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WHEN FUEL PRICES RISE, KENYANS FEEL IT EVERYWHERE

There is a growing frustration across Kenya today — in Nairobi, Kisumu, Mombasa, Eldoret, and in the smallest rural towns. It is a quiet anger, but it is everywhere.

Fuel prices have gone up again. And for many Kenyans, this is not just another government announcement. It is a direct hit to daily survival.

Because in Kenya, fuel is not just about cars. It is about everything.

When petrol and diesel prices rise, matatu fares go up almost immediately. The worker who already struggles to make ends meet now has to dig deeper into their pocket just to get to work. For many, that means choosing between transport and food.

For the mama mboga in the market, it means vegetables arrive at a higher cost. For the farmer, it means more expensive fertiliser transport and diesel for machinery. For the shop owner, it means higher delivery costs. And for families, it means food prices quietly creeping up week after week.

The truth is simple: when fuel goes up, life becomes more expensive for everyone — but especially for the poor.

And this is where the real disappointment lies.

Many Kenyans feel that the burden is becoming too heavy, and that government decisions are not fully reflecting the realities on the ground. Wages are not increasing at the same pace. Jobs are not becoming easier to find. Yet the cost of living keeps rising — one fuel adjustment at a time.

There is also a growing sense that the system is not transparent enough. People see the price at the pump, but they do not always understand how it got there. Taxes, levies, global oil prices, exchange rates — these are complex issues. But when communication is unclear, it creates suspicion and mistrust.

Kenyans are not unreasonable. They understand that global oil prices fluctuate. They understand that the shilling can weaken. They understand that government needs revenue.

But what they are asking is this:
why does the pain always fall so quickly and so heavily on ordinary citizens?

How This Is Affecting Real Lives

This is no longer just an economic discussion. It is personal.

A young worker in Nairobi now spends a bigger share of their salary just getting to work.

A family in Kisumu is cutting back on food because prices have risen.

A farmer in Eldoret is questioning whether the next planting season is even affordable.

A small business owner in Mombasa is thinking twice about hiring or expanding.

The economy may still be growing on paper. But for many Kenyans, life is getting harder.

What Should Be Done Now

Complaining alone is not enough. Kenya needs practical, realistic solutions that reduce the pain without damaging the economy.

1. **Support the Most Vulnerable — Directly.** Instead of trying to reduce fuel prices for everyone, government should focus on helping those who are struggling the most.

   Cash support, transport vouchers, or targeted assistance through mobile money can go a long way in protecting low-income households.

   This approach works better because it puts help directly into the hands of people who need it — instead of spreading resources too thinly.

2. **Protect Public Transport.** Matatus and buses are the backbone of daily life. If fares rise too sharply, it becomes a national problem — affecting jobs, productivity, and livelihoods.

   Government should consider temporary support for public transport operators, but with clear conditions:

   - Keep fares stable
   - Maintain routes
   - Operate transparently

   This is not about subsidies for profit — it is about protecting mobility.

3 Reduce Pressure on Food Prices

Fuel increases quickly turn into food increases.

Kenya must protect key food supply routes — from farms to markets — so that transport costs do not spiral into a food crisis.

Targeted support for logistics, cold chains, and farm transport can stabilise prices where it matters most.

4 Be Honest and Transparent

Kenyans deserve to understand what they are paying for.

Government should clearly show:

- What portion of fuel prices comes from global markets
- What portion comes from taxes and levies
- What can and cannot be controlled

When people understand the situation, they are more likely to accept difficult decisions.

5 Adjust Taxes Carefully During Extreme Shocks

There may be times when fuel prices rise too sharply.

In those moments, government can temporarily reduce certain levies — not as a permanent solution, but as a short-term cushion.

But this must be:

- Transparent
- Time-bound
- Carefully managed

Otherwise, it risks damaging public finances.

6 Invest in Rail and Smarter Logistics

Kenya still depends heavily on trucks to move goods.

That makes the economy very vulnerable to diesel price increases.

Expanding rail transport and improving logistics can reduce this dependence over time — making the country more resilient.

7 Accelerate the Shift to Cheaper Energy Alternatives

Kenya cannot rely on imported fuel forever.

Electric mobility, cleaner energy, and alternative fuels are no longer luxuries — they are economic necessities.

The more Kenya reduces its dependence on oil, the less exposed it will be to global price shocks.

A Moment of Truth

This situation is more than just a fuel price issue.
It is a test of leadership.

It is a test of whether policy decisions truly consider the everyday Kenyan — the worker, the farmer, the trader, the small business owner.

Kenyans are resilient. They always have been.

But resilience should not be taken for granted.

There is a limit to how much pressure households can absorb before it begins to break the social and economic fabric.

Final Reflection

Fuel price increases may be unavoidable at times.

But the way a country responds — that is a choice.

Kenya now faces that choice.

It can allow rising fuel costs to quietly erode livelihoods…
or it can act decisively to protect its people while building a stronger, more resilient economy.

The path forward is clear:

Protect the vulnerable.
Stabilise transport and food.
Be transparent.
And invest in a future that depends less on fuel.

Because at the end of the day, this is not just about petrol and diesel.

It is about the dignity of everyday life in Kenya.

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