prices.

"We have increased prices of some commodities, including second-hand clothes, hardware items, and plumbing materials," he said.

Mr Mujimba added that traders have opted not to stock some items until market conditions stabilise, noting that customers are increasingly reluctant to purchase expensive goods.

Mr Musa Dauku, a retail shop operator in Jinja City, said rising fuel prices are pushing prices of commodities high.

"I go shopping with a budget, but when I reach the suppliers, the prices are higher than expected. As a result, I am forced to leave out some items," Mr Dauku said.

He added that a kilogramme of sugar is sold between Shs4,000 and Shs4,400 up from under Shs4,000, while a bar of laundry soap now costs Shs6,500, up from Shs5,500.

He also noted that a litre of cooking oil has increased from Shs7,000 to Shs7,700.

In Jinja City, a litre of fuel costs between Shs5,500 and Shs5,990.

In Namutumba District, a litre of fuel now costs between Shs6,500 and Shs7,000, with some fuel stations going up to four days without supply.

As a result, boda boda riders have increased transport fares by Shs2,000, raising charges from Shs1,000 to Shs3,000.

Explanation. Since transport costs have increased from Shs2,000 to Shs5,000 per bag of charcoal, we have also increased the price of a bag of charcoal from Shs33,000 to Shs40,000. All this increase is as a result of the increased prices of fuel in the area,"
- Ms Margaret Guma, a charcoal dealer

In Arua, a litre of petrol now costs between Shs 6,900 and Shs7,000, while diesel ranges from Shs5,780 to Shs6,000.

As a result, taxi fares have jumped from Shs10,000 to Shs 15,000 for the Apac-Lira route, and boda boda riders are charging Shs30,000, up from Shs12,000.

Mr Moses Engur Alele, head of Apac Taxi Operators and Drivers Association, said the hike is necessary to offset rising fuel costs.

"We have to charge more to stay afloat," he said.

But passengers are not happy. Mr Alex Aboce, who travelled from Apac to Lira City, described the experience as "discomforting and risky".

"Twelve of us were crammed into a Toyota Ipsum, each paying Shs15,000. It's unacceptable," he said.

In the western part of the country, most boda boda riders have complained about declining profits due to reduced customer numbers.

Mr Owen Tusiime, a rider from Muhorro Town Council, explained that business has significantly declined.

"Previously, one would return home with about Shs35,000 after a day's work. Now, it is difficult even to make Shs10,000. Customers prefer walking because transport costs have gone up, for example, a distance of about one kilometre now costs Shs2,000, up from between Shs1,000 and Shs1,500," he said.

Fuel shortages and price hikes across the region have worsened the situation. Starlight filling station has temporarily closed and, for the past two months, has been operating as a parking yard.

Local dealers queue at HAB filling station in Nebbi Town to buy fuel, which they sell in rural areas, last Thursday. PHOTO/PATRICK OBABA

Vehicle owners are now charged Shs2,000 for daytime parking and Shs4,000 at night.

Fuel dealers said they are also feeling the pinch. Several, who spoke to *Daily Monitor*, have reduced their purchasing volumes due to high costs, with some stations cutting their usual supply by half.

In Kyanyambali Trading Centre, fuel prices have surged to as high as Shs10,000 per litre on some murram roads. One rider noted that he used two litres of fuel to cover just seven kilometres, highlighting the growing cost of operations.

Transport fares have also increased sharply. Travel from Kagadi to Ibanda now costs between Shs45,000 and Shs50,000, up from the previous Shs35,000.

In Fort Portal City, fuel prices have risen in the last two weeks. At Shell, petrol is selling at Shs5,450, up from Shs5,400 in just three days, while diesel has increased to Shs5,330 from Shs5,270. However, some stations are reportedly running out of fuel altogether.

At the Total filling station in Ibanda District, there was no petrol on Saturday evening. Later, a fuel vehicle came to deliver fuel in the morning, but the prices are at Shs6,200 a litre and diesel at Shs5,790. At Shell Ankole, petrol is sold at Shs5,595 and diesel at Shs5,290.

Mr Puterabo Micheal, the manager at Shell Ankole Mbarara, said: "As *Vivo Energy*, we follow international standards; we didn't use the crisis to increase the price of fuel."

"There is a traffic jam at our stations because our prices favour every customer. Other stations have higher prices; most of the customers are looking for a place where the fuel is cheap," he added.

Mr Ivan Ngobi, a boda boda rider in Mbarara City, said: "I have realised every filling station has its own price because here at Shell Ankole, the price is still low, while at other stations it goes up to Shs10,000 per litre. We were told that Uganda has enough fuel, but why don't they release it, because we are suffering from this fuel crisis."

"Getting fuel below Shs5,000 has become difficult. The government has always said they have oil in Hoima, but when are they bringing it, and we use it? See, we are being charged highly, yet we earn less," Mr Kakuru Kenneth, a boda cyclist, said.

As of last Friday, prices of fuel in Ibanda were changing at various time intervals. At Mogas filling station, there was no petrol. Diesel was being sold at Shs5,780 in the morning, but by evening, each litre was sold for Shs6,000. On Saturday, at Bam filling station, petrol prices were at Shs8,000 a litre and diesel at Shs7,200.

Mr Benson Tumusiime, a boda boda operator in Ibanda Town, decried the high fuel prices in the district.

"We have also increased charges for now. Town service is now Shs2,000, up from Shs1,000," he said.

Mr Tumusiime added: "At some petrol stations there is no fuel, and others have put extra charges. We are likely going to park our motorcycles if fuel prices keep rising."

In Soroti, anxiety gripped motorists as filling stations ran empty, with pump attendants seen waving off customers.

At Shell and Total Energies, the globally renowned icons in the fuel business, by last Tuesday, were seen dispensing diesel at their filling stations, but some of their stations had run out of petrol

Mr Sam Okello, one of the pump attendants, said the station expects fuel replenishment, but when it will be don, remains unknown.

No major changes in Acholi

In several parts of the Acholi Sub-region, transport fares and food prices have remained stable despite a significant increase in fuel prices.

In Gulu City, for example, by Saturday evening, fuel prices for petrol ranged between Shs5,500 and Shs7,500. However, Total filling stations were closed due to depleted fuel stocks.

"We have kept prices of food commodities that we ship from elsewhere stable; it will only increase once the truck drivers increase fares for us," Ms Jennifer Akot, the secretary of Lacor Market Vendors Association, said in an interview.

"We are yet to have a meeting next week as transport operators to decide on the next course of action. Of course, the increased fuel prices are already hitting us badly, and it is likely going higher at the weekend," Mr Denis Okello, a taxi operator who plies the Gulu-Nimule highway, said.

GOVT ON THE FUEL ISSUE

Last week, the Ministry of Finance called for calm, saying the economy is not in a crisis and assuring that the Ministry of Energy and the Uganda National Oil Company (Unoc) are on top of the situation.

A joint Ministry of Energy and Unoc statement issued last Thursday, stated that the country had, as of 20 April 2026, 70.5 million litres of petrol – enough for 19 days of national cover – alongside 43.2 million litres of diesel for 12 days and 32 million litres of jet fuel for 53 days."

It further added that Uganda expects to take in an additional 183 million litres of petrol, 258 million litres of diesel, and 23 million litres of jet fuel between May and June this year.

The ministry said isolated retail outages are tied to "logistical operations affecting individual Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs)" rather than a national shortfall. Price spikes in border towns like Arua and Tororo, it added, have been driven largely by cross-border demand, and OMCs have been engaged where "unjustified increases" appeared. While global oil dynamics, exchange rates, and geopolitics can move pump prices, the government said it continues to monitor the market to keep prices "within manageable levels".

The statement added that UNOC, working with licenced OMCs and regional partners, is coordinating logistics to ensure the incoming volumes are received and distributed nationwide.

Mr Peter Ochieng, a regional fuel marketing expert who tracks East African import cycles, said the mismatch often comes down to distribution, not headline volumes.

"Vessels in Mombasa solve the country's stock question, but they don't solve the dealer's cash flow question. When small players buy from bigger ones at a premium because they can't finance full cargoes or KPC line capacity, you get dry forecourts even when the national number is healthy," Mr Ochieng told *Daily Monitor* last week.

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