



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION OF POVERTY  
ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The excruciating effect of poverty in Nigeria is pervasive. This paper presents an overview of the nature and prevalence of poverty in Nigeria generally, and in Akwa Ibom State specifically. It examines some of the poverty Alleviation Programmes instituted and implemented by the Akwa Ibom State Life enhancement agency between 2001 and 2015. The paper also evaluates the actions and/or inactions of the state political leadership during the implementation and administration of these programmes which have tended to impede or contribute to the sluggish attainment of the envisaged objective of the programmes. Descriptive and qualitative methodology is adopted in this work. Also, the work is situated within the "Marxist Political Economy Theoretical Framework". Data used was gathered from books, Journals, Government Publications and Library Materials. The paper suggests that there is a strong relationship between the poverty prevalence in Akwa Ibom State in particular and Nigeria in general and lack of commitment by the political leadership responsible for the implementation and administration of these poverty alleviation programmes in the country. It recommends that tougher legislation and effective monitoring machinery must be put in place to check the political leadership in order to forestall nepotism, favouritism, ethnocentrism, misappropriation, corruption and undue capturing of the benefits of the programmes, which would have accrued to the "real poor" and the "benefiting communities", to satisfy their private selfish interest.

*Keywords:* Political Leadership, Administration, Poverty Alleviation Programme, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Poverty is a global phenomenon; but its high incidence and widespread in Akwa Ibom State vis-à-vis Nigeria is obviously a paradox. The paradoxity arises from the fact that Nigeria is so rich, yet it is rated amongst the poorest nations of the world while the Akwa Ibom State is the second largest Oil Producing State in Nigeria, yet it is the 7th poorest in the country (Ekpo and Uwatt, 2005:2). As aptly put by the World Bank (1996), "the country is rich, but the people are poor". In addition to this report, in 1992, about 90 percent of Nigerians were confirmed to have been spending their income, mostly on food; and according to Engle's law as reiterated by Ruggles (1990), any household that has to spend

more than the specified maximum share of its income on basic needs such as food, housing, health care, etc. is considered poor. Again, the United Nations Development Programme, using the Human Development Index (HDI), had measured the progress or retrogression of some countries with data gathered on Life Expectancy, Adult Literacy Rate and Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita adjusted to the local cost of living in 1997 and Nigeria was ranked 142<sup>nd</sup> with an HDI of 0.40 amongst the 174 countries listed. By 1998 the country dropped to the 146<sup>th</sup> position and fell amongst the 40 poorest countries indicating that Nigerians are extremely poor (Ekpo and Uwatt, 2005:2). Available statistics have confirmed that Akwa Ibom State is the seventh poorest state in the country with 72.3 percent of its inhabitants living below the poverty line in 1986. About 38.9 percent of the population are moderately poor, 33.4 percent belong to the core poor class, while its non-poor is only 27.4 percent (Ekpo and Uwatt, 2005:2). Investigations revealed that 95 percent of the non-poor make their wealth from politics (political leaders); while the remaining 5 percent are Entrepreneurs. The state is widely known as a "civil service state" because the state Government is the sole employer of labour.

To reduce this high incidence of poverty and ensure that there exist the necessary synergy between economic growth and economic prosperity of the people, the past and present governments in Nigeria and Akwa Ibom State have instituted numerous poverty eradication (or reduction) strategies (programmes) most of which are in moribund state. Those instituted and implemented by the Akwa Ibom State Life Enhancement Agency could be classified as on-going.

The problem is that, in spite' of the numerous Poverty Alleviation Programmes implemented in Akwa Ibom State, vis-a-vis Nigeria, by NDE, NAPEP, SMEDAN, Akwa Ibom State Life Enhancement Agency, as well as the on-going National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS); Akwa 'Ibom State Economic empowerment and Development Strategy (AK-SEEDS); and Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (LEEDS), the impact of these programmes have not really been felt by the people. The level of poverty continues to be high especially amongst vulnerable groups like the graduates from secondary and tertiary institutions, youths, women, handicapped persons, orphans and others. Why is it that none of the numerous programmes is capable of achieving and sustaining poverty alleviation in Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria? Is the weakness due to poor implementation of policies and programmes? If this is the case (which is the likely thing, because all policies and programmes cannot be inadequate), then it zeros in the focus of this paper on the degree of commitment, by the political leadership (including the bureaucratic leadership) during the implementation of the numerous lofty programmes on poverty alleviation in Akwa Ibom State.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 *Politics*

The definition of politics are so numerous and varied as are political philosophers and political scientists; hence, this paper has only picked out the views of David-Easton, Harold Lasswell and Okwudiba Nnoli within which its analysis is conducted. In the views of Easton (1965), politics is conceived as "the authoritative allocation of values". This, by implication, infer that politics contains some elements of authority (power), and this could be used negatively or positively for development purposes. Considering the abstract nature of Easton's definition which could not explain the type of "value" he meant; the view of Lasswell (1936) was added to our analysis. According to Lasswell, politics could be viewed as "who gets what when and how", At least, he had successfully drawn our attention to certain aspects of political reality in Nigeria where political leaders used access to political office as a means of accumulation of private wealth at the expense of the poor masses. This

appears to be the cause of, according to Ikpe (2005:4), the "tempestuous and norm-less political competition" as well as the high incidence of poverty in Nigeria.

In his opinion, Nnoli (1986) espoused politics as all those activities which are directly or indirectly associated with the seizure of state power, the consolidation of state power and the use of state power. This conception elucidates the fact that the ruling class (political leaders) after the seizure of state power, uses it first to further its interest before considering the interest of other classes in the society. This explains why the bourgeoisie (political leaders) in Nigeria uses their control of state power to exploit the proletariat (workers and peasants) with a view to acquiring more wealth to consolidate their domination of the poor masses, hence, in Nigeria, the rich are made richer while the poor are made poorer.

## 2.2 Poverty

Poverty in this paper is viewed from two perspectives: the prescriptions of the UNDP and that of Professor Sam Uniamikogbo. The United Nation Development Programme (UNDP, 1998:10) understand poverty as:

The denial of choice and opportunities most basic to human development, the opportunities to live a tolerable life not only materially but also psychologically, politically, socially and culturally. It also implies the lack of the ability to make choices and uses available opportunities purposefully.

Moreso, "for a given country in a given circumstance, poverty must be conceived, defined and measured in absolute quantitative ways that are relevant and valid for analysis and policy making in that given time and space. Poverty, specifications should become relative once circumstances in the country change. Poverty has many dimensions, such as inadequate income, malnutrition, lack of access to social services, and lack of social and political status" (Uniamikogbo, 1997:21). The analysis that follows is conducted with reference to these two conceptions of poverty.

## 3. DISCUSSIONS

In view of the strong relationship that exist between politics and economy (as is the case between political leadership and poverty prevalence) as well as the fact that political decisions often influence economic policies and economic policies often influence political decisions, it is expedient to locate this paper within the "Marxist Political Economy Approach". According to Akpuru-Aja (1998), although it is difficult to separate political economy as "a discipline" from political economy as "an approach", there is need to make a clear difference between the two. Hence, he posits that: "political Economy is a tool of analysis, or a framework for organizing approaches, concepts, theorems, hypotheses and theories to explain, analyze and predict the interplay of forces which determine not only the nature of capitalist and socialist economies, but the structure of the present domestic and, international political economy and direction of change" (Akpuru-Aja, 1998:10).

The outstanding feature of Marxist Political Economy Approach is that it is based on "dialectical materialism" otherwise known as "Economic determinism" which gives primacy to material or economic conditions of the society. The principal theoretical foundation of this paper as supported by Marx and Engels (1973:504) is that, "the economic structure or the productive system of a society is the real foundation on which the legal and political superstructure and specific forms of social consciousness" is built upon. In other words, it is the Marxists belief that, a specific mode of production conditions a specific social, political

and intellectual reality. Once we understand what the material assets and constraints of a society are, how the society produces goods to meet its material needs, how the goods are distributed and what types of social relations arises from the organization of production, we have come a long way to understanding the culture of the society; its laws, its religious system and its mode of thought.

In Nigeria (Akwa Ibom State inclusive) as an underdeveloped capitalist state, the primary source of accumulation of wealth is the State through politics. Thus, politics becomes hegemonic as the struggle for power becomes so intense and absorbing that it has overshadowed everything else including the merit of development. The appearances suggest that development is our major pre-occupation. It is not and cannot be, at least for most of our leaders. They are, as it were, in a state of siege and their first concern, sometimes it seems to be the only one, is to survive and produce their domination. The most dependable source of wealth is the occupation of state office (politics) which leads directly to deprivation of the people (underdevelopment/poverty). Thus, the central thesis of this paper is that, in Nigeria and indeed Akwa Ibom State, politics engenders underdevelopment and poverty and there is a visible conflict between the need for eradication of poverty by the people on one hand, and the struggle for survival and domination by the leaders on the other hand. The damaging effect of this conflict is noticed everywhere. It leads to the misuse of manpower, resources and to inefficiency in service delivery and misappropriation and corruption. Furthermore, important development projects may be initiated for wrong reasons, they may be located in places where they are least beneficial economically on account of political considerations. We are all too familiar with cases where important contracts and licenses have been given to politically significant people who are unable to execute them successfully which turns out to defeat national and development interest (Ihonvbere, 1989.:56).

Invariably, if poverty alleviation policies and programmes are such political strategies designed by political elites to siphon public funds into their private pockets, then no matter the loftiness of such policies, they will fail. Some have been designed for the survival of the political leaders, not for the development of the people. Hence the numerous policies and programmes of poverty alleviation in Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria have failed because of the incompatibility between the development potentials in them and the exploitative and selfish intention for survival and domination by the political leadership.

Thus, the hypotheses that this paper rests its arguments are: (i) the more the Poverty Alleviation Programmes are executed to satisfy the private interest of political leaders, the greater their chances of failure; (ii) Lack of commitment by political leadership to the implementation of poverty alleviation programmes increases the chance of failure of such programmes.

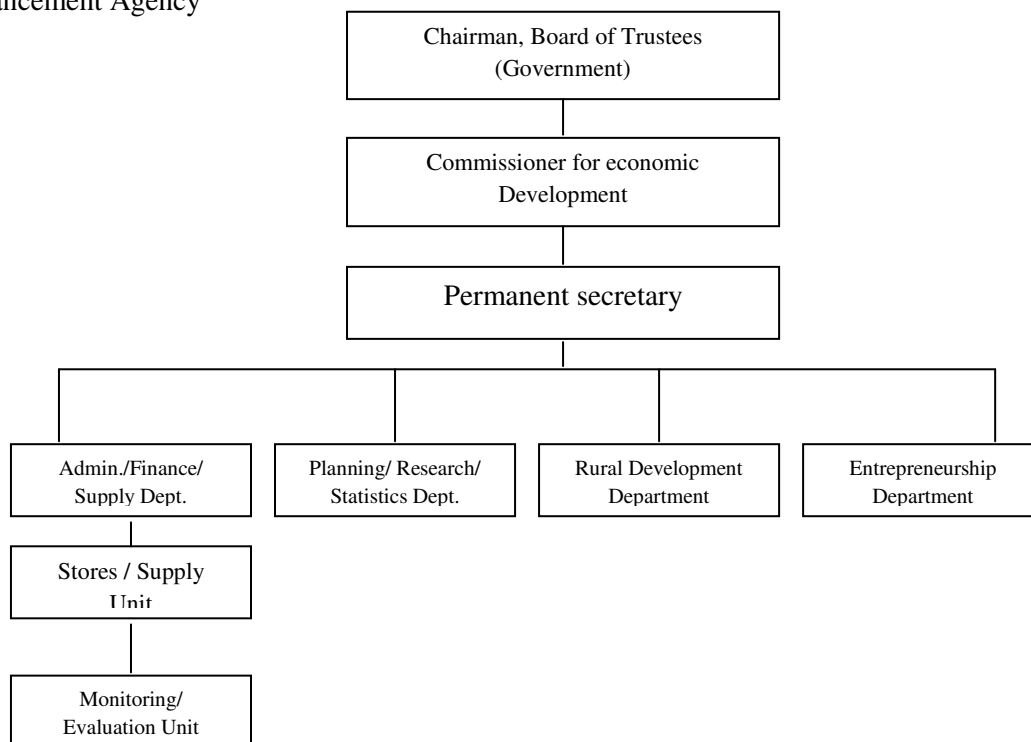
### *3.1 An Analytical Review of Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Akwa Ibom State 2000 - 2005*

The Akwa Ibom State Life Enhancement Agency was established in April 2000 as an Inter-ministerial committee on Poverty Alleviation. The committee, in December 2001, metamorphosed by law into an Agency. The State Government established this Agency to use it complement the Federal Government's efforts in formulating, implementing and administering poverty alleviation programmes, policies and strategies which could ultimately result to the eventual eradication of poverty and enhancement of high standard of living amongst the indigenes of the state.

The administrative structure of the Agency comprises of 13 members of the Board of Trustees with the State Governor as the Chairman. Also, the State Governor has appointed the Commissioner for Economic Development to represent him always as the Political Head of the Agency while a Permanent Secretary has been appointed specially for the Agency as the bureaucratic head whose responsibility it is to implement, as directed by the political

leader, the policies, programmes and schemes initiated by the agency. The Agency has four departments headed by Directors, namely: Department of Administration/Finance/ Supply; the Department of Planning/Research/Statistics; the department of Rural Development and the Department of Entrepreneurship. The staff strength of the Agency stands at forty. The organogram below shows how commands and instructions flow vertically and hierarchically in the Agency:

Fig 1: The Organogram of the Administrative Structure of Akwa Ibom State Life Enhancement Agency



The vision of the Agency is to become an effective and efficient instrument for the eradication of poverty; and its mission is to develop and disseminate productive and entrepreneurial skills and facilitate the establishment of a variety of small-scale businesses for self-employment and income generation. The major functions of the Agency were spelt out as follows:

- To advise the State Government on ways and means of alleviating poverty among the people.
- To formulate policies, programmes and strategies for the reduction and eventual elimination of poverty and thereby enhance the living standard of the people.
- To identify, train and/or provide material support to unskilled and unemployed skilled persons to reduce unemployment and improve their living standard.
- To provide equipment and material support to viable small-scale enterprises co-operative societies/groups and individuals involved in agriculture, industry and commerce.
- To build, equip and run in collaboration with viable NGOs, skills acquisition centres and also support existing functional skills acquisition and literacy centers.
- To register, support and monitor non-governmental organizations engaged in Poverty Alleviation and life enhancement activities.
- To source for financial assistance and contributions from the Federal and Local Government as well as from the organized private sector.

- To disseminate information to beneficiaries on additional sources of funding and also provide research findings to enable them develop and improve their small-scale business enterprises.
- To streamline and rationalize Poverty Alleviation programmes/ schemes in order to revamp the state's economy and improve living condition.
- To provide assistance to handicapped persons and support charitable organizations and programmes.
- To sensitize and empower the people to increase productivity and thereby promote private sector growth.

### 3.2 Administration of Poverty Alleviation Programmes By Akwa Ibom State Life Enhancement Agency

Evaluating on the basis of the mandatory functions listed above vis-a-vis the actual performance of the Agency within its five years of existence (2000 - 2005), there are several recorded achievements in the area of employments generation/jobs creation. A close perusal of the table has revealed that the Agency executed eleven important projects, which touched the lives of many indigenes of the state. For instance the free medical mission of the year 2000 covered (eleven) 11 communities; and many people were treated; the distribution of Agricultural and fishing in-puts to 155 co- operative groups in 31 Local Government Areas in the state assisted many in generating self-employment; again in 2000/2001, the distribution of Equipment Support in Dress making, Hair Dressing, barbing, Soap making, carpentry, welding and straight sewing machines to 31 persons in 31 Local Government Area and 26 mothers of malnourished children in the state (totaling 987 people) indicates a right step in the right direction. Numerous other projects like Oil Palm and Cassava Processing Mills; Generating sets' skill development trainings as well as construction and equipment of skill Development Centres deserve acknowledgment and commendation. However, it must still be remarked that the Skill Development Centre at Nsit, Ubium Local Government Area had been left "uncompleted due to non-availability of fund."

Equally, only one (1) person in Ini Local Government area was assisted in 2003/2004 with working capital and Baking Powder Equipment to start his own business, this was just a drop of water in an ocean. It must be emphasized that poverty prevalence in the state is still severe and much is still expected from the State Political Leadership in terms of commitment to the implementation of all the Poverty Alleviation Programmes, especially facilitating the establishment of more Small-scale businesses for self-employment and income generation by the poor masses in line with the mission of the Agency.

Table1: Amount Disbursed by Akwa Ibom State Life Enhancement Agency-to Beneficiaries Between 2000 and 2005

Years	Amount Disbursed to purchase equipment/ agic inputs	SALES of equipment/ agic inputs to beneficiaries at 50% of cost of purchase	Cumulative at 50% of cost of purchase	Repayment by beneficiaries (Actual Amount Recovered)	Outstanding balance	Remark
2000	31,390,150.00	15,695,075.00	-	-	15,695,075.00	Repayment by beneficiaries is for 36 months from date of collection after 3 months moratorium
2001	41,371,532.00	20,935,766.00	36,630,841.00	4,227,619.50	32,403,221.50	
2002	17,735,801.00	8,867,900.00	45,498,741.50	4,158,390.00	37,102,732.00	
2003	-	-	45,498,741.50	1,761,470.00	35,341,262.00	
2004	10,178,175.00	5,089,087.50	50,587,829.00	1,709,530.00	38,720,819.50	
2005	-	-	50,587,829.00	2,454,397.00	36,266,422.50	
Total	101,175,658.00	50,587,829.00	50,587,829.00	14,321,406.50	36,266,422.50	

Source: Obtained from Life Enhancement Agency, Uyo, Nigeria

Note: The money shown in the table is quoted in local Nigerian currency (the Naira).

In table 1.2 above it has been discovered that the State Government has sunk in a total sum of ₦101,175,658.00 into these projects with an expectation to recover only 50% amounting to ₦ 50,587,809.00 from the beneficiaries. As at the time of the compilation of records only ₦14,321,406.50 was recovered, leaving a whopping sum of ₦36,266,422.50 in the hands of the beneficiaries. This reluctant attitude in loan repayment, to say the least, is not encouraging as this may obstruct others from benefiting from this assistance. The state Government obviously deserves commendation but more should be done to ensure that poverty is reduced to barest minimum in the state.

### *3.2.1 constraints on Administration of Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Akwa Ibom State*

The Agency had encountered numerous constraints during the discharge of its statutory responsibilities and these include the following:-

#### *(a) Financial Constraint*

There is no sufficient funds to execute enough programmes to meet the needs of the poor unemployed indigenes of the state which permeates vulnerable groups like the secondary school leavers, graduates from tertiary institutions, handicap persons, women and even the numerous political and motor park touts roaming the streets of the State Capital and our rural areas. Only the sum of N101,175,658.00 had been received from the State Governments for its programme between 2000 and, 2005. This is obviously very insufficient.

#### *(b) Insufficient Professional Personnel/Monitoring Vehicles*

The Agency executed most of its Programmes through 'contractors due to paucity of personnel especially the highly skilled and professional staff like Engineers, (Civil, Electrical and Electronic Engineers), the Economists (only one), the Accountants (only two), the Statistician (only one), and the Lawyers (none) and others. Even the few monitoring staff available have no sufficient vehicles to use for projects monitoring.

#### *(c) Political Interference/ Political Patronage*

Most of the contracts awarded by the Agency went to loyalists and political lackeys of the political leaders. All procurements are handled by them at inflated rates. The directives often come from "above" and are always compulsory. Projects locations are always influenced by political consideration and not where they are mostly needed by the poors. The recipients of the procured and distributed equipments/inputs are not the real poors but supporters, friends and relatives of the Political Leadership.

#### *(d) Poor Attitude of Borrowers/Political Lending*

The belief of an average Akwa Ibom man or woman towards Government Loans and enhancement packages is that it is a national cake and whoever is lucky to grab it has gotten his/her own share of the national cake. Politicians who received the loans claimed that it was a measure of the patronage they rendered to the Government in power and so have refused to repay .

*(e) Poor Personnel Management System*

There is no commitment to Personnel Motivation, Training and Integration. Interview conducted revealed that most of the recruitments were not based on "Merit" but rather on "spoil" system whereby the political leaders sent in their subjects for employment in the Agency without regards to competency and professionalism.

*(f) Ineffective Loan Recovery Strategy*

There is no effective strategy for recovering unpaid Micro-Credits that were given out to the so-called "Poors". Instead of prosecuting defaulters in law court to recover the loans, the debts were declared as "Bad Debts". This confirms the allegations made by members of the public that most of the loans were collected by the Political Leaders through their agents who stood in as the "poor masses". For example out of the ₦ 50,587,829.00 given out to the so called "poors", only ₦14,321,406.50 was recovered while outstanding balance was ₦ 36,266,422.50.

*(g) Non-Involvement of The Poors During Policy Formulation*

The Agency uses two major strategies to fight poverty in the State, namely:- Skill Acquisition Programmes, (an embodiment of training and supply of equipments) and Micro-Credit Schemes. During the implementation of these programmes, evidences abound to confirm that the opinions of the people were not sought for during the designing of the programmes. For instance, Palm Oil Processing Mills were located where there were no Palm Fruits to process. The rural women had to travel to Akamkpa in Cross River State to buy Palm Fruits and by the time all expenses were estimated including transport, little or nothing was left as profit. Now, most of the mills have been abandoned for few women who can afford the huge capital needed for procurement of Trailer-Loads of these Palm Fruits for onward retailing to the rural women, who can not still make profit after toiling throughout night's and days. Other examples are situations whereby youths were trained as Tailors, Carpenters and Farmers, but on completion of the training and collection of the initial resettlement loans for their vocations, they diverted the loans to purchase motorcycles for use in commercial transportation businesses known as "Okadas" or "Alalok" or "how-far". Those who would have utilized these loans effectively were not selected for the training because they were not known by the Political Leaders whereas those who were not serious were selected.

*(h) Un-cooperative Attitudes of Contractors*

This has become a serious constraint, of recent. Since most of these Contractors are Political Stallwarts, they can hardly complete one single project given to them according to specification and design. The projects are either executed haphazardly or unduly delayed or absolutely abandoned on the pretext of "unavailability of funds". The most disturbing of their attitudes is abandonment of the projects after more than 90 percent of the contract sums have been paid to them. Apart from the delay in recovering such money after cancellation of the contracts, the stress, risk and associated cost of recovery can not be overemphasized. All these contributed to the failures of most of the Poverty Alleviation Programmes executed by the State Life Enhancement Agency between 2000 and 2005 and the insignificant impact these have created on poverty reduction in the State.



#### 4. CONCLUSION

In the course of evaluating the performance of Akwa Ibom State Life Enhancement Agency during the administration of poverty alleviation programmes in the state within the five years under review (2000 - 2005), it was discovered that most of the constraints that impeded the satisfactory attainment of its prescribed objectives would have been averted if the political leadership in the state had lived up to its expectation in the following areas:

The political leadership lacked the needed political will to release sufficient funds for fighting of poverty in all ramifications. For instance, only ₦101, 175, 658.00 was put into all the programmes embarked upon by the Agency in five years.

The leadership slacked in its commitment to monitor all those appointed by the state Government to supervise the execution of the programmes. They lacked sufficient professionals to monitor the contractors. The few Engineers were not effectively checked as the political leaders hardly visit the project sites to prevent them from compromising government's set standard.

Most of the contracts awarded by the Agency went to party stalwarts and political lackeys representing the political leaders. All procurements and supplies were handled by them at inflated rates. This engendered corruption and favoritism, and projects were sited outside the agreed locations.

No serious attempt was made to recover funds given out to borrowers as loans because the beneficiaries were supporters or agents of the political leaders. Out of NSO, \$87,809.00 given out, only N14,321,406.50 was recovered. Instead of prosecuting defaulters in law court" to recover the loans the debts were declared as "bad debts".

Projects taken to some communities were not in line with the peoples' choice and this contributed to abandonment or under-utilization of such projects. For instance, taking Palm Oil processing mills to where there was no sufficient palm fruits and the beneficiaries had to travel to other states to bring in these raw materials at exorbitant costs.

Most of the contractors used were not qualified and experienced type. Hence, most of the jobs were executed haphazardly or abandoned on the pretext of insufficient funding. Even most water projects developed serious faults and become dysfunctional after few weeks from commissioning dates. This implies that the contractors (Agents of the political leaders mostly) were using inferior materials. After cancellation of the contracts, the 90 percent contract sums already paid out were not recovered.

There is no doubt that poverty is a worldwide phenomenon; but it is indisputable to re-emphasize here that Nigeria's and Akwa Ibom State's case is very unique. The persistent high incidence of poverty in the country in spite of numerous poverty alleviation programmes purported to have been implemented is caused by the selfish and exploitative behaviour of our political leaders who have been using their leadership positions to protect their private interests at the expense of the general interest of the poor indigenes of the country. In other words, the persistent incompatibility between the developmental potentials of the programmes and the intention of survival and domination of the poors by the leaders are always in conflict culminating in the failures of the programmes. Only a change of attitude and commitment to Poverty Alleviation Programmes implementation and administration by the country's political leadership shall eradicate or reduce poverty to the barest minimum in Nigeria.

#### 5. THE WAY FORWARD

Since most of the factors that have contributed to the failure of most of the poverty alleviation programmes executed in Akwa Ibom State, vis-a-vis, Nigeria, have been highlighted, the following solutions have been proffered to curb this predicament:

- Let the political leaders develop strong political will and determination towards funding of poverty alleviation programmes adequately. Adequate budgetary provisions should be made annually and actual release of budgeted funds should not be politicized.
- Those appointed to supervise the contractors should be monitored to ensure that set standards are not compromised. Frequent visit to project sites by political leaders shall do the magic.
- Decisions taken at Board meetings or State or Federal Executive Councils should be devoid of nepotism, favouritism and ethnocentrism. Let jobs be given to competent contractors at accurate costs. Inflated contracts and political patronage should be checked through tougher laws and legislations.
- Let project be sited where it shall be economically viable and where it is highly needed. The benefiting communities should be involved in all stages of decision making about the projects, namely formulation, execution and evaluation. This shall check project under-utilization, abandonment and vandalism.
- All fraudulent contractors and loan defaulters should be prosecuted and all the money fraudulently collected from government recovered from them through law courts. The political leaders should stop using their company agents or political loyalists to loot government coffers.

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