



POVERTY DYNAMICS AND SOCIAL PROTECTION AMIDST COMPLEX CRISES IN AKWA IBOM STATE



Current population size by gender and age-range

Category	Population (2006 Census)	Estimated Population (2025)	Percentage of Total Population (2025)
Total Population	3,902,051	7,423,702	100.0%
Male Population	1,983,202	3,771,255	50.8%
Female Population	1,918,849	3,652,447	49.2%
Age 0–14	1,456,920	2,773,678	37.4%
Age 15–64	2,318,155	4,411,464	59.4%
Age 65+	126,976	241,660	3.3%

Source: 2025 population projection based on 2006 national census & annual growth rate

- % of population in multidimensional poverty: 71.3%
- Population in multidimensional poverty in 2022: 5.08 million
- Estimated population in multidimensional poverty in 2025: 5.29 million
- % of children in multidimensional poverty in 2022: 86.3%
- % of school-age children out-of school (aged 6-15): 10.6%
- % of school-aged girls (aged 6–15) who are poor and out of-school: 10.4%
- Total State Budget for 2025: ₦955.00 Billion
- % of total budget for social protection in 2025: 5.60%

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Executive Summary

Akwa Ibom State, located in Nigeria's Niger Delta region, faces persistent poverty challenges exacerbated by economic instability, environmental shocks, and governance inefficiencies. Despite various poverty alleviation initiatives, including social protection programmes and economic development policies, the state continues to experience high levels of multidimensional poverty, unemployment, and income inequality. The economic downturn caused by fluctuating oil revenues, inflation, and post-pandemic disruptions has further deepened financial insecurity, particularly among rural households. Additionally, environmental factors such as coastal erosion, flooding, and climate change have negatively impacted agriculture and fisheries, which are key livelihood sources for many residents. Understanding the complex interplay between poverty dynamics and social assistance in this multi-hazard context is essential for designing effective intervention strategies.

This research explores the drivers of poverty, the coping mechanisms of affected households, and the effectiveness of existing social protection programmes in Akwa Ibom State. Using a combination of qualitative research methods including life history interviews, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews the study examines how different demographic groups navigate poverty, the role of government and non-governmental assistance, and the impact of policies such as the removal of fuel subsidies and cashless transactions. Findings indicate that chronic poverty remains widespread, with rural communities relying on subsistence farming and informal labour, while urban households face job insecurity and rising living costs. Gender disparities further complicate poverty dynamics, as women and children are disproportionately affected by limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.

Key Findings

- Many social protection initiatives failed to reach the most vulnerable populations. Participants noted that programmes like cash transfers and food relief were either inconsistently distributed or captured by intermediaries, limiting their effectiveness.
- Economic crises, such as inflation and subsidy removals, worsened poverty conditions, rendering short-term interventions inadequate. The purchasing power of cash transfers was significantly eroded by rising costs.
- Many interventions failed to reach the chronically poor due to targeting inefficiencies and corruption. Beneficiaries were often selected based on connections rather than need.
- Women were disproportionately affected, particularly in informal trading and subsistence farming. Programmes such as Trader Money had some positive effects but lacked sustainability.
- Most social protection interventions were reactive and temporary rather than long-term solutions. Public works programmes provided temporary employment but did not lead to sustained economic stability.
- Despite frequent economic and environmental crises, there was no permanent framework for emergency assistance. Programmes such as Emergency Relief Distribution were ad hoc and inconsistently implemented.
- Access to credit and business sustainability programmes remained limited, particularly for the poorest. Microfinance and soft loan programmes often required collateral that many could not provide.
- In the absence of reliable government support, community networks and religious groups played a critical role in helping people cope with crises. Informal savings schemes (e.g., *adashi*) and mutual aid groups provided some relief but were insufficient for long-term resilience

Policy Recommendations

- **Institutionalise Shock-Responsive Social Protection:** Establishing a permanent crisis response fund and emergency social protection framework will ensure rapid, structured aid distribution during crises. Real-time monitoring and pre-registered beneficiary databases will enhance efficiency, minimise corruption, and strengthen national emergency response capacity.
- **Targeting and Transparency in Social Protection Programmes:** Implementing digital beneficiary tracking systems, such as biometric registration and blockchain disbursement, will enhance accountability and prevent fraud. Strengthening community-based monitoring committees will further improve legitimacy, reduce elite capture, and ensure fair access to aid.
- **Sustain and Scale Up Women-Focused Economic Interventions:** A Women's Economic Resilience Fund will provide continuous financial support, integrated with business incubation and financial literacy programmes. Linking microfinance initiatives with structured business development will enhance women's economic independence and reduce household vulnerability.
- **Strengthen Public Works and Livelihood Support Programmes:** Integrating skill development and MSME linkages into public works programmes will create pathways to stable employment. Collaboration between government, training institutions, and employers will ensure market-relevant skills, reducing reliance on temporary work and fostering long-term economic independence.
- **Financial Inclusion and Access to Affordable Credit:** Collateral-free microcredit schemes and interest-free financing will remove barriers for low-income individuals, fostering entrepreneurship and resilience. Expanding mobile money adoption and government-backed loan guarantees will promote financial inclusion and sustainable economic growth.

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

NSR	National Social Register
NASSCO	National Social Safety-Nets Coordinating Office
ANEEJ	Africa Network for Environment and Economic Justice
AK-CARES	Akwa Ibom COVID-19 Action Recovery and Economic Stimulus
AK-SEEDS	Akwa Ibom State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy
ASG	Akwa Ibom State Government
AKSIP	Akwa Ibom State Social Investment Programme
AKSIP	Akwa Ibom State Social Investment Programme
BASIC	Better Assistance in Crises Research
CFR	case fatality rate
CSJ	Centre for Social Justice
CP	Chronic Poverty
CPAN	Chronic Poverty Advisory Network
CSO	civil society organizations
CSDP	Community and Social Development Project
CCT	Conditional Cash Transfer
DEEP	Data and Evidence to End Extreme Poverty
dRPC	development Research and Projects Centre
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
EARCOM	Ethical and Attitudinal Re-orientation Commission
FMBEP	Federal Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning
FMEHSW	Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfares
FGN	Federal Government of Nigeria
FGD	Focused Group Discussion
GDL	Global Data Lab
IM	Impoverishment
ITF	Industrial Training Fund
ICT	information and communication technology

IDS	Institute of Development Studies
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IWI	International Wealth Index
KII	Key Informant Interview
LHI	Life History Interviews
LGAs	Local Government Areas
LTR	Long-Term Residence
MTEF	Medium-Term Expenditure Framework
MDAs	Ministries, Departments, and Agencies
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
NASSCO	National Social Safety-Nets Coordinating Office
NCTO	National Cash Transfer Office
NEMA	National Emergency Management Agency
NIN	National Identification Number
NITDA	National Information Technology Development Agency
NSIP	National Social Investment Programme
NSPP	National Social Protection Policy
NAN	News Agency of Nigeria
NBS	Nigeria Bureau of Statistics
NCDC	Nigeria Centre for Disease Control
NG-CARES	Nigeria COVID-19 Action Recovery and Economic Stimulus
NRCS	Nigerian Red Cross Society
OWP	Organisation for World Peace
OPM	Oxford Policy Management
PCGS	Presidential Conditional Grant Scheme
PPP	Public-private partnerships
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
SEMA	State Emergency Management Agency
SOCU	State Operations Coordinating Unit
SSPP	State Social Protection Policy

SHDI	Subnational Human Development Index
SURE-P	Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SE	Sustained Escape
TE	Temporary Escape
UN	United Nations
VOP	Voice of the People
VGF	Vulnerable Group Fund
WAEDEP	Women Agro Entrepreneurship Development Programme

Glossary

- **Well-being 1** People who cannot work. So, they depend on others for basic needs (food, housing). However, they often don't have external support (socially excluded), and so:
- **Well-being 2** are extremely poor and capable of working. They are physically able to work but who have no or few productive assets or capital for trade
- **Well-being 3** are moderately poor and have labouring capacity (not infirm) and some productive assets (land livestock bike) or small trade with capital. But in rural areas, not enough to escape labouring for wages in order to meet basic needs
- **Well-being 4** are vulnerable but not poor: those who have relatively more productive assets (plough, ox cart, oxen, bikes, taxi) and assets made more productive through inputs and which can provide the income necessary to feed the family through the year.
- **Well-being 5** are resilient in the face of shocks because of substantial assets, social networks, and political connections necessary to prevent significant downward mobility relative to overall productive wealth.
- **Well-being 6** are large and several businesses, assets including land if rural, often have well-paid urban employment. Often not resident in rural areas but can be present in peri-urban area.
- **Chronic poverty (CP)**. A more severe and persistent form of poverty where individuals or households remain trapped in deprivation for most or all of their lives. Chronic poverty is often intergenerational, meaning it is passed down from parents to children due to factors such as lack of education, poor health, limited access to economic opportunities, and social exclusion. Here, we refer to WB level 1, 2, or 3 for longer than 10 or so years with special focus on the period 2010-2023.and, possibly since birth or intergenerational (since parents).
- **Temporary poverty (TE)**. A situation where individuals or households manage to rise out of poverty for a period but later fall back into it due to economic shocks, policy changes, health crises, or other vulnerabilities. The term is used here to refer to those who lived in poverty in 2010, successfully escaped it for a period of years, and subsequently fell back into poverty by 2023. That is, they became re-impoverished. It does not include those who 'churn' briefly around the poverty line, remaining very close to it.
- **Sustained escapes- (SE)** A condition where individuals or households successfully rise out of poverty and maintain their improved economic status over a long period. Unlike **temporary escape**, where people fall back into poverty after some time, sustained escape means they have developed resilience through stable income sources, assets, education, social networks, and access to financial or institutional support. Factors that contribute to sustained escape include diversification of income, investment in productive assets, education, and strong social protection systems that help mitigate economic shocks. Here it is used for someone poor in around 2005 and non-poor in 2023. They have been non-poor for at least 5 years or more just before 2023.

Section 1: General Introduction

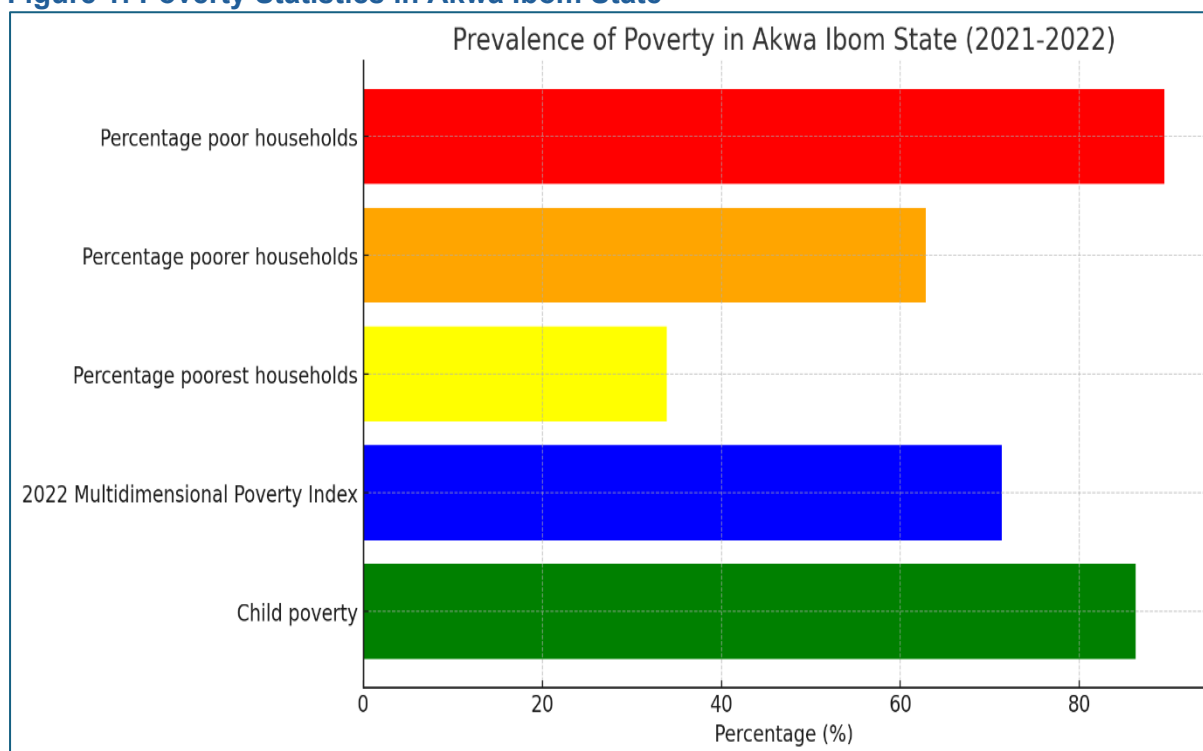
1.1 Background of the Study

Akwa Ibom State, located in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, faces significant socio-economic challenges exacerbated by complex crises such as economic downturns, environmental degradation, and governance instability. Despite Nigeria's various poverty alleviation programmes, poverty remains a persistent issue in the state, characterised by high unemployment, income inequality, and limited access to essential social services. Multiple intersecting factors, including fluctuating oil revenues, inflation, and climate-related vulnerabilities, shape the dynamics of poverty in Akwa Ibom, a state highly dependent on oil revenues. Economic shocks and resource mismanagement have contributed to widespread financial insecurity. Environmental challenges such as coastal erosion and flooding also threaten livelihoods, particularly those in agriculture and fishing communities.

Compounding the economic challenges are recurring environmental and health crises, such as flooding and the COVID-19 pandemic, which have exacerbated poverty levels. Flooding, driven by climate variability, heavy rainfall, poor urban planning, and waste mismanagement, has led to widespread displacement, destruction of homes, and disruption of agricultural livelihoods. A 2024 post-flood assessment identified 52 heavily affected locations across 12 LGAs, impacting 114,948 individuals, with 46,310 displaced (IOM 2024). Agricultural losses were severe, further endangering food security and household income, particularly in rural areas. In urban centres like Uyo, poor drainage systems, and improper waste disposal exacerbate flood risks, worsening social and economic vulnerabilities. Similarly, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the state's healthcare and economic resilience weaknesses. While Akwa Ibom recorded relatively lower mortality rates than some high-burden Nigerian states, limited testing capacity, and inadequate social protection measures placed additional strain on vulnerable households. Economic disruptions during the pandemic, coupled with post-pandemic inflation, fuel subsidy removals, and rising living costs, have worsened poverty conditions, particularly among children who experience high levels of multidimensional deprivation.

Historical poverty trends in Akwa Ibom indicates a fluctuating pattern. While the poverty headcount rate declined from 56.8% in 2003 to 26.82% by 2018/19 due to economic growth, social welfare programmes, and infrastructure development, the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) surged to 71.3% by 2022 (NBS 2010 and 2022). This increase suggests that more profound structural inequalities persist while income-based poverty may have declined. According to the International Wealth Index (IWI), 89.5% of households in the state were classified as poor in 2021–2022, with a significant proportion experiencing extreme deprivation.

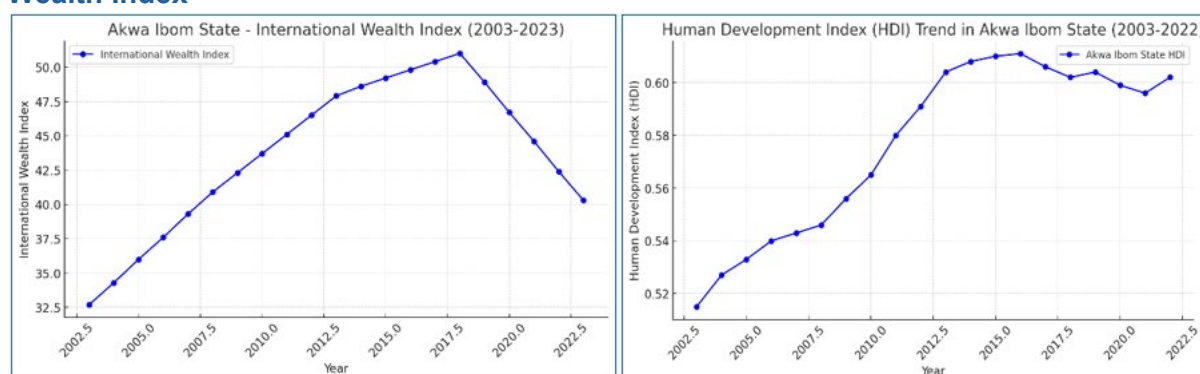
Figure 1: Poverty Statistics in Akwa Ibom State



Source: Global Data Lab 2021 and NBS 2022

Similarly, data on Akwa Ibom State's International Wealth Index (IWI) and Subnational Human Development Index (SHDI) from 2003 to 2023 reveals a gradual economic and human development progress pattern, followed by a decline in recent years. The IWI consistently increased from 32.7 in 2003 to its peak at 51 in 2018, indicating improved wealth levels. However, from 2019 onwards, the index declined to 40.3 in 2023, suggesting economic downturns or reduced household wealth. Similarly, the SHDI followed a rising trend from 0.515 in 2003 to 0.611 in 2016, reflecting improvements in education, health, and income levels. However, after peaking, the SHDI slightly fluctuated, dipping to 0.596 in 2021 before stabilising around 0.602 in 2022. This trend indicates that while Akwa Ibom has made significant progress over the years, recent economic challenges have hindered sustained growth, potentially due to governance inefficiencies, economic shocks, or structural weaknesses in the economy.

Figure 2: Akwa Ibom State Subnational Human Development Index and International Wealth Index



Source: Global Data Lab 2025

Existing research has identified several intersecting crises exacerbating Akwa Ibom's poverty, including inadequate infrastructure, inconsistent government policies, and low agricultural productivity. However, gaps remain in understanding the specific role of environmental shocks, such as climate change and flooding, in deepening poverty. Against this background, the objectives of this report align with and contribute to the broader goals of the Better Assistance in Crises (BASIC) Research programme. BASIC is implemented by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and the Data and Evidence to End Extreme Poverty (DEEP) programme hosted at Oxford Policy Management (OPM). These initiatives examine how social assistance, and other interventions can effectively support people facing intersecting crises, including conflict, displacement, climate shocks, economic instability, and pandemics. By generating evidence on poverty dynamics and policy responses, the BASIC/DEEP study aims to improve the design and implementation of social protection measures in fragile and crisis-affected contexts.

Specifically, this report aims to:

1. To understand the relationship between complex crises (namely armed conflict, displacement, climate shocks and stressors, economic shocks, and COVID-19), poverty dynamics and social assistance in Nigeria
2. To evaluate the extent to which social assistance mitigates the effects of these intersecting crises on individuals living in and near poverty. This includes exploring the perceptions and experiences of beneficiaries regarding the effectiveness and adequacy of the social protection measures in place.

The following research questions are explored for the purpose of this study

Table 1: Research Questions

1. Poverty dynamics & livelihoods amidst complex crises	2. Social assistance in response to protracted crises (Basic)
a) Why is chronic poverty and multi-dimensional deprivation so widespread? b) How does conflict, drought, and floods affect livelihood pathways out of poverty? c) What are the urban-rural variations in livelihood pathways, before and	a) What role do state and federal governments and other agencies play in a multi-hazard context? b) Why and how are specific individuals or households or communities targeted? c) What are peoples' perceptions of adequacy, reliability, fairness and

<p>during COVID-19? How have these been affected by conflict, displacement and climate change?</p> <p>d) What measures are governments in a position to take to reduce poverty?</p>	<p>appropriateness of different modalities?</p> <p>d) What other key interventions are needed to improve poverty dynamics and how can they best be delivered?</p>
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1.2 Policy and Administrative Frameworks for Poverty Reduction in Akwa Ibom State

Administrative Frameworks

In Akwa Ibom State, thirteen Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) play crucial roles in social protection and poverty reduction. The primary MDAs include:

Table 2: MDAs with responsibility for social protection and/or poverty reduction in Akwa Ibom state		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry of Economic Development Ministry of Agriculture & Rural Development Ministry of Labour & Manpower Planning Ministry of Water Resource & Sanitation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry of Women Affairs & Social Welfare Ministry of Environment Ministry of Lands & Housing Ministry of Trade & Investment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry of Health Ministry of Education Ministry of Finance Ministry of Works & Fire Service Ministry of Power & Petroleum Development

Source: <https://akwaibomstate.gov.ng>

In Akwa Ibom State, poverty reduction efforts are coordinated through a network of thirteen Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs). The Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Welfare serves as the primary agency overseeing social protection initiatives, including women's economic empowerment programmes. It also supervises the Akwa Ibom State Community and Social Development Agency, which implements community-based poverty alleviation projects. The Ministry of Economic Development is central in coordinating poverty reduction strategies, working alongside the Ministry of Education and the Akwa Ibom State Bureau of Statistics to implement data-driven social protection programmes. A newly established Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs is expected to take on some of these responsibilities, reflecting the state's evolving institutional framework. Overall coordination and supervision of these MDAs fall under the Office of the Governor, ensuring alignment with state development priorities.

The Ministry of Economic Development spearheads poverty alleviation through its flagship programme, AK-SEEDS, which focuses on economic empowerment in agriculture, education, healthcare, and gender equality. Programmes such as WAEDEP (Women Agricultural Empowerment and Development Programme) aim to improve livelihoods by supporting women in agribusiness. Similarly, the Ministry of Labour and Manpower Planning addresses poverty indirectly by promoting workforce development, job creation, and skill-building. Key officials like Amanam Nkanga, Special Adviser on Political and Social Re-orientation, contribute through public awareness campaigns. At the same time, Prince Enobong Uwah, Secretary to the State Government, leads cross-sectoral coordination

efforts. Notably, following the removal of the fuel subsidy, Governor Umo Eno inaugurated an 18-member Palliatives Committee chaired by Uwah to oversee relief distribution. These coordinated institutional roles collectively drive poverty alleviation and social welfare improvements across Akwa Ibom State.

Policy Framework

Akwa Ibom State has developed multiple policy frameworks aimed at alleviating poverty through long-term planning, economic empowerment, infrastructure development, legal reforms, and social safety nets. The proposed 40-year Long-Term Development Plan (2024–2064) seeks to ensure policy continuity across successive administrations by establishing legally binding commitments to poverty reduction (Etim, 2024). It prioritises key sectors such as education, health, tourism, agriculture, and industrialisation to create sustainable economic opportunities. By defining sectoral priorities, such as positioning the state as an industrial hub and implementing coordinated urban planning strategies, the plan aims to reduce economic disparities and promote equitable resource distribution. However, the plan is yet to be legislated, raising concerns about its long-term feasibility and implementation across political transitions.

The Akwa Ibom State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (AK-SEEDS), aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has played a crucial role in addressing poverty through agricultural initiatives, free education, and healthcare interventions. Programmes like WAEDEP have empowered women in agriculture, while policies ensuring free and compulsory primary education have sought to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Health programmes focusing on the eradication of child killer diseases and immunisation campaigns have contributed to reducing mortality rates among vulnerable populations. Additionally, infrastructure development has been a key driver of economic growth, with projects such as the Ibom Power Plant and major road networks enhancing trade, investment, and business opportunities. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) have further contributed to job creation and economic diversification, notably through projects like the Ibom Deep Water Port and Uyo Grain Storage Facility.

Legal and institutional reforms, particularly the 2025 Business-Enabling Reform Action Plan (BERAP), focus on creating a pro-business environment to attract investment and stimulate economic activity. Fiscal management strategies, tax incentives, and simplified land acquisition policies are designed to encourage entrepreneurship and economic participation. Digital economy initiatives like broadband deployment aim to enhance connectivity and promote digital inclusion, particularly for rural and underserved communities. At the grassroots level, social safety nets, including Operation Aduma for security and EARCOM for social reorientation, play a role in protecting vulnerable groups. The Akwa Ibom State Social Investment Programme (AKSIP) provides targeted support to marginalised populations through cooperative schemes and disability empowerment initiatives.

Poverty alleviation and social protection in Akwa Ibom State have seen varying degrees of budgetary allocation from 2021 to 2025, reflecting changing priorities in economic and social policies. The state's budget has steadily increased from ₦598.98 billion in 2021 to ₦955 billion in 2025, yet the allocation for poverty alleviation remained relatively low until 2025 (ASG 2025). From 0.086% of the budget in 2021 to a peak of 4.22% in 2025, there has been a significant shift, indicating a stronger focus on direct poverty reduction efforts. In contrast, social protection funding has consistently accounted for a larger share, fluctuating between

4.10% and 5.60%, with the highest allocation of ₦53.5 billion in 2025. This trend suggests that while previous years prioritised social protection over direct poverty alleviation, the 2025 budget reflects a more balanced approach, significantly increasing funding for poverty reduction alongside expanding social safety nets.

Table 3: Poverty Alleviation and Social Protection in Akwa Ibom

Year	Budget Size (Nbn)	Poverty Alleviation Classification (Nbn)	Total as a % of Budget Size	Social Protection Classification (Nbn)	Total as a % of Budget Size
2021	598,975,209,000.00	513,859,990.00	0.086%	27,134,972,160.00	4.53%
2022	586,881,041,050.00	797,227,760.00	0.136%	26,699,990,720.00	4.55%
2023	850,000,000,000.00	2,120,500,000.00	0.249%	34,813,084,280.00	4.10%
2024	923,462,276,880.00	877,100,000.00	0.095%	44,912,138,830.00	4.86%
2025	955,000,000,000.00	40,286,900,000.00	4.22%	53,502,925,890.00	5.60%

Source: Akwa Ibom State Government Appropriation Documents, 2021-2025

The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) has implemented various intervention programmes in Akwa Ibom State, providing financial and social support to vulnerable groups. Between August 2018 and April 2022, the state received ₦2.29 billion from the \$322.5 million Abacha loot, representing 1.85% of the national allocation for cash transfers. The Presidential Conditional Grant Scheme (PCGS) from July 2023 to August 2024 allocated ₦1.16 billion, constituting 3.68% of the national estimate, reflecting a targeted effort to empower small businesses and individuals. The Vulnerable Group Fund, covering 12,824 beneficiaries in the state, accounts for only 0.23% of the national share, indicating limited reach. The Nigeria COVID-19 Action Recovery and Economic Stimulus (NG-CARES) third disbursement in July 2024 provided ₦2.43 billion to the state, constituting 0.55% of the national disbursement. Additionally, a ₦5 billion grant was allocated in 2024 for purchasing rice and grains as palliatives, making up 2.7% of the national budget for food aid.

Table 4: FGN-supported interventions Akwa Ibom State

Interventions (FGN to States and FCT)	National Estimate	Amount / Number of Beneficiaries in the State	State Share from the National Estimates
Cash Transfer Through the \$322.5 million Recovered Abacha Loots, August 2018 to April 2022 (₦)	₦123,731,188,000	₦2,287,856,000	1.85%
₦50,000, Presidential Conditional Grant Scheme (PCGS) July 2023 to August 2024	₦31,569,450,000	₦1,161,800,000	3.68%
Vulnerable Group Fund Coverage Rate as of November 2024	5,640,783	12,824	0.23%
Nigeria Covid19 Action Recovery and Economic Stimulus, July 2024 Third Disbursement (₦)	₦438,368,915,030	₦2,430,830,532	0.55%
Grant for the purchase of rice and other grains for distribution as palliative, 2024 (₦)	₦185,000,000,000	₦5,000,000,000	2.70%

Source: Data from FMBNP 2024; FMHSW, 2024; ANEEJ 2022; <https://grant.fedgrantandloan.gov.ng/>; <https://leadership.ng/rising-food-prices-fg-okays-n185bn-for-states-fct-to-buy-grains/>

Akwa Ibom State has a social register. Establishing a social register to identify the most vulnerable populations, particularly children, youth, and women highlights an organised approach to social welfare. The involvement of multiple government agencies, such as the Akwa Ibom State Bureau of Statistics and the Ministry of Women Affairs & Social Welfare, reflects a coordinated effort to address these challenges through data-driven methods.

The Akwa Ibom State government utilises the social register for its poverty reduction programmes, targeting around 600,000 vulnerable households identified through a transparent community-based process (Egufe & Chioma 2024)). The register is regularly updated in collaboration with local leaders and community members to accurately represent current socio-economic conditions (Chioma, 2023). This enables the effective implementation of various support initiatives, including cash transfers and food distribution, with the involvement of stakeholders such as village heads to guarantee that assistance reaches those in need.

Akwa Ibom State Bureau of Statistics, the Ministry of Women Affairs & Social Welfare, the State Operations Coordinating Unit, AK-CARES (Akwa Ibom COVID-19 Action Recovery and Economic Stimulus) engage in tracking and documenting poor and vulnerable populations in the state by engaging village heads and community officers in the process, the state emphasises transparency and community involvement, which are essential for building trust and ensuring that aid reaches the intended beneficiaries. This community-based tracking facilitates tailored interventions that address the specific needs of various groups, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of poverty alleviation strategies

1.3 Data and Methods

Research Design: This study employs a qualitative research approach with a case study methodology to analyse poverty trajectories and evaluate the effectiveness of social protection measures in Akwa Ibom State. The case study approach allows for an in-depth exploration of how poverty evolves over time and the extent to which social protection programmes contribute to mitigating economic hardships.

Study Area: The research is conducted in Akwa Ibom State, focusing on urban (Makurdi) and rural (Guma) communities. This geographic distribution ensures a comprehensive understanding of poverty experiences across different socio-economic settings. Akwa Ibom State, located in northern Nigeria, presents a unique context for studying poverty due to its high dependence on agriculture, limited industrialisation, and exposure to economic shocks and climate-related vulnerabilities.

Data Collection Methods: This study employs a combination of qualitative data collection techniques to gain a comprehensive understanding of poverty dynamics. The primary method involves 20 Life History Interviews (LHIs) with individuals from different poverty categories, including the Chronic Poor (those consistently in poverty), Sustained Escapees (those who have escaped poverty and remained out), the Impoverished (those who have fallen back into poverty), and the Never Poor (individuals who have never experienced poverty). A purposive sampling approach is employed to ensure the selection of respondents who can provide in-depth qualitative insights into poverty dynamics. This method allows for a targeted selection of individuals and households based on their poverty status and

experiences with social protection programmes. To explore regional and social variations in poverty experiences, the study includes four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), two in urban areas and two in rural areas, incorporating diverse demographic groups such as women, youth, the elderly, and farmers. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) are conducted with policymakers, social protection officers, and community leaders to assess social protection programmes' design, implementation, and effectiveness. Long-Term Resident (LTR) interviews, one urban and one rural, further enrich the analysis by providing localised, in-depth perspectives on poverty experiences. Combining these data sources ensures greater reliability and offers a holistic view of poverty trajectories in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 5: Instrument and sample size

INSTRUMENT	INSTRUMENT ADMINISTERED BY RESIDENCE
Life History Interviews	20 LHIs (Balanced across rural and urban areas, and across women and men)
Focused Group Discussion	4 FGDs (Balanced across rural and urban areas, and across women and men)
(Long-term community residents)	4 LTRs (Balanced across rural and urban areas, and across women and men)
Expert Key Informant Interview	2 KIIs (Balanced across rural and urban areas, and across women and men)

Data Analysis: The collected qualitative data is analysed using thematic coding with Nvivo Software to identify recurring patterns and key themes related to poverty trajectories and social protection effectiveness. Poverty trajectory mapping is employed to visualise the movement of individuals and households across different poverty categories over time. This mapping technique facilitates a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to sustained escape, impoverishment, and chronic poverty. A comparative analysis of policy interventions is also conducted to assess their impact on poverty alleviation. The integration of qualitative analysis techniques ensures a comprehensive examination of poverty dynamics, enabling a nuanced understanding of the intersection between economic vulnerability, social protection, and long-term livelihood outcomes.

Section 2: Chronic Poverty

2.1 Livelihoods in Chronic Poverty

Subsistence farming remains a key livelihood activity among chronically poor households, but its low returns and vulnerability to external shocks make it an unsustainable path to economic growth. Many smallholder farmers rely on rented or government-owned land, which limits their ability to make long-term investments in improving soil fertility or adopting modern farming techniques. As noted, “Presently, he lives in the village, cultivating cassava, cocoyam, and vegetables on three plots of rented land. His children live in Uyo but do not send any assistance.” (ILH_Akwa Ibom_M02). This highlights the precarious nature of land access and the lack of external financial support, which leaves subsistence farmers unable to expand their production or escape poverty. The economic instability of subsistence farming is further evident in its inability to generate sufficient income beyond basic food consumption. Farmers often struggle with limited market access and the absence of financial support to scale up their operations. For instance, “He farms on undeveloped government land and leased land, cultivating cassava and vegetables. Though they can sometimes feed up to three times a day, the income is not enough to improve their situation.” (ILH_Akwa Ibom_M04). While farming ensures food security to some extent, it does not provide enough income to cover other essential needs such as healthcare, education, and housing improvements. As a result, households engaged in subsistence farming often remain in a state of persistent poverty, unable to accumulate savings or invest in alternative income-generating activities.

Wage labour, particularly menial and unskilled jobs, is a common survival strategy among the chronically poor, yet it often fails to provide a pathway out of poverty. Many individuals rely on physically demanding jobs such as farm labour, bamboo cutting, or construction work, which offer low wages and irregular employment. As seen in the case of *Okon Moses Okon*, who *“engages in menial jobs, such as working on other people’s farms, but the opportunities are not persistent,”* such jobs lack stability, making it difficult for workers to plan for the future or accumulate savings (LHI_Akwa Ibom_M09). The inconsistent nature of these opportunities means that those who depend on wage labour are highly vulnerable to economic shocks and seasonal fluctuations, keeping them trapped in poverty. Beyond financial instability, menial labour often comes with significant health risks and the potential for exploitation. Workers engage in physically demanding tasks with little to no safety measures, exposing them to injuries and long-term health complications. The case of *LHI_Akwa Ibom_M02*, who *“began working as a bamboo cutter and carrier, but after an accident, he was blinded in one eye, which left him unable to work regularly,”* highlights the dangers associated with such labour. Without proper medical care, social security, or compensation for work-related injuries, individuals who suffer accidents often find themselves unable to earn a living, further deepening their economic hardships. This lack of workplace protection and safety nets leaves many wage labourers in a precarious position.

Trading and small businesses present a potential avenue for economic mobility among the poor, offering opportunities for self-employment and financial independence. Many individuals venture into petty trading or small-scale entrepreneurship, using savings or loans to start businesses in retail, provisions, or motor-related services. For instance, *a respondent* managed to transition from bamboo trading to renting a shop for provisions, demonstrating

how small businesses could serve as a stepping stone toward improved livelihoods. However, his decision to *"use part of the capital to buy a motorcycle depleted his funds, and the business collapsed,"* highlighting how poor financial planning and reinvestment decisions can undermine entrepreneurial success (LHI_Akwa Ibom_M06). Limited access to financial literacy and business management skills often leads to misallocation of funds, making businesses fragile and short-lived. The small business owners frequently face risks such as fraud, theft, and external shocks threatening their ventures. *Edem Okon Udo* experienced this firsthand when *"the boy who was managing the engine oil and petrol retail business defrauded him and absconded with his money, and the business was closed"* (LHI_Akwa Ibom_M02). This case reflects a broader issue where trust and security within informal business operations remain weak, exposing traders to financial losses. Many small business owners lack the legal protections or formal structures to mitigate such risks, leaving them vulnerable to setbacks that could wipe out their entire investments.

Table 6: Economic Activities in Akwa Ibom State by Gender as identified in FGD and KII

Category	Males	Females	Youth
Agriculture & Farming	Palm fruit harvesting, Fishing, Farming (cassava, yam)	Cassava farming, Food processing (garri, yam flour)	Assisting in family farms, cassava planting
Trading & Commerce	Selling palm wine, petty trading (livestock, fish)	Petty trading (food items, grains)	Petty trading, market errands
Manual Labour	Daily wage labour (farm work, construction)	Daily wage labour (cassava peeling, farm labour)	Farm work, manual labour jobs
Craft & Skills	Palm wine tapping, Carpentry, Small repairs	Soap making, Tailoring, Food processing	Assisting in tailoring, bread making
Other Activities	Community security, Fishing	Household chores, Subsistence food gathering	Assisting in household tasks

Source: Created by the Author from FGDs, and KIIs Project Data

2.2 Maintainers of Chronic Poverty

Poor educational attainment is a major issue among CPs and TEs, as limited access to quality education constrains economic opportunities. Many individuals are unable to complete their schooling due to financial difficulties, preventing them from acquiring the skills needed for sustainable employment. Without formal education or vocational training, they are restricted to low-paying, informal jobs that offer little financial security. A respondent's struggles highlight the consequences of financial instability on schooling: "Because of irregular payment of school fees, he missed terminal examinations... he could only hardly feed once a day." (ILH_Akwa Ibom_M06). For many, dropping out of school due to financial constraints means limited job prospects, forcing them into low-income labour that barely sustains daily needs.

Health crises are a major issue, as medical emergencies and chronic illnesses drain limited household resources. Families who lack access to affordable healthcare are forced to deplete savings or go into debt to cover medical expenses. When the primary breadwinner falls ill or suffers a disabling injury, the financial burden intensifies, often resulting in lost

income and deeper economic hardship. One respondent share, *"After an accident with a bamboo stick, he was hospitalised, which resulted in blindness in one eye."* (ILH_Akwa Ibom_M02). Meaning that a single accident could have long-term consequences, affecting an individual's ability to work and support their family. Another case emphasises the emotional and financial toll of illness and loss: *"Ill health and children's demise contributed to the collapse of his wellbeing level from 3+ to 1."* (ILH_Akwa Ibom_M03).

Section 3: Impoverishment

3.1 Livelihoods Under Impoverishment

Menial jobs and casual labour were common livelihood strategies among temporary poverty escapees, but these activities lacked the stability and long-term growth needed to sustain their financial independence. Many individuals engaged in physically demanding jobs such as house help, bamboo cutting, farm labour, and security work. While these jobs provided short-term financial relief, they often paid low wages, were inconsistent, and offered no clear pathway to wealth accumulation. One respondent, for example, worked clearing plantain plantations under *an agreement that he would eventually be settled with his own plantation, but after three years, the master reneged on the agreement, leaving him stranded (LHI_Akwa Ibom_F05)*. The vulnerability of TEs who depend on informal labour contracts that could be easily broken, trapping them in cycles of economic instability. A key challenge faced by temporary poverty escapees in menial jobs is the lack of savings and financial security. Since their incomes are often just enough to cover daily subsistence, they are unable to build buffers against economic shocks. The physically demanding nature of such work means that injuries, illnesses, or even aging can quickly push them back into poverty.

Farming: Many TE households rely on agriculture as a primary source of income, cultivating crops like cassava, sweet yam, and corn. These crops not only provide food but also generate income through sale or trade. One individual noted, *"The little that we use for a living is petty jobs, farming, and palm oil production,"* which underscores the significance of farming, alongside other small-scale work, in sustaining their livelihoods (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F01). Farming thus serves as both a survival tool and a means for modest income generation, especially in rural areas where access to other opportunities may be limited. Moreover, some TE households have been able to improve their financial situation by diversifying their activities. One respondent shared, *"Her life was improved because she was able to start a farming business, in addition with Akara business, which helped her to buy land, palm trees with the help of her husband"* (LHI_Akwa Ibom_f04).

Petty trading provides TE households a means for generating income and sustaining daily needs. Many individuals engage in small-scale commerce, selling food items, vegetables, and other essentials to support their families. Training programmes have also helped traders develop better financial management skills, enabling them to reinvest their earnings and gradually improve their economic conditions. As one respondent noted, *"They were trained on how to manage the resources given to them and also to put their money into petty businesses to make a profit so that they can come out of poverty"* (KII_Akwa Ibom_01). This highlights the role of skill development and entrepreneurship in helping households achieve financial stability and work towards a more secure future. Petty trading is highly vulnerable to external disruptions, which can push households back into poverty. A respondent shared, *"All these women were into trading and in that market and since that market is no longer in existence all of them fell back to poverty,"* emphasising how market closures or economic downturns can dismantle fragile livelihoods (LTR_Akwa Ibom_02). Despite these challenges, some traders have successfully leveraged their earnings for long-term improvements, such as home renovations. For instance, one woman was able to upgrade her living conditions through vegetable trading: *"She was engaged in trading vegetables, which assisted her to*

repair her house and replaced the thatched roof with zinc roofing sheets" (LHI_Akwa Ibom_F01).

Table 7: Coding frequencies in LHI related to economic activities

Nodes	State = Akwa Ibom (n=19)			
	13Y Poverty Trajectory = CP (n=9)	13Y Poverty Trajectory = IM (n=6)	13Y Poverty Trajectory = SE (n=4)	13Y Poverty Trajectory = NN (n=0)
Agriculture wage labour	3	1	1	0
Farming	3	2	3	0
Informal sector	0	0	0	0
Smuggling	0	0	0	0
Pensions	1	1	1	0
Business	4	3	3	0
Petty trade sales	2	3	2	0
Wage labour	8	4	4	0
Salaried employment	0	2	2	0
Cash Transfers	2	1	0	0
Loss of resources	0	0	0	0
Debt	3	0	0	0
Food insecurity	1	0	0	0
Loss of land	3	0	1	0
Loss of livestock	0	0	0	0
Loss social capital	0	0	0	0
Rented accommodation	3	1	0	0
House or property	5	4	4	0
Land ownership - access	2	3	4	0
Livestock	0	0	0	0
Production technologies	0	2	2	0
Remittances	0	0	1	0
Savings - resources	0	0	0	0
Migration	4	0	1	0

Source: Created by the Author from LHIs Project Data

Palm fruit processing provides TE households with both sustenance and income. Many households rely on processing harvested palm fruit into palm oil, which is either consumed or sold to generate earnings. This small-scale industry serves as a vital economic activity, especially for those with limited alternative income sources. One respondent shared, *"Whenever they harvest palm fruit, we buy and process it and use it to feed ourselves,"* illustrating how palm oil production not only supports household consumption but also acts as a buffer against food insecurity (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F01). In addition to providing food and income, palm oil processing contributes to household investments and economic growth. Some families combine palm processing with other businesses to improve their financial standing. For instance, one respondent described how a husband and wife worked together: *"His wife trades on cassava products and he invests in the wife's business too and also supports her in processing the cassava"* (LHI_Akwa Ibom_M05). This cooperative approach helps maximise earnings and stability. Furthermore, palm oil production has enabled

individuals to acquire assets, as seen in the case of a woman who successfully built a house: *"Palm oil production business helped her to build a house in her husband's compound"* (LHI_Akwa Ibom_F02).

Daily wage jobs, or menial labour, serve as a crucial survival strategy for temporary poverty escapees (TE households) in Akwa Ibom, particularly for women. These jobs, which include farm labour, domestic work, and other physically demanding tasks, provide immediate but often unstable income. For many, engaging in daily wage labour is a necessity due to the lack of formal employment opportunities. As one respondent noted, *"The main activities of women we were born to experience are daily jobs, farming, and palm fruit production,"* highlighting the generational reliance on low-paying, labour-intensive work to sustain livelihoods (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F01). Daily wage jobs offer little long-term financial security, often trapping individuals in cycles of poverty. Many engage in menial labor only as a last resort when other income sources fail. One account describes the desperation that led a woman to take up daily jobs: *"During this period, life was so difficult to the point that sometimes she engaged herself in daily jobs for survival."* Similarly, another respondent shared how economic hardship forced her to return to daily labor: *"When she returned from Cameroon, she fell back into poverty which made her go back to daily jobs"* (LHI_Akwa Ibom_F04).

Cash transfers and government support play a crucial role in helping temporary poverty escapees (TE households) in Akwa Ibom improve their economic situation. These financial interventions provide immediate relief and enable beneficiaries to invest in income-generating activities. One respondent highlighted the positive impact of such programmes, stating, *"Cash transfer is one of the things that made them move out of poverty although some of them fell back because of lack of continuity"* (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F02). This emphasises that while cash transfers can offer a pathway out of poverty, their effectiveness is often short-lived without sustained support or complementary income sources. Empowerment programmes, particularly those targeting women, have also contributed to poverty reduction by providing financial assistance and training. The ability to invest such funds into business ventures is a key determinant of long-term success, as reflected in the statement, *"If we see money like that cash transfer, we will use it for business, so that we keep ourselves busy"* (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F01).

Migration for work was a common strategy among TEs, but many found themselves trapped in job insecurity and exploitation. While relocating to cities or other regions initially provided financial relief, low wages, lack of job stability, and exploitative conditions often led to failed attempts at permanent escape from poverty. For instance, *one respondent moved to Port Harcourt and worked as a domestic help for ₦3,000 per month, but the job ended when his employer could no longer keep him* (LHI_Akwa Ibom_06). This unpredictable nature of low-wage migration, where employment is often informal, short-term, and highly dependent on employer circumstances. Without contracts or legal protections, migrants in these jobs could lose their livelihoods overnight, forcing them to return to poverty. Another major challenge for temporary escapees engaging in labour migration was the lack of upward mobility. Many migrants took on menial jobs such as domestic work, security services, or casual labour, which provided just enough income for survival but little opportunity for career advancement. Unlike skilled migrants who invest in education or entrepreneurship, temporary escapees often lack the resources or networks to transition into more stable, higher-paying jobs.

3.2 Drivers of Downward Mobility

The COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on already struggling households.

Movement restrictions and market closures meant that people could not engage in their usual economic activities, leading to food insecurity and financial instability. *"COVID-19 affected us so much that we could not go out beyond two villages. Life was so hard because people could not go to the market (outside the communities)" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_M02).* While the government provided some relief in the form of food items like rice, garri, beans, and noodles, it was not enough to sustain families who had lost their primary sources of income. *"During this period, we struggled to eat, and during that period, the government gave us rice, garri, beans, and noodles, and asked everybody to stay at home to avoid being infected with disease" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F01).* However, the irregular opening of markets made it difficult for traders to recover, further entrenching poverty. *"There were specific days that markets were allowed to open. The only constant thing was suffering."* The pandemic also exposed people to financial risks such as fraud and economic exploitation. A particularly tragic case is that of a man who entrusted his wife with his ATM card to withdraw money, only for her to fall victim to fraud, losing all their savings. *"By 2020, he gave his wife his ATM card to go and withdraw money. She got scammed, and all the money was taken away from her. This, alongside the impact of COVID-19, affected him and his family a lot" (LHI_Akwa Ibom_M01).* The economic downturn forced many individuals to abandon their primary businesses and take on less profitable ventures, further trapping them in financial distress. *"Since the store folded up, life has not been easy till now. What he does now is to trade on palm oil and palm kernel, which is not giving him enough money" LHI_Akwa Ibom_M06).*

Unfavourable government policies and external shocks significantly contribute to impoverishment by disrupting economic activities and increasing the cost of living for already struggling households. Abrupt policy changes, such as the cashless policy in 2022 and the removal of fuel subsidies in 2023, had severe consequences for small business owners and low-income earners. These policies, although implemented to address economic inefficiencies, disproportionately affected those without financial security, pushing many further into poverty. The Naira redesign and cashless policy created an economic crisis for many households, restricting their ability to conduct daily transactions. The lack of physical cash meant that even essential services like healthcare became inaccessible for those without digital banking options. *"During this cashless policy, we were in poverty even when they took me to the hospital, there was no money for treatment" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F01).* The scarcity of new currency also led to exploitative practices, where individuals who exchanged old notes often never received their money back. *"Some people came and collected the old notes to bring the new naira notes for us, but when they collected the old notes like N10,000, N20,000, you would not see it again" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F01)* Food prices skyrocketed, with basic items like a cup of rice rising from N200 to N500. These financial barriers forced many to close their businesses entirely, as one woman noted: *"In 2023, because of the cashless policy and fuel subsidy, she could not continue with her business."*

The removal of fuel subsidies in 2023 further worsened economic hardships, increasing transportation costs and making goods unaffordable for many. The rising cost of fuel affected not only businesses but also individual households, leading to widespread inflation. *"The negative impact on the lives of people, women, men, and children is because of the fuel subsidy, life has become so difficult for them" (LTR_akwa Ibom_F01).* Many found it challenging to afford even basic necessities as transportation and food prices soared.

"LTRs: Since the removal of the fuel subsidy, everything has been hard for us" (FGD_Akwa Ibom_F02). The burden was particularly heavy on small-scale traders and rural dwellers, whose livelihoods depend on affordable transport to access markets.

The combined effects of these policies resulted in severe economic distress, pushing vulnerable populations deeper into poverty. *"Because of the fuel subsidy removal, we could not afford things like before, life became harder" (LHI_Akwa Ibom_F05).* While the government aimed to improve economic stability and reduce fiscal burdens, the lack of immediate relief measures left many struggling to survive. Inflation and rising costs have made survival increasingly difficult for impoverished families. The soaring prices of food and fuel have further eroded people's purchasing power, affecting their ability to feed their families and engage in economic activities. One mother lamented the high cost of rice, emphasising the struggles of feeding a household: *"Rice is now sold at ₦200 per cup. How can one afford to feed two or three children with that and you as the mother also eats along?" (FGD_Akwa Ibom_F01).* Similarly, rising transportation costs due to fuel price hikes have crippled mobility and trade: *"Petrol is sold at ₦700 per liter, we cannot afford the cost of transportation, we cannot go out to trade anymore" (FGD_Akwa Ibom_F01).* For those who rely on small-scale trading or agricultural sales, these economic shocks have resulted in business failures and deepened financial insecurity. Furthermore, policies such as the naira redesign have plunged individuals into debt, as seen in one case where a man lost over half of his borrowed money: *"The naira redesign policy led to a debt of over 50% of the borrowed money" (LHI_Akwa Ibom_M06).*

Communal conflicts have triggered leadership crises, leaving communities without effective governance. The arrest of a newly appointed chief amid these disputes created a leadership vacuum, halting development efforts. As one respondent noted, *"This new Chief that is supposed to bring policies to the community was arrested because of the communal crises, and everything has been on a standstill" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F01).* The absence of traditional leadership has further weakened communal ties, leading to a breakdown of unity and cooperation. A community member expressed this concern: *"The community is no longer in oneness, unity, and love; nothing is moving well since then, we have nothing good coming to the village" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F01).* Additionally, the lack of organised leadership, including the absence of a designated representative for women, has left many residents without guidance or advocacy. Another respondent highlighted this gap: *"None of the Chiefs have been able to organise our people. We don't have a woman leader who is supposed to represent women in this community to show us the way forward" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F01).* Beyond governance challenges, communal disputes, land conflicts, and violence have forced many to relocate, often leading to economic hardship. Displacement disrupts access to stable sources of income such as farming, trading, or formal employment. In unfamiliar locations, displaced individuals struggle to find stable work, frequently ending up in irregular or low-paying jobs. This not only affects their immediate financial stability but also limits long-term economic recovery. As one displaced individual explained, *"Conflict between his father and a community member forced the family to relocate, leading to reduced livelihood" (ILH_Akwa Ibom_M06).*

Environmental shocks, particularly flooding, have significantly contributed to poverty by displacing individuals, destroying livelihoods, and limiting economic opportunities. Natural disasters force people to abandon their means of survival, pushing them further into financial distress. For example, one man was compelled to relocate after floods devastated his

rubber-tapping job, stripping him of his primary source of income: "flooding which affected the whole community and forced him to stop work and return to the village, leaving everything he had, with the hope that he will return after the flood" (LHI_Akwa Ibom_M09). Relocation due to environmental shocks often means leaving behind stable income sources and struggling to find alternative employment, which could result in long-term hardship. These disruptions not only affect individuals directly but also have ripple effects on entire communities that rely on farming, fishing, and other land-dependent activities. Other environmental factors, like plant diseases, compound economic struggles, particularly for farmers. The destruction of crops could erase years of investment, leaving farmers with little to no income. One farmer faced such devastation when his cocoa farm was infected, leading to financial ruin: *"His cocoa farm was infected with blackspot disease, which he attributed to spiritual manipulation"* (LHI_Akwa Ibom_M04). While some may perceive such misfortunes as spiritual in nature, the reality remains that environmental conditions such as plant diseases, extreme weather, and soil degradation could lead to substantial economic losses.

Similarly, oil exploration destroys traditional livelihoods, reducing agricultural productivity and affecting overall living conditions. The loss of fishing livelihoods due to oil spills and pollution has had a devastating impact on communities that traditionally rely on fishing as their primary source of income. The contamination of water bodies by crude oil has significantly reduced fish populations, making it difficult for fishermen to sustain their trade. *"The exploration of crude oil has affected a lot of things. Even our water bodies have been affected. Sometimes crude oil floats on the water. Even fishing has been affected, we no longer have as much fish as we used to have. Such things have not allowed us to be as rich as we would have been"* (LTR_Akwa Ibom_M01). This statement underscores how environmental degradation directly translates to economic hardship, pushing communities further into poverty. The reduction in fish supply has not only impacted individual fishermen but has also disrupted the larger market ecosystem that once thrived on the fishing trade. The decline in fishing has also triggered broader socio-economic consequences, including the collapse of local businesses and food insecurity. *"Our people like fishing. Because of these things, business did not flourish, market collapsed, we didn't have as much as they used to have"* (LTR_Akwa Ibom_M01). The interdependence of fishing and trade means that when fish populations decline, entire communities suffer economically. The impact of pollution extends beyond water bodies, affecting agricultural productivity as well. *"Now, no matter how long you leave the land fallow, the cocoyam will not sprout by itself. That is why we have lost so many things"* (LTR_Akwa Ibom_M01).

Climate change has shifted traditional farming methods increasingly ineffective. Communities that once relied on predictable seasonal rains are now struggling with delayed or insufficient rainfall. *"Crude oil drilling has made our climate/weather to change. We used to have rains. Before now, rain started falling immediately after Christmas but now it starts in April"* (LTR_Akwa Ibom_M21). This shift disrupts planting cycles, reducing crop yields and increasing food insecurity. Farmers, who previously depended on natural rainfall, are now forced to adapt to an unpredictable climate, often without adequate resources or infrastructure to support irrigation. The irregularity of rainfall has extended the dry season, further complicating agricultural activities. *"It has affected us because, like I said earlier, rain used to fall either at Christmas or immediately after the New Year celebrations. But now, by the end of January, February, and March, there are no rains"* (LTR_Akwa Ibom_M21). With prolonged dry spells, water sources are depleted, and farmers are increasingly relying on

boreholes for irrigation. However, this method is not a sustainable solution for all, as water access remains limited. *'People now use boreholes to irrigate their farms. And it is not sufficient because rain is not falling the way it used to fall for people to plant.'*

The destruction of farmland due to crude oil spills and land contamination has significantly reduced agricultural productivity in affected communities. Once-fertile lands have been rendered unproductive, forcing farmers to abandon traditional cultivation methods. *"In this Ifianyon Usuk, we don't have what you would call black bush where we can cultivate the way we used to do, because of development that is coming in (LTR_Akwa Ibom_M01).* The expansion of industrial activities, particularly oil extraction, has not only degraded the soil but also reduced the availability of arable land. This loss has led to a decline in food production, increasing dependence on imported or externally sourced food, which further strains household incomes and food security. In the past, nature provided a self-sustaining agricultural cycle, but pollution and environmental changes have disrupted this balance. *'In those days, if you leave the land, things will grow from the ground. In those days, we used to have muddy areas where things used to grow but now, we no longer have muddy areas because of crude oil drilling" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_M02).* The destruction of wetlands and loss of natural irrigation sources have made farming more difficult, requiring additional resources that many farmers cannot afford. Additionally, unpredictable rainfall patterns further worsen the situation. *'Even at that, after three days the rain will stop such that even if you plant and does not have water to irrigate, those things will die.'*

Family tragedies and health crises are impoverishment that push some individuals into financial distress as they struggle to cope with medical expenses and the loss of loved ones. In many cases, significant health issues drain household resources, leaving families vulnerable. For instance, the high cost of medical care consumes an individual's savings, as seen in the case of a man whose wife underwent two caesarean sections: *"His wife went through two caesarean sections during childbirth, which took all that he had" (LHI_Akwa Ibom_M04).* This medical emergency, especially in societies with limited healthcare support, can completely deplete financial resources. The inability to recover from such expenses often results in long-term economic hardship, forcing them to rely on unstable or low-paying jobs. Moreover, severe health crises not only create financial burdens but also diminish a person's ability to work, leading to even greater economic instability. Mental and physical health struggles render some individuals incapable of earning a living, as demonstrated by one man's experience: *"In 2017, the attacks on him became more intense, and in the month of March, it affected his brain and his eyes, which resulted in him going mad and his eyes not seeing properly again" (LHI_Akwa Ibom_M04).* Such conditions make it nearly impossible to sustain a livelihood.

The loss of family members, especially a spouse, devastates the financial stability and emotional well-being of some households. One individual who lost both his wife and most of his children describes the lasting impact: *"Out of 10 children, seven have died, remaining 3. His wife was strangulated to death in the bush where she went to rent a palm plot at Itu. The wife's death brought difficulties to him as he no longer had a helping hand, which has affected him till date" (LHI_Akwa Ibom_M03).* This personal loss compounds financial struggles, leaving individuals without the support they once relied on and ultimately deepening their state of poverty.

Moreso, a failed investments and poor business decisions impact individual households, as financial missteps and external shocks lead to severe economic losses. Many individuals invest in small businesses with limited knowledge or resources, making them vulnerable to market fluctuations, theft, or unforeseen disasters. The inability to recover from such setbacks forces many to rely on low-paying jobs or unsustainable livelihood strategies. One individual recall how a business collapse devastated his financial situation: *"The boat sank, and he lost his capital, making it impossible to continue his fuel business."* (ILH_Akwa Ibom_M02). Similarly, a focus group discussion noted the struggles of those lacking productive assets: *"They are physically able but with few or no productive assets or capital for trading or so."* (FGD_Akwa Ibom_F01).

The relocation of markets due to crises has significantly impacted economic activities, particularly for women who depend on them for their livelihoods. The division and eventual relocation of Ifiayong market to Nwaniba disrupted commerce, making it difficult for traders to maintain their businesses. *"The crisis was because of the market that was divided and our own Ifiayong market was relocated to Nwaniba in another community"* (FGD_Akwa Ibom_F02). This shift left many without viable economic opportunities. *"Since the market is no longer there, our women don't have any tangible thing to do again"* (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F02). Further compounding the issue, an effort by the local government and the World Bank to renovate the market resulted in its complete demolition, further displacing traders. *"People were still selling around the market fringes before the local government and World Bank came to renovate the market"* (LTR_Akwa Ibom_M01). The unintended consequences of these decisions have deepened economic hardship, particularly for small traders who rely on local markets for survival.

Loss of livelihood and economic instability remain significant contributors to impoverishment, as individuals struggle to maintain a stable source of income due to external shocks and economic downturns. Many livelihoods, particularly those reliant on infrastructure and market stability, are vulnerable to disruptions. For instance, the unreliability of public power supply in 2008 caused the collapse of a welding business, leading to inconsistent income and a decline in household welfare: *"In 2008, public power supply became erratic and unreliable, which also affected his welding work. Because of lack of power supply, his welding business collapsed, his income was no longer consistent, and life became difficult. Their feeding dropped from thrice to twice a day"* (LHI_Akwa Ibom_M01). This case illustrates how even skilled workers can face setbacks when essential services fail, forcing them into financial hardship. Without alternative means of sustaining their business, many individuals are left unable to support their families adequately.

Section 4: Sustained Escapes

4.1 Livelihoods Supporting Sustained Escapes

Sustained escapees leveraged agriculture as a stable and strategic livelihood activity, ensuring both food security and financial growth. Unlike subsistence farmers who struggled with low yields and market uncertainties, these individuals approached farming with a business-oriented mindset, cultivating high-value crops such as cassava, oil palm, and melon for both consumption and sale. Their ability to generate surplus produce allowed them to reinvest in land, equipment, and other income-generating ventures. For instance, *Mrs. Comfort* and her husband strategically cultivated cassava and melon, with her *“selling melon in bags”* and using the profits to *“buy another land and build a five-room apartment.”* This demonstrates how agricultural investments, when managed effectively, could create long-term economic stability and asset accumulation.

Land expansion was another crucial factor in maintaining financial independence and sustaining poverty escapes. Unlike those trapped in CP due to limited land access, SE strategically acquired or rented additional farmland to scale their agricultural production. *Emmanuel Edet Effiong* and his household, for example, successfully rented *“up to ten parcels of land for cassava farming,”* ensuring a steady livelihood that helped them remain above the poverty line. Their ability to secure multiple plots highlights the importance of land access in improving economic resilience, as larger-scale farming enables greater output, higher sales, and reinvestment opportunities. Additionally, these escapees likely benefited from improved farming techniques, better market linkages, and financial discipline, distinguishing them from vulnerable farmers who struggle with sustainability. The success of these SE is an indication res the role of strategic decision-making, reinvestment, and resilience in breaking the cycle of poverty. Their ability to transition from farming as mere survival to farming as a business enabled them to accumulate wealth and improve their living standards. However, their continued success depends on stable land tenure, access to agricultural inputs, and protection from external risks such as climate change and market fluctuations.

Trading and small businesses played a crucial role in sustaining poverty escapes by offering opportunities for diversification, resilience, and financial growth. Unlike vulnerable traders who struggled with instability and fraud, sustained escapees strategically reinvested their earnings to expand their businesses. Many engaged in value-added agricultural processing, such as cassava processing and palm oil trading, which ensured higher returns than raw produce sales. For example, *Mrs. Comfort* leveraged her *garri business* to achieve *“a slight improvement, eventually saving enough to expand her ventures.”*

A key characteristic of these escapees was their ability to reinvest profits and integrate trading with farming. Rather than relying solely on one income source, they combined agricultural production with small businesses to create multiple revenue streams. *Emmanuel Edet Effiong* and his household exemplified this approach, as their *“cassava business continues to thrive, allowing them to reinvest profits into farming and processing fufu for sale.”* This reinvestment strategy not only increased household earnings but also provided a buffer against economic shocks, ensuring that financial setbacks did not push them back into poverty. The ability to process and sell finished agricultural products further highlights the importance of value addition in sustaining economic mobility. Women, in particular, played a

significant role in trading activities, using entrepreneurship to enhance household income and improve resilience. Many leveraged small grants or support programmes to start businesses in soap-making, food vending, and other petty trades. *Mrs. Veronica*, for example, “used the money from the *Dakada ambassador programme* to start a soap-making business and also fried akara for sale.”

Palm oil production and rubber processing were key economic activities that facilitated SE’s by providing stable income and opportunities for financial growth. Unlike those engaged in subsistence farming or low-paying wage labour, individuals in these industries were able to generate substantial savings and reinvest in long-term assets. Palm oil processing, in particular, allowed individuals to leverage locally available resources to establish profitable businesses. *Mrs. Comfort*, for example, strategically joined the *oil palm processing business*, which not only enabled her to “pay her children’s school fees” but also “raise a structure for herself.” This illustrates how engaging in value-added agricultural processing helped individuals transition from basic survival to financial stability and asset accumulation.

Rubber tapping, while labour-intensive, provided another viable pathway for economic advancement when managed strategically. Sustained escapees in this sector demonstrated financial discipline by saving and reinvesting their earnings to scale their operations. *Emmanuel Edet Effiong* exemplified this by using *savings from rubber waste to rent a plantation and begin tapping independently*, reducing his dependence on exploitative labour arrangements. This move toward ownership and self-sufficiency reflects the importance of strategic reinvestment in maintaining upward mobility. Rather than remaining stuck in low-paying manual labour, sustained escapees capitalised on their earnings to secure better economic opportunities.

Social programmes and employment opportunities played a crucial role in supporting sustained poverty escapes by providing financial stability during periods of transition. Government initiatives such as the Sure-P programme and the National Social Investment Programme helped households secure temporary income, which was then strategically reinvested into long-term livelihood activities. These programmes acted as a safety net, enabling families to recover from economic shocks and make critical improvements to their living conditions. For example, *Mrs. Veronica’s husband earned ₦10,000 monthly through the Sure-P programme, which later increased to ₦50,000 during Goodluck Jonathan’s regime*. With this income, they were able to “change the roof of their thatched house to zinc and buy land.” This demonstrates how social programmes, even with modest payouts, provided essential capital for asset accumulation and improved living standards. Beyond immediate relief, social programmes facilitated strategic reinvestment in productive economic activities, ensuring long-term financial sustainability. *Emmanuel Edet Effiong’s wife* benefited from the *National Social Investment Programme*, which allowed them to “invest the cash disbursement into cassava and palm oil businesses.” This highlights how targeted financial assistance, when utilised effectively, can transform short-term aid into lasting economic empowerment. Rather than relying on handouts, sustained escapees used these funds to expand their businesses, reinforcing their ability to remain above the poverty line. Such cases emphasise the importance of structured financial support programmes that encourage entrepreneurship and self-sufficiency.

4.2 Poverty Interrupters

Individual attributes such as determination, resilience, and hard work enable individuals to seize opportunities and recover from setbacks. Personal motivation is often the driving force behind sustained economic progress, allowing individuals to rebuild their lives even after experiencing significant financial losses. One example is a woman who, despite losing everything, refused to succumb to poverty. Through sheer determination, she took on daily jobs, saved money, and successfully restarted her business: *"She was a very hardworking and industrious woman. After losing everything, she resorted to daily jobs, saved enough money, and started another oil processing business"* (LHI_Akwa Ibom_M03). Resilience and persistence empower individuals to overcome financial hardships and establish sustainable livelihoods. Similarly, skills and expertise serve as a strong foundation for economic recovery among some households, as seen in the story of a welder who attributed his success to hard work and technical proficiency rather than formal education: *"He attributed his success in the welding industry to hard work and proficiency, not education"* (LHI_Akwa Ibom_M01). This highlights the importance of skill acquisition and self-reliance in poverty reduction. Many individuals who have escaped poverty emphasise the value of persistence, adaptability, and continuous effort in navigating economic shocks and sustaining.

Asset ownership provides them with the means to establish sustainable livelihoods.

Productive assets such as land, tools, and equipment serve as long-term investments that generate income and improve financial stability for some households. For instance, land ownership allows individuals to engage in farming, which serves as both a source of food and revenue. One woman was able to transform her financial situation through land acquisition: *"She bought one acre of land at the rate of seven thousand francs, which allowed her to start cultivating melon and cassava. This significantly improved her life"* (LHI_Akwa Ibom_F02). This example highlights how owning land creates economic opportunities, enabling individuals to build stable livelihoods and reduce vulnerability to poverty. Access to essential business equipment is also a crucial factor in financial recovery and sustainability. Many entrepreneurs struggle when external shocks impact their businesses, but asset ownership provides a way to adapt and rebuild. One welder was able to sustain his livelihood by reinvesting in his business after experiencing power supply issues: *"He sold his land and used the money to buy a power generator for his welding business, which helped him recover from the effects of erratic power supply"* (LHI_Akwa Ibom_M01). This demonstrates how owning assets offers financial resilience, allowing individuals to reinvest in their work and recover from setbacks. Whether through land, tools, or equipment, asset ownership provides a strong foundation for economic stability, helping individuals sustain their escape from poverty and build a more secure future.

Spousal support provides both financial assistance and emotional encouragement. When partners work together, they combine resources, share responsibilities, and create a more stable household economy. One woman's journey to financial stability was made possible through her husband's backing: *"With the support of her husband, she was able to start a business that took her to level 3. Her life was improved to the point she was able to start a farming business in addition to Akara business, which helped her to buy land and palm trees with the help of her husband "* (LHI_Akwa Ibom_F04). Moreover, when both partners contribute to household income, it reduces financial pressure and allows for greater investment in businesses and essential needs. A strong example of this is a household where the husband's fishing business complemented his wife's farming, leading to improved

living conditions: *"Her husband was also a farmer; he assisted her in farming, he had a canoe which he used in fishing, and the money he made from the business was enough to support her and the family"* (LHI_Akwa_Ibom_F05). Likewise, another family experienced financial relief when the wife's hairdressing business contributed to household income: *"His wife was a hairdresser and used to bring in money from her hair-making business. This brought relief and happiness to everyone as their lives became easier"* (LHI_Akwa_Ibom_M03).

Similarly, community support and social networks also provide financial assistance, guidance, and emotional encouragement. Family members and friends serve as informal safety nets, offering crucial resources during times of economic distress. For example, one man was able to sustain his livelihood and even expand his farmland due to financial support from his children and son-in-law: *"His son-in-law and children now send him financial support regularly, which has helped him maintain his livelihood and buy additional farmland"* (LTR_Akwa_Ibom_M02). This demonstrates how social ties provide stability and opportunities for economic advancement, ensuring that individuals do not fall back into poverty. Likewise, community advice and mentorship can be life-changing, as seen in the case of a woman who transitioned from unstable daily jobs to a profitable farming business after receiving guidance from a community member: *"A woman in the community advised her to leave her daily jobs and join agriculture, which led to her buying land and starting a successful farming business"* (LHI_Akwa_Ibom_F02). Such examples highlight the transformative power of community networks in fostering sustainable livelihoods.

Social networks also help some families overcome major life challenges, including the loss of a breadwinner. When one woman lost her husband and could no longer afford to send her children to secondary school, her siblings stepped in to support their education: *"Her children went to government primary school in Kwara state while the father was alive. After the death of her husband, which prompted her to move to Akwa Ibom, she could not send them to secondary school. One of her brothers took her son while the sister took the daughter. They were the ones who sponsored them to the secondary level"* (LHI_Akwa_Ibom_F09).

Entrepreneurship offers financial independence and long-term stability. A prime example is a man who started a palm kernel business in 2016, which later allowed him to expand into transportation: *"In 2016, the husband started a palm kernel business; it was within the same year that the mother-in-law died. In 2019 the husband made enough gain from the palm kernel business; he used it to purchase Keke and started another line of business"* (LHI_Akwa_Ibom_F04). Entrepreneurship, when managed well, could lead to economic growth and diversification, reducing financial vulnerability. Similarly, business ownership provides women with economic empowerment and stability, as seen in the case of a woman who successfully ran a business with her husband's support: *"She was able to engage in business, and her husband also supported her"* (LHI_Akwa_Ibom_F04). When both partners contribute to entrepreneurship, households become more resilient against financial shocks, ensuring long-term economic security. Entrepreneurship also led to large-scale investments that significantly improved financial well-being. For instance, a woman leveraged her earnings from farming to expand her business and acquire more assets: *"After buying the land, she started large-scale farming. She cultivated cassava and melon; it was such that she could sell her melon in bags. From the money she made from her produce, she was able to buy another land and also build a five-room apartment"* (LHI_Akwa_Ibom_F02).

Diversified livelihoods reduce economic vulnerability and ensure financial stability. When individuals engage in multiple income-generating activities, they create alternative revenue streams that help them absorb financial shocks and maintain their standard of living. One example of this strategy is seen in a man who successfully combined different business ventures to sustain his family: *"His cassava business, coupled with fufu processing and palm oil trading, has been the backbone of his family's sustained escape from poverty"* (FGD_Akwa Ibom_M02). This demonstrates how diversification not only provides financial security but also ensures resilience against economic downturns. Similarly, diversification allows individuals to maximise their economic opportunities by leveraging different skills and resources. A woman who successfully sustained her family's escape from poverty did so by engaging in multiple businesses simultaneously: *"She combined akara frying with soap-making and farming, which helped her family to sustain their escape and improve their well-being"* (LHI_Akwa Ibom_F04).

Government and institutional support provide financial assistance that helps individuals start businesses, invest in assets, and sustain themselves during economic hardships. Cash transfer programmes, whether from the government or non-governmental organisations, enable beneficiaries to improve their living conditions and create sustainable sources of income. One such example is the *Sure-P programme*, which provided financial relief to a household, allowing them to make significant investments: *"Through the Sure-P programme, her husband earned ₦10,000 monthly, later increased to ₦50,000. They used this money to change their thatched roof to zinc and buy land"* (LHI_Akwa Ibom_F04). Similarly, targeted financial aid could help individuals secure income-generating assets, as seen in the case of a family that benefited from the *National Social Investment Programme*: *"The National Social Investment Programme gave them funds to rent a palm plantation, which became a major source of income"* (LHI_Akwa Ibom_M05). The direct cash transfers empower beneficiaries to invest in businesses and achieve financial independence. For instance, during the *Buhari administration*, a woman received financial assistance that enabled her to start a small business and improve her family's nutrition: *"In 2020, during President Buhari's regime, she got a cash transfer which helped her and her children. So, she used the money to start a banana business, which improved her life, and they could eat three times a day"* (LHI_Akwa Ibom_F08).

Education and skill acquisition equip individuals with the ability to secure better job opportunities and improve business performance. Vocational training, in particular, allows people to develop practical skills that provide long-term financial stability. One example is a man who, despite facing extreme financial hardship, turned his life around through welding: *"He learned welding, a skill that gave him an edge over others. This period represented the lowest wellbeing of his life, but it became a turning point when he later opened his welding workshop"* (LHI_Akwa Ibom_M02). Learning a skill also act as a buffer to some households against economic instability, providing individuals with alternative income sources when faced with financial challenges. One man's experience reflects this reality: *"He left his father to learn welding and later served both his brother and his uncle as a welder. This period represented the lowest well-being of 2 in his life history. After that time, his well-being level fluctuated between levels 3 and 4. One thing he has that other respondents do not have, which seems to be the reason why his well-being level averaged those levels, is that he learned a skill"* (LHI_Akwa Ibom_M01).

Box 1: Gender and Economic Mobility: Differences in Sustained Escape

Women frequently turn to small-scale businesses and government assistance as a means of survival. Many women start businesses, such as selling vegetables or palm oil production. For instance, one woman stated, "Later on, she started selling vegetables, which has been her stable business from that time till date" (LHI_Akwa Ibom_F03). This demonstrates how women engage in petty trading to sustain themselves. In another case, a widow depended on a government cash transfer to restart a business, saying, "She was empowered by the government through cash transfer, which helped her to start a banana business" (LHI_Akwa Ibom_F08). These examples reveal how women rely on informal businesses combined with external support. Unlike women, men often depend on skilled labour or migration to sustain themselves. One respondent recounted how he "left his father to learn welding and later served both his brother and his uncle as a welder." His ability to acquire a skill enabled him to maintain a relatively stable livelihood. Another individual relied on relocation to improve his well-being, stating, "Relocated to Edo state and was employed as a rubber tapper" (LHI_Akwa Ibom_F08).

Women face greater challenges in escaping poverty due to social constraints, including gender discrimination in education and dependency on male figures. One woman narrated how her father refused to sponsor her education despite her stepmother's insistence, forcing her into early marriage. Another woman faced difficulty escaping poverty after her husband's death, as she was solely dependent on him, stating, "The situation that brought her back to poverty was the death of her husband because she depended on him for everything" (LHI_Akwa Ibom_F09). These examples illustrate how cultural norms limit women's financial independence and upward mobility. While men may have better access to skills and employment, they are also vulnerable to job instability. One male respondent recounted how his well-being declined after his employer failed to fulfil a settlement promise, forcing him to work as a security guard and later return to subsistence farming. Another man described how he lost his job when his employer passed away, stating, "The transport company folded up due to the death of the owner, and he moved to Etinan to work as a security man" (LHI_Akwa Ibom_M10).

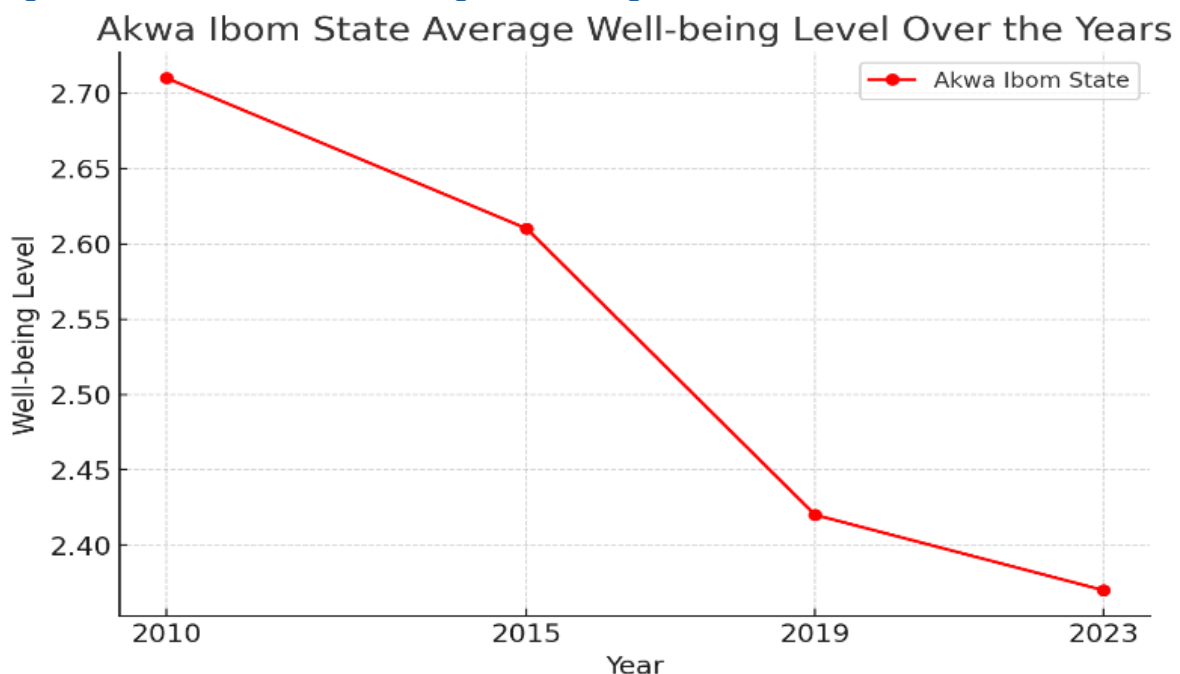
For both men and women, having a supportive spouse can be a key factor in poverty escape. Women particularly benefit from husbands who contribute to household businesses. One woman stated, "With the support of her husband, she was able to start a business that took her to level 3" (LHI_Akwa Ibom_F04). . Conversely, the absence of spousal support, as seen in the case of a woman whose husband abandoned her due to gender preferences for male children, pushed her back into poverty. While spousal support could be an asset, its absence disproportionately affects women.

Section 5: Demographics disparities: Rural vs. urban poverty, gendered impacts

5.1 Rural-Urban Differences

The average well-being level in Akwa Ibom State has shown a consistent decline from 2010 to 2023, indicating worsening living conditions over time. In 2010, the well-being level was at 2.71 but dropped to 2.61 by 2015, reflecting early signs of economic or social challenges. This downward trend continued, reaching 2.42 in 2019 and further declining to 2.37 in 2023. The steady decline suggests increasing hardship, potentially influenced by economic instability, inflation, unfavourable government policies, and external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 3: Akwa Ibom State Average Well-being Level Over the Years

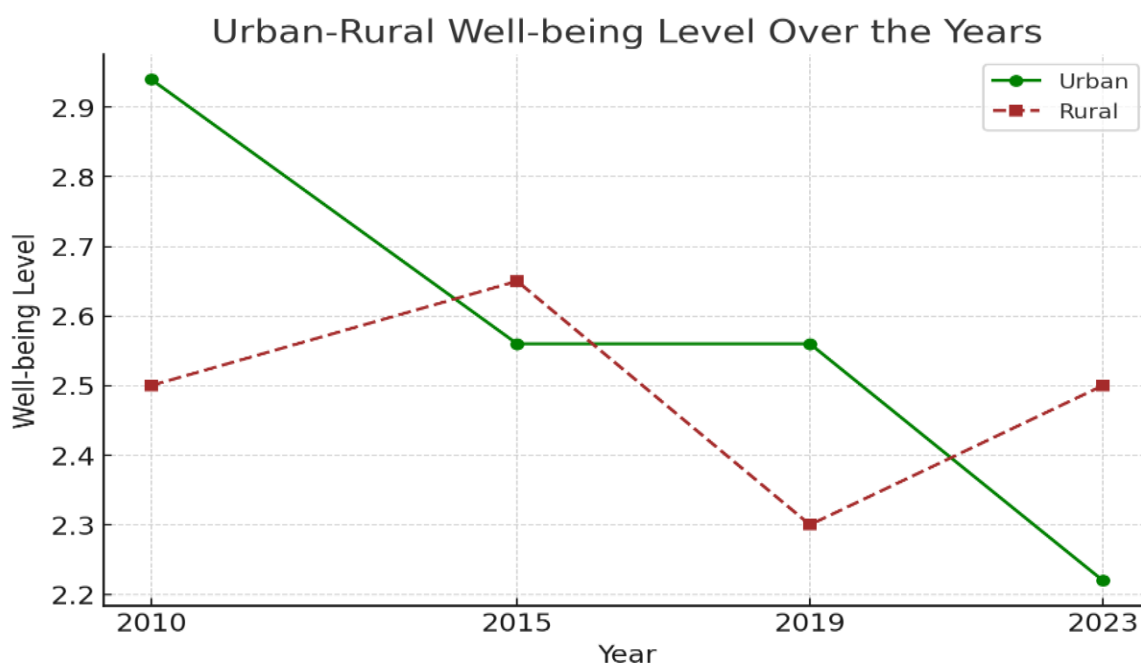


Source: Created by the Author from LHIs Project Data

The well-being levels in urban and rural areas of Akwa Ibom State have fluctuated over the years, showing distinct trends. Urban well-being started higher at 2.94 in 2010 but saw a continuous decline, dropping to 2.56 in 2015 and remaining stagnant in 2019 before falling further to 2.22 in 2023. This decline suggests increasing economic struggles in urban areas, possibly due to job losses, inflation, and government policies affecting businesses. Urban residents, reliant on formal employment and commerce, may have been more vulnerable to economic downturns, cashless policies, and subsidy removals, which negatively impacted their financial stability. In contrast, rural well-being showed a different trajectory, initially increasing from 2.5 in 2010 to 2.65 in 2015, then dropping to 2.3 in 2019 before rebounding to 2.5 in 2023. The resilience of rural well-being could be attributed to diversified income sources, including agriculture and community support systems. Unlike urban dwellers, rural residents may have benefited from subsistence farming, reducing their vulnerability to

economic crises. The rise in 2023 suggests possible adaptation strategies, such as engaging in multiple income-generating activities or receiving community and government support. However, both urban and rural areas still experience challenges that require policy interventions to improve overall well-being.

Figure 4: Rural and Urban Average Well-being Level Over the Years in Akwa Ibom State



Source: Created by the Author from LHIs Project Data

Poverty manifests differently in rural and urban areas, shaped by distinct economic structures, livelihood sources, and access to social services. In rural areas, poverty is often tied to agriculture and land ownership, while urban poverty is influenced by employment instability and market fluctuations. The life histories documented in Akwa Ibom illustrate how individuals in both settings navigate poverty, often experiencing shifts between upward and downward mobility. For example, a respondent who relied on farming and daily jobs in the village highlighted how her well-being fluctuated over time: *"She was into palm oil production, coupled with her husband's support; she was able to invest more money into her palm oil production business"* (LHI_Akwa Ibom_F05). However, following her husband's death and her son's arrest, she fell back into poverty due to loss of support and assets.

One major distinction between rural and urban poverty is access to job opportunities. In urban areas, job loss can quickly lead to financial crisis due to high living costs. One respondent recounted how his family's well-being declined after his employer failed to settle him as promised: *"Instead of his boss to settle him as agreed, he recalled him back to continue in the company as a driver. He went back but when the owner of the company died, the company folded up and he became jobless"* (LHI_Akwa Ibom_M10). Unlike in rural areas where subsistence farming can provide a safety net, urban residents often have no alternative when formal employment disappears, leading to severe financial insecurity.

Another key factor affecting poverty levels is gender. Women in rural areas face additional hardships due to societal norms that limit their education and economic opportunities. One

woman shared how she was denied an education because "female education was considered a waste of resources; it was believed that the female child would eventually get pregnant and start having children, so education was not an option for her"(LHI_Akwa Ibom_F03). This lack of education restricted her ability to secure well-paying jobs, keeping her confined to subsistence farming and petty trading. In urban areas, while women have more access to education and employment, they often encounter wage disparities and job discrimination, limiting their economic mobility.

The role of external shocks also differs in rural and urban settings. Rural households are more vulnerable to environmental disasters, such as floods, which can wipe out their primary source of income. One respondent explained how *"in 2012, he quit rubber tapping due to flooding,"* forcing him to relocate and find new means of livelihood (LHI_Akwa Ibom_M019). On the other hand, urban residents are more affected by economic policies, such as fuel subsidy removals and cashless transactions, which increase their cost of living and limit their access to financial services.

Despite these disparities, both rural and urban households often depend on social assistance to escape extreme poverty. Government programmes such as cash transfers have been instrumental in improving living conditions. One respondent noted how *"in 2021, she received a cash transfer which helped her to boost her business, and she was able to feed three times a day"* (LHI_Akwa Ibom_F01). However, while rural recipients often invest such assistance into farming or small-scale trade, urban beneficiaries face higher living costs, making it harder for them to sustain improvements in well-being.

Box 2: Wellbeing and Economic Status Across Social Classes

Wellbeing across social classes in Akwa Ibom State, as depicted in Table 10, reveals stark disparities influenced by economic status, particularly in dimensions like food and nutrition, housing conditions, education, and resilience to shocks. The "Poorest of the Poor" and "Very Poor" experience severe deprivation, with irregular access to low-quality food (e.g., cocoyam or garri) and inhumane living conditions such as mud/thatch homes with leaking roofs or homelessness. Education for their children is minimal, often limited to free public primary schooling with high dropout rates, and they possess virtually no assets or skills beyond menial labour. Social and political relationships are negligible, leaving them stigmatised and excluded, with extreme vulnerability to shocks like illness or floods that they cannot recover from. In contrast, the "Not Poor but Not Rich" and "Rich/Resilient" classes enjoy significantly better wellbeing, with consistent meals (including meat and fish for the latter), stable housing (mud/zinc or concrete homes), and access to education up to secondary or university levels. These groups also demonstrate moderate to strong social ties and some political influence, enabling greater resilience against life's challenges.]

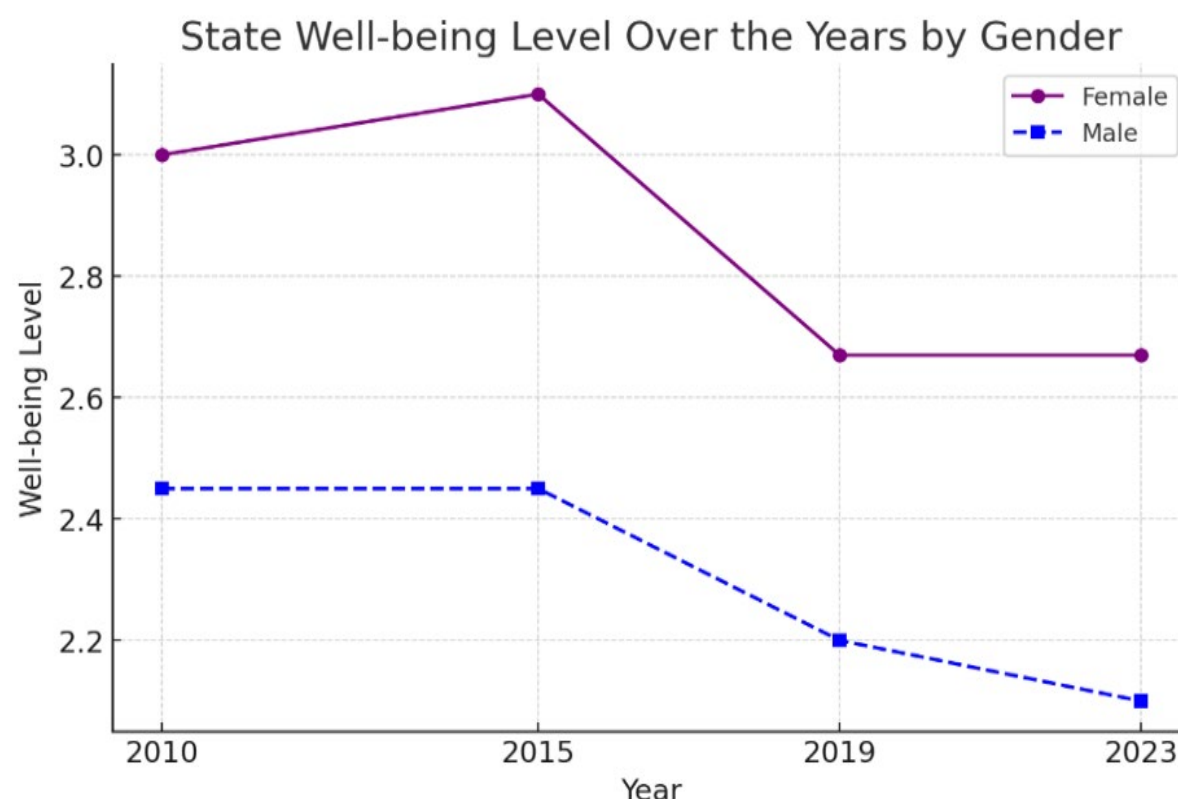
Economic status further delineates these wellbeing disparities, as it directly correlates with access to resources, economic relationships, and the ability to withstand adversity. The "Poorest of the Poor" and "Very Poor" have little to no economic agency unable to borrow, trade reliably, or accumulate assets beyond small inherited land plots, which are often sold out of desperation. Their economic isolation exacerbates their social exclusion and political irrelevance, as they are only acknowledged during elections for votes. Meanwhile, the "Poor" engage in petty trading and limited borrowing, though their modest assets (e.g., radios or small livestock) offer little buffer against shocks. Higher up, the "Not Poor but Not

Rich" and "Rich/Resilient" leverage land ownership, vehicles, and trade networks to sustain economic activity, with the rich even hiring labour and lending money. The "Very Rich," though less tied to the village, epitomise economic dominance with urban-based wealth and extensive assets, underscoring how economic power enhances wellbeing across all dimensions while leaving the lower classes trapped in a cycle of poverty and fragility. See the Annex.

5.2 Intersecting crises among individual households by Gender

The state well-being levels over the years by gender indicate a noticeable trend in both male and female well-being scores. In 2010, females had a well-being level of 3, which slightly increased to 3.1 in 2015. However, after 2015, there was a decline, with the score dropping to 2.67 in 2019 and remaining at that level in 2023. This suggests that while female well-being initially saw some improvement, it later experienced a decline and then stabilised. This pattern may indicate underlying factors such as economic conditions, social changes, or access to resources that influenced female well-being during this period. For males, the well-being levels remained constant at 2.45 between 2010 and 2015. However, in 2019, there was a decline to 2.2, which further dropped to 2.1 in 2023. Unlike females, whose well-being levels initially increased before declining, males showed a gradual and consistent decrease over the years. This continuous decline could reflect challenges such as increased stress, financial instability, or reduced access to support systems that affect male well-being. The overall trend indicates that both genders experienced a reduction in well-being levels after 2015, with males facing a more consistent downward trajectory.

Figure 5: Jigawa State Average Well-being Level Over the Years



Source: Created by the Author from LHIs Project Data

Gender differences in the impact of intersecting crises are evident in how individuals navigate economic, social, and policy-driven hardships. For men, crises often exacerbate pre-existing vulnerabilities related to employment and displacement. Respondent A, a 46-year-old menial worker, faced extreme hardship due to COVID-19, flooding, and the naira redesign policy. His pre-existing illness made securing work difficult during the pandemic, forcing his wife to become the sole provider. *"Covid-19 period was a very difficult one for him because since he was already sick, people were not accepting him for work so all responsibilities for their survival were on his wife."* Beyond health and employment struggles, he was displaced twice due to flooding, leading to the loss of his livelihood. However, he identified the naira redesign policy as the most devastating factor. *"The naira redesign policy of the Buhari administration had the worst effect on him because it pushed his life to the lowest level of well-being."* This highlights how intersecting crises—natural disasters, health issues, and economic policies—disproportionately impact men by disrupting their primary income sources and pushing them into deeper financial instability.

For women, financial policies and social instability present distinct challenges, particularly for those in informal sectors. A 49-year-old petty trader (LHI_Akwa Ibom_F09) initially faced minimal hardship before COVID-19, but the cashless policy and fuel subsidy removal drastically affected her ability to sustain her business. She struggled to withdraw money sent by family members, stating, *"During the cashless policy, life became very difficult for her because even when her family members sent some money to her through bank transfer, she could not withdraw the money because there was no money available."* The fuel subsidy removal further worsened her situation by increasing transportation costs, limiting her ability to reach the market. *"Fuel subsidy removal also makes life very difficult for her because she cannot transport her business to the market to make sales; life has become so difficult for her."* Similarly, an 83-year-old vegetable seller (LHI_Akwa Ibom_F03) suffered financial setbacks due to the naira redesign, losing access to her savings. *"Even the money that she was told to take back to the bank, she has not been able to get back her money even up till now. The situation really made her poorer."* These cases illustrate how economic policies disproportionately affect women in informal trade, disrupting their financial independence and deepening poverty.

Women also bear a greater social and emotional burden due to crises, particularly when they assume caregiving roles in the absence of male providers. A 34-year-old palm oil producer (LHI_Akwa Ibom_M06) struggled financially despite receiving cash transfers, as her overall well-being remained low. *"In 2023, she was assisted by cash transfer, and she used the same money to pay her children's school fees but their well-being was still at level WB3."* However, beyond financial struggles, she endured emotional distress following her husband's arrest due to intercommunal conflict. *"In 2020, her husband was arrested because of kinship crises in the community."* This left her with greater financial and caregiving responsibilities, showcasing how women are often left to manage household survival amidst crisis. Her experience highlights how intersecting crises—economic, social, and political—create long-term hardships for women, as financial assistance alone does not address the structural barriers they face.

Section 6: Social Assistance Amidst Crisis

6.1 Targeting of Individuals, Households, and Communities for Assistance

Identification of the Poorest Households: Targeting assistance to specific individuals, households, or communities during crises relied on structured identification methods. One key approach was conducting surveys to pinpoint the poorest households eligible for financial aid. “We do not select the names, we use the names pasted in the local government which comes from the previous survey of the poor in the community, we use the names from the government” (KII_Akwa Ibim_F01). This process ensured that government interventions reached the most vulnerable populations, minimising errors and favouritism in distribution. In 2018, the government strengthened its efforts by directly deploying trained personnel to villages in nine local government areas severely impacted by poverty. Aside from 2018, when President Buhari selected and trained us to go into villages in nine local governments where poverty was believed to be devastating the population, including Ibesikpo, Uruan, Nsit Atai, Ika, and Oruk Anam, among others. (KII_Akwa Ibom_M02).

Beyond large-scale surveys, direct identification by field officers played a crucial role in targeting aid. “Some people were sent to identify the poor households. After the identification, we, the enumerators, went in to see and capture them” (KII_Akwa Ibim_M02). This method allowed for firsthand assessment of living conditions, ensuring that those truly in need were included in social programmes. The combination of pre-existing government records and on-the-ground verification helped streamline the selection process, making it more accurate and transparent.

Targeting assistance based on community and geographic location: This ensured that aid reached areas most in need, considering both poverty levels and accessibility. The selection process was not uniform across entire states but rather focused on specific local government areas identified as highly vulnerable. *‘If Akwa Ibom is going to benefit from it, it will not be everyone in Akwa Ibom, it is only nine (9) local government areas including Nsit Atai’* (KII_Akwa Ibom_F01). This approach allowed resources to be distributed more effectively, prioritising regions where poverty was most severe. Additionally, aid distribution was facilitated through organised community groups, ensuring direct access to beneficiaries. *‘The money was given to them in person through their different groups’* (KII_Akwa Ibom_F01).

Financial and logistical constraints also played a role in determining which locations received assistance. “Based on government’s financial capability... the chairman decided to do the one at Itu Mbang because it is conspicuously located” (KII_Akwa Ibom_M01). This highlights how funding availability and infrastructure influenced the implementation of aid programmes. While prioritising accessible locations may have streamlined distribution, it may have also left some remote or marginalised communities underserved.

Women, particularly caregivers: Prioritised in-cash transfer programmes and other government aid initiatives to enhance economic stability and reduce poverty. These programmes specifically targeted women as primary beneficiaries, ensuring that financial support was directed towards household well-being and business ventures. *‘The programme was majorly for women except the woman whose name was in the record is no more, that is*

the only time the money will go to the husband or the child (KII_akwa Ibim_F01). By focusing on women, the government aimed to empower them economically and create a ripple effect of financial stability within their families and communities. The funds provided were intended to support small businesses and prevent families from falling deeper into poverty. *'The money was for the women to use in business to keep them from poverty.'* The programme also included training and guidance on effective money management. *"It was to teach them what the programme was for and also train them how to use the money to come out of poverty"* (KII_akwa Ibim_F01).

Criteria of Vulnerability (Widows, Households in Crisis): Households experiencing severe crises, such as widowhood, disability, and health challenges, were prioritised for assistance due to their heightened vulnerability. Government and aid programmes focused on individuals who lacked stable sources of income or support systems, ensuring that relief reached those in the most desperate need. *"She stayed in one house; one side of the house was soaked with water. She told me she is a widow with children, I captured her without any delay"* (KII_akwa Ibim_M02). This indicates that fieldworkers were actively identifying and registering widows and other vulnerable individuals to ensure they received aid without unnecessary bureaucratic delays. Such an approach acknowledges that economic hardship is often compounded by personal tragedies, making targeted intervention essential for these households.

Additionally, the system was flexible in accommodating individuals who faced health challenges or were unable to physically collect aid. *"Sometimes even when the women themselves don't come because of health challenges we still use their identity card to pay them through the family representatives"* (KII_akwa Ibim_F01). This ensured that no eligible recipient was left out due to mobility issues or illness. The criteria for vulnerability extended beyond widowhood to include various crises such as ill health, bereavement, and broader economic instability. *'Ill health, death of a loved one, crisis.'*

Political and administrative decisions: The allocation of funds and projects was influenced by factors such as revenue-generating potential and strategic importance. *"So, when you want to carry out an activity, you consider the revenue generating capacity or capability of that facility"* (KII_Akwa Ibim_M02). This suggests that some initiatives were designed to benefit communities that could contribute to economic growth, while others were provided purely as relief measures. However, not all projects were driven by financial returns; some were established solely for community welfare. *"Right from the word go, that of Ndon Ebom does not yield money for the government, it is just there for the community people to enjoy as a form of palliative"* (KII_Akwa Ibim_M02). This indicates that certain aid projects were implemented as social interventions rather than economic investments.

Resource availability also influenced the expansion of aid programmes, with additional communities benefiting when funds allowed. *"We had a lot of money remaining after we had done what was to be done. So, we upscaled to additional local governments"* (KII_akwa Ibim_M01). This highlights the government's approach to fund distribution once initial priorities were met, remaining resources were used to extend assistance to other areas. However, this method also suggests that some communities only received aid as a secondary consideration rather than as part of a comprehensive strategy.

Inclusion of ethnic minorities: This was a deliberate effort to ensure fairness and equal access to resources. Government policies emphasised the importance of gender and social

inclusion, ensuring that all communities, regardless of ethnic background, had a fair chance at benefiting from aid programmes. *"In our water sector law, we have made a very strong statement that in everything we want to do, even in appointments, government should make sure... to take into consideration gender and social inclusion"* (KII_Akwa Ibom_M01). This demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity, not just in social programmes but also in governance and decision-making. Such policies aimed to prevent the marginalisation of minority groups, ensuring they had a voice and access to essential services.

Practical steps were also taken to include ethnic minorities in specific aid initiatives. During a cleanup campaign, officials identified a community predominantly occupied by Igbos and ensured their participation. *"During the cleanup campaign, we went to a community and discovered the Igbos are the ones there... we factor them in"* (KII_Akwa Ibom_M01). Similarly, government agencies considered the needs of Fulani communities by providing resources suited to their lifestyle. *"There was a time we positioned the agency against emergency... we acquired so many rubber kettles. Rubber kettles are used by which people? The Fulani"* (KII_Akwa Ibom_M01).

6.2 Social Assistance and its Effectiveness Amidst Complex Crises

Several interventions were identified by the respondents across LHI, KII, FGD and LTR, including the Conditional Cash Transfer, Trader Money Programme, COVID-19 Food Relief Programme, and the National Youth Volunteer Programme. Others mentioned were the Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (Sure-P), Child Education Support Initiative, Survival Fund, Electrification Project, Water Supply Projects, and the Public Work Programme as stated in table 10 below. For instance, **Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programme identified by the respondents provide financial support to poor and vulnerable households, with the objective of reducing poverty and improving access to essential services, such as education.** While the programme has demonstrated positive effects, including helping families pay school fees and lifting some households out of poverty, its effectiveness is hampered by a lack of continuity. The transformative potential of the CCT programme is evident in testimonies like, "It was President Buhari's second term that brought us cash transfers that changed our lives positively and moved us out of poverty" (FGD_Akwa Ibom_F02), indicating its profound impact when it was implemented. However, the lack of continuity, as noted in "Some of them fall back because of lack of continuity" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F02), reveals that interruptions in the programme's implementation led to setbacks for beneficiaries, undermining its long-term benefits.

In addition to issues of continuity, the CCT programme faces challenges in terms of adequacy, reliability, and fairness. Its limited coverage excludes many vulnerable households, as reflected in "These sets of people were not among the beneficiaries, so their lives remained the same" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F02), leaving a significant number of families without support. The programme is also criticised for being unreliable, with payments fluctuating due to changes in government, as stated in "Nothing has changed; because of lack of intervention, it has been fluctuating from time to time due to the change of government" (KII_Akwa Ibom_F01). Furthermore, concerns about political favouritism in beneficiary selection are evident in, "Only remembered when it is time to vote and thereafter forgotten" (FGD_Akwa Ibom_F02), which highlights the programme's vulnerability to politicisation. While the CCT programme offers immediate relief, its inability to ensure sustainability and provide long-term solutions for poverty alleviation limits its overall impact,

as noted in "Yes, the government brought cash transfer which helped some women in the community" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F02). The programme's short-term benefits are clear, but it lacks the necessary strategies for lasting change.

Table 8: Effectiveness of intervention

Programme	Objective	Component s	Impact	Adequacy	Reliability	Fairness	Appropriate ness
Conditional Cash Transfer	To support poor and vulnerable households with financial aid	Bimonthly stipend to beneficiaries	Helped parents pay school fees and lifted some out of poverty, but lack of continuity caused setbacks	Limited coverage, some households left out	Partially reliable, but inconsistent payments	Concerns over political favouritism in beneficiary selection	Useful for immediate relief but lacked sustainability strategies
Trader Money Programme	To empower small traders with business capital	Small grants for traders	Provided capital for petty traders, but impact was not long-term	Limited scope, funds were not always reinvested properly	Unclear monitoring structure	Concerns over political influence in allocation	Effective as short-term economic stimulus but lacked monitoring
COVID-19 Food Relief Programme	To provide food support during lockdowns	Food distribution to affected communities	Limited impact; supply chain issues and insufficient provisions were reported	Inadequate for long-term sustenance	Some communities did not receive sufficient support	Distribution was uneven, with some communities receiving more aid than others	Helpful but lacked a comprehensive approach to long-term food security
National Youth Volunteer Programme	Engage youth in community sensitisation	Training and stipends for volunteers	Exposed youth to hygiene practices and provided stipends	Relatively well-executed but temporary	Reliable but short-lived	Fair in selection, though impact was minimal	Effective for hygiene promotion but lacked continuity
Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (Sure-P)	Reinvest fuel subsidy savings into public programmes	Infrastructure, employment, and social services	Helped women escape poverty but was not sustained	Initially effective but lacked long-term planning	Partially reliable, discontinued over time	Benefited some, but many were excluded	Addressed immediate needs but did not create lasting economic impact
Child Education Support Initiative	Improve access to education for underprivileged children	School fees support, educational materials	Helped keep some children in school but faced implementation gaps	Limited funding and reach	Schools remained under-resourced	Some families received more support than others	Important for educational access but lacked sustainability
Survival Fund	Support small businesses during economic shocks	Grants and wage support	Helped businesses survive temporary economic shocks	Effective but short-term	Reliable within its time frame	Some exclusions due to bureaucratic challenges	Useful for economic stability but not a long-term solution

Programme	Objective	Components	Impact	Adequacy	Reliability	Fairness	Appropriateness
Electrification Project	Provide electricity to underserved communities	Installation of transformers and grid expansion	Created temporary employment and improved economic activities	Beneficial but maintenance challenges exist	Infrastructure reliability issues	Some communities benefited more than others	Effective but required better planning for sustainability
Water Supply Projects	Improve access to clean water	Boreholes and water treatment facilities	Improved sanitation and reduced disease burden	Infrastructure gaps affected access	Some projects stalled due to funding	Distribution favoured certain areas over others	Critical for health but faced maintenance issues
Public Work Programme	Provide employment through community projects	Short-term public sector jobs	Offered temporary employment but did not transition workers to stable jobs	Only effective for short periods	Payments were inconsistent in some cases	Selection process was not always transparent	Useful but not a permanent employment solution

Source: Created by the Author from FGDs, LTR, LHI and KIIs Project Data

The Trader Money Programme empower small traders by providing them with grants to improve their business activities. While the initiative received positive feedback from the community, as reflected in statements like, "Even though I am not with them, I know that the programme has impacted the people of the community a lot from the feedback we get from them" (KII_Akwa Ibom_F01), its long-term effectiveness was undermined by insufficient sustainability measures. The programme's lack of a clear institutional framework, as implied in the need for policy enforcement ("Apart from the business they do, it also helps them in hospital bills and supporting their family members" [file narrative]), suggests that the funds provided were often diverted from business use to meet immediate personal needs. This highlights a critical gap in the programme's design, which failed to ensure that the grants were reinvested into business growth, limiting the programme's long-term impact on economic empowerment.

Despite its positive short-term effects, the Trader Money Programme was plagued by challenges related to oversight and political influence. The call for institutionalising the programme, as expressed in statements like "let it be a law, let it be a policy" (KII_Akwa Ibom_M01), points to a lack of structured monitoring and accountability, leaving the programme vulnerable to mismanagement. Furthermore, there were concerns about the fairness of the allocation process, with hints of political interference: "They said that you kick out political coloration" (KII_Akwa Ibom_M01), suggesting that political considerations might have influenced fund distribution. The programme's effectiveness as a short-term economic stimulus is clear, but its lack of reliable monitoring and vulnerability to political manipulation compromised its overall reliability and fairness, ultimately limiting its potential to create lasting change.

The COVID-19 Food Relief Programme provide essential food support to communities affected by lockdowns, offering immediate relief to households facing the brunt of the pandemic's economic disruption. While the programme succeeded in distributing basic food items such as rice, garri, and noodles, its impact was limited due to supply chain challenges and insufficient provisions. As one beneficiary noted, "Yes, the government distributed garri,

rice, and noodles" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F01), confirming aid delivery, but the quote "During this period, we struggled to eat" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F01) highlights the inadequacy of the provisions, suggesting that the programme failed to meet the full range of needs during a period of heightened vulnerability. The relief was designed for short-term aid, but it lacked the scope to address the long-term challenges of food insecurity exacerbated by the pandemic.

The programme's effectiveness was further hindered by its uneven delivery, with some communities receiving more support than others, as implied in the observation "some people never received anything" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F01), which suggests disparities in distribution. While the programme provided some immediate relief, it was not sufficient to sustain families in the long term. The economic strain of the pandemic, as expressed in "The overall economic strain of the pandemic meant that numerous households still faced difficulties meeting their basic needs" (file narrative), underscored the inadequacy of the food relief efforts. Furthermore, while the government's food distribution helped address immediate hunger, it did not offer a comprehensive strategy for long-term food security, leaving vulnerable households without sustainable solutions, as indicated by "The government gave us rice, garri, beans, and noodles" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F01), showing that while aid was given, the longer-term structural issues of food security were not addressed.

The National Youth Volunteer Programme was designed to engage youth in community sensitisation, particularly focused on promoting hygiene practices like handwashing. The programme provided training and stipends for volunteers, offering both educational and financial incentives. As one respondent explained, "The idea behind that programme was to encourage the youths to be part of advocating and carrying out community sensitisation on the need for hand washing" (KII_Akwa Ibom_M01), highlighting the educational value of the initiative. While the programme successfully exposed youth to important hygiene practices, its impact was limited by its temporary nature, as it was executed on a short-term basis, with a notable 100 youths engaged across each local government area, suggesting decent coverage but not enough to foster long-term behavioural changes.

Although the programme was reliable during its operation, its short-lived nature prevented it from having a lasting impact. The mention of "apart from the national youth volunteer programme, there was a particular one" (KII_Akwa Ibom_M01) implies that it was a brief initiative, without extended continuity. Its fairness in the selection of volunteers appears to have been non-biased, but the programme's overall impact was minimal, as its scope did not extend beyond short-term engagement. While it was effective in promoting hygiene practices, the programme lacked strategies for ensuring long-term community involvement and sustained impact, as noted in "The idea behind that programme was to encourage the youths" (KII_Akwa Ibom_M01). The absence of a continuity plan meant that the educational benefits were not solidified into enduring behaviors, limiting the programme's potential to influence long-term public health outcomes.

The Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (Sure-P) was designed in 2012 to reinvest fuel subsidy savings into public programmes aimed at improving infrastructure, creating employment, and enhancing social services. While it had a positive initial impact, particularly for women, by helping them escape poverty, its long-term effectiveness was undermined by mismanagement and poor sustainability. As one respondent noted, "Sure-P was one of the key factors that helped some of the women to escape poverty and remain

out" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F02), highlighting the programme's success during its implementation. However, the narrative also underscores the programme's eventual failure, with another respondent stating, "During this period, what made people fall back into poverty was mismanagement" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F02), pointing to the lack of proper management and continuity as significant factors in the programme's decline.

Although Sure-P was initially effective, it struggled with adequacy in the long run due to a lack of long-term planning and continuity. The programme's effectiveness waned over time, as poor management led to its eventual discontinuation, as suggested by the mismanagement concerns. Its reliability was compromised by its limited lifespan, and many communities that initially benefited from it were excluded from subsequent support. "Some of them fall back because of lack of continuity" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F02) suggests that the programme was uneven in its benefits. While Sure-P was appropriate for addressing immediate needs during its operational years, it failed to create lasting economic impacts or foster sustainable growth. The programme's lack of sustainability, as indicated by the reference to "2010-2015: Sure-P, survival fund" (file narrative), points to a missed opportunity to build a robust, enduring framework for economic empowerment and poverty alleviation.

The Child Education Support Initiative was designed to improve access to education for underprivileged children by providing school fees support and educational materials. While the programme had some positive impacts, such as helping keep children in school, it faced significant implementation gaps that limited its effectiveness. One respondent acknowledged the positive effects of related policies, stating, "The respondent acknowledged the positive impact of the government of Godswill Akpabio's free education policy" (LHI_Akwa Ibom_M06), which indicates that the programme contributed to increased access to education. However, the limitation of the initiative is highlighted by the fact that "Sometimes they stop halfway because they have no funds to pay for dues" (FGD_Akwa Ibom_F02), revealing that the financial support provided was insufficient to sustain continuous education for some children.

The adequacy of the programme was also constrained by limited funding and reach, as reflected in "Their children always go to government school" (FGD_Akwa Ibom_F02), which suggests that the support was primarily targeted at children attending government schools, leaving gaps in coverage. Additionally, despite the financial assistance, schools remained under-resourced, and many children still faced barriers to education. This continued lack of resources points to the programme's inability to address all the challenges faced by underprivileged children. Fairness was also a concern, with some families receiving more support than others, as indicated by, "These sets of people were not among the beneficiaries" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F02), pointing to exclusionary issues. While the programme was appropriate for improving immediate educational access, it lacked sustainability and did not ensure long-term solutions for educational equity, as highlighted by, "enabled some community members to send their children to school" (LHI_Akwa Ibom_M06). The lack of continuity in funding and support ultimately undermined the programme's potential for lasting impact.

The Survival Fund was introduced to support small businesses during economic shocks, providing grants and wage support to help businesses survive in times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of the cashless policy. The programme played

a critical role in crisis relief, as reflected in the statement, "During the other event, shocks and systemic trends were survival funds" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F02), which emphasises its importance in providing temporary support during tough economic conditions. While it was effective in the short term, the programme's impact was limited by its duration. One respondent noted, "I think if the programme is sustained it will help in keeping them out of poverty" (KII_Akwa Ibom_F01), suggesting that the programme's benefits were constrained by its temporary nature, highlighting the need for a more sustained approach.

The Survival Fund was reliable within its time frame, as it functioned as intended during its operational period. However, it was not without issues of fairness, as some small businesses faced exclusion due to bureaucratic challenges, with one participant noting, "Some people never received anything" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F01), indicating access problems that affected the equitable distribution of support. While the programme was useful for providing immediate relief and stabilising businesses during economic shocks, it was not designed as a long-term solution. The programme's relevance is confirmed by its focus on crisis periods, as shown in "Under shocks were coronavirus, COVID-19, cashless policy" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F02), but its lack of sustainability left businesses vulnerable once the programme ended, and no long-term plans for support were in place.

The Electrification Project aimed to provide electricity to underserved communities, with a focus on installing transformers and expanding the grid. The programme had immediate positive impacts, including the creation of temporary employment and the stimulation of local economic activities. As one respondent shared, "During the electrification process, people joined in molding the poles" (LTR_Akwa Ibim_M02), showing how the project created job opportunities. Additionally, "During the installation of the transformer, owners of land around the area were compensated" (LTR_Akwa Ibim_M02) highlights the benefits for local landowners, indicating that the programme provided multiple forms of economic support. However, while these benefits were notable, the programme's long-term impact was undermined by ongoing maintenance challenges and infrastructure reliability issues, which reduced its overall value.

Although the electrification project was beneficial in the short term, its long-term sustainability was jeopardised by inadequate planning for maintenance and the reliability of the infrastructure. Ongoing maintenance concerns were implied, pointing to issues in ensuring the continued functionality of the installed systems. Additionally, the programme's fairness was questioned, as some communities benefited more than others, with disparities in aid distribution. This uneven access to resources suggests that not all underserved communities were equally served by the project. While the electrification effort was effective in creating immediate jobs and stimulating local economies, better planning for the long-term sustainability of the infrastructure and more equitable distribution of resources would have maximised its potential impact. As one respondent noted, "That created jobs and put small money in the hands of people" (LTR_Akwa Ibim_M02), indicating its relevance, but highlighting the need for stronger strategic planning to ensure enduring benefits.

The Water Supply Projects aimed to improve access to clean water by installing boreholes and water treatment facilities, which had significant health benefits for the communities. The programme helped improve sanitation and reduce the disease burden, as one respondent noted, "The water has improved our lives, both men and women, even the children" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F01), highlighting the positive impact on public health. However, despite

these benefits, the programme faced ongoing challenges in terms of adequacy and access. Infrastructure gaps, such as the vandalization of existing water sources, hindered some communities' access to clean water. The mention, "Since the old one was vandalised, the government provided a new hand pump" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F01), shows that while the government took steps to address these gaps, the issues persisted and required continual attention.

The programme's reliability was affected by funding issues, which disrupted its ability to maintain consistency. As some projects stalled due to a lack of funding, the overall sustainability of water access was threatened. The uneven distribution of water supply projects also raised concerns about fairness, with certain areas benefiting more than others. Although the provision of water through hand pumps was an essential and critical service, "Yes, the government brought water, and the hand pump was provided for the community" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F01) reflects the immediate relief, it also underscores the challenges of maintaining these systems in the long term. Without proper planning for maintenance and resource allocation, the sustainability of the water supply projects remained in jeopardy, limiting their long-term effectiveness and accessibility for all communities.

The Public Work Programme was designed to provide employment opportunities through short-term community projects, offering temporary public sector jobs aimed at alleviating economic hardship. While it succeeded in offering immediate income benefits, such as the statement, "Some people were paid up to five hundred and seven hundred thousand naira" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F02), the programme's long-term impact was limited. Many workers, after completing these short-term jobs, were unable to transition into stable employment, as reflected in, "if someone does not have a passion for schooling, they may drop out due to distance" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_M02), which suggests that the temporary nature of the work did not create lasting career opportunities or sustainable economic stability for participants.

The programme's adequacy was constrained by its short-term focus, making it effective only for brief periods, as the temporary nature of the jobs limited the scope of its impact. Additionally, payments were inconsistent, which further undermined the programme's reliability. The inconsistency of aid is implied in broader challenges, suggesting that not all workers received the support they were promised. Fairness in the selection process was also questioned, with concerns over bias and political favouritism, as illustrated by the statement, "They said that you kick out political coloration" (KII_Akwa Ibom_M01), indicating that the programme's distribution of jobs was influenced by political factors. While the programme offered valuable short-term benefits, such as enabling workers to "build houses and send their children to school" (LTR_Akwa Ibom_F02), it was not a permanent solution to unemployment. The lack of long-term employment opportunities meant that its impact was ultimately limited, and it failed to provide enduring economic stability for participants.

Table 9: Most and less effective interventions

Programme	Impact	Adequacy	Reliability	Fairness	Appropriateness	Overall Effectiveness
Conditional Cash Transfer	✓	~	~	~	~	Partially Effective
Trader Money Programme	✓	X	~	~	~	Partially Effective
COVID-19 Food Relief	~	X	X	X	X	Ineffective
National Youth Volunteer Programme	✓	~	~	✓	~	Partially Effective
Subsidy Reinvestment	✓	~	~	~	~	Partially Effective
Child Education Support Initiative	✓	X	~	~	✓	Partially Effective
Survival Fund	✓	~	✓	~	~	Partially Effective
Electrification Project	✓	~	~	~	✓	Partially Effective
Water Supply Projects	✓	~	~	~	✓	Partially Effective
Public Work Programme	✓	~	~	~	~	Partially Effective

Note: Analysis uses a simple rating system (✓ for effective, X for ineffective, and ~ for partially effective) to indicate which programmes are more effective and which are not, based on the project data information from FGDs, KII, LTR and LHIs.

Section 7: Policy Recommendations

7.1 Institutionalise Shock-Responsive Social Protection

Establish a Permanent Crisis Response Fund and an Emergency Social Protection Framework will ensure a structured and predictable response to sudden shocks. A key aspect of this approach is the development of pre-registered beneficiary databases across levels, allowing for rapid identification and support of affected individuals without bureaucratic delays. Integration real-time monitoring and digital tracking systems will ensure that aid reaches those in need efficiently, minimising exclusion and corruption. This proactive system will strengthen national and local capacities to respond to emergencies in a coordinated manner, preventing widespread socioeconomic disruptions. The implementation of a shock-responsive social protection system will enhance household resilience by reducing delays in emergency interventions and preventing further impoverishment. Poor households bear the brunt of crises due to their limited savings and economic flexibility, making timely assistance crucial for preventing long-term hardship. Institutionalising emergency social support mechanisms will also facilitate adaptive social protection, ensuring that interventions evolve based on the nature and severity of crises

7.2 Targeting and Transparency in Social Protection Programmes

Improving targeting and transparency in social protection programmes is crucial to ensuring that resources reach those who need them most. The introduction of digital beneficiary tracking systems, such as biometric registration and blockchain-based disbursement, can significantly reduce fraud, prevent duplication, and enhance accountability. Additionally, digital tracking will enable real-time monitoring, allowing policymakers to assess impact and adjust interventions based on evolving needs. Transparent social protection programmes foster public trust and ensure that interventions effectively break cycles of poverty instead of being diverted through corrupt networks. Beyond technology, community-based monitoring committees should be strengthened to oversee beneficiary selection and aid distribution. By involving local leaders, civil society groups, and community representatives, the government can improve programme legitimacy, reduce elite capture, and enhance grassroots accountability. These committees should have a direct role in validating beneficiaries, resolving complaints, and ensuring fair access to social protection initiatives. Effective targeting mechanisms will not only improve the reach and impact of social assistance but also reinforce citizens' confidence in government policies, fostering greater participation in poverty alleviation efforts.

7.3 Sustain and Scale Up Women-Focused Economic Interventions

Establish a Women's Economic Resilience Fund to provide long-term capital for female traders and entrepreneurs, ensuring that women have continuous access to financial support beyond one-time grants. By integrating this initiative with business incubation programmes, financial literacy training, and cooperative-based credit systems, women will gain not only capital but also the skills and networks needed to sustain and expand their businesses. Strengthening these interventions will enhance women's financial independence, foster entrepreneurship, and create more resilient local economies. To ensure sustainability, existing initiatives such as Trader Money and microfinance programmes should be linked with structured business development support, including mentorship, digital financial

services, and cooperative funding models. Women in informal markets should have access to credit facilities that are affordable, accessible, and tailored to their unique economic constraints. These measures will bridge the gender gap in economic participation, reduce household vulnerability, and contribute to overall poverty reduction

7.4 Public Works and Livelihood Support Programmes

A crucial policy shift is required to transform these programmes into vehicles for long-term livelihood empowerment. This transformation involves integrating skill development and vocational training into PWP, ensuring that beneficiaries acquire valuable and marketable skills while participating in public works projects. Furthermore, strategic linkages with Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (MSME) development initiatives and job placement services are essential. By creating pathways for participants to transition into stable employment, these programmes can play a pivotal role in breaking the cycle of poverty and fostering economic independence. The successful implementation of transformed PWP necessitates a multi-faceted approach. It requires collaboration between government agencies, vocational training institutions, and private sector employers. These collaborations will ensure that training programmes are aligned with market demands and that beneficiaries receive the support needed to secure sustainable livelihoods. Continuous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be integrated into these programmes to track participant progress and assess the long-term impact on poverty reduction. Ultimately, this strategic realignment of PWP will empower individuals to move away from reliance on temporary work and towards building a foundation for sustained economic well-being, thereby significantly contributing to the reduction of chronic poverty

7.5 Financial Inclusion and Access to Affordable Credit

This involves the creation of collateral-free microcredit schemes, and the provision of interest-free financing options tailored to the specific needs of these populations. By removing the barrier of collateral, which many poor households lack, and eliminating the burden of interest, financial services become more accessible and aligned with ethical considerations. These measures aim to empower individuals to invest in microbusinesses, improve their livelihoods, and build resilience against economic shocks, ultimately preventing further impoverishment caused by financial exclusion. The successful implementation of enhanced financial inclusion requires a multi-pronged strategy. This includes the establishment of community-based microfinance institutions that understand the local context and can provide personalised services. Expanding the adoption of mobile money platforms can further extend financial services to remote areas, offering convenient and secure transaction methods. Additionally, the introduction of government-backed loan guarantees can reduce the risk for financial institutions, encouraging them to lend to low-income individuals and small businesses. These combined efforts will foster a more inclusive financial ecosystem, providing the necessary capital for microbusiness growth and facilitating

Conclusion

The findings of this research highlight the complex and multi-dimensional nature of poverty in Akwa Ibom State, shaped by economic instability, environmental shocks, governance challenges, and social disparities. The study reveals that chronic poverty persists due to limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, while temporary escape from poverty remains fragile due to external shocks such as inflation, flooding, and unfavourable government policies. Rural and urban populations experience poverty differently, with rural households relying on subsistence farming and informal labour while urban dwellers face job instability and high living costs. Additionally, gender disparities further exacerbate economic vulnerability, as women encounter barriers to education and employment, limiting their capacity to achieve financial independence. The study also demonstrates that social protection programmes, though beneficial, remain insufficient in addressing the deep-rooted causes of poverty, leaving many households exposed to financial shocks and economic downturns.

Despite various government initiatives and external interventions, poverty dynamics in Akwa Ibom State continue to be shaped by structural and systemic challenges that hinder long-term economic resilience. The impact of policies such as the removal of fuel subsidies and cashless transactions disproportionately affects the most vulnerable populations, deepening financial hardship and increasing inequality. Environmental degradation caused by oil exploration and climate change further threatens livelihoods, particularly for fishing and farming communities. While some households have achieved sustained escapes from poverty through strategic economic diversification, investment in education, and access to stable income sources, the majority remain trapped in cycles of deprivation due to persistent economic shocks and inadequate social support.

Annex

**Table 10: Perception of participants on Well-being Levels Across Multiple Dimensions
Akwa Ibom State**

Wellbeing Level	Food and Nutrition	Housing Conditions	Education and Skills	Assets and Resources	Economic Relationships	Social Relationships	Political Relationships	Shocks and Resilience
Poorest of the Poor	Eat once a day or not at all; low-quality food (e.g., cocoyam with salt/pepper, garri with water); depend on charity.	Inhuman conditions: mud/thatch houses, no doors, leaking roofs; some homeless or sleep in churches/verandas.	Children rarely educated; if so, public primary only, often drop out; no skills, limited to menial jobs.	None, except occasional inherited land (often sold); no livestock or movable assets.	None; cannot borrow, buy sporadically with little money from menial jobs.	Socially excluded, stigmatised (e.g., considered mentally unstable due to appearance).	None; only remembered during elections for votes, then forgotten.	Highly vulnerable: sickness, death of loved ones, floods, failed promises; unable to withstand shocks.
Very Poor	Erratic, 1-2 times daily; low-quality (e.g., cocoyam, garri, cassava, no crayfish/meat); rely on menial job earnings.	Poor: mud/thatch houses, leaking roofs; some rent or squat, occasionally share electricity philanthropically.	Children attend free public primary, some secondary with help; often drop out; no skills, menial jobs.	Minimal: inherited land plots; no livestock or significant movable assets.	Limited; cannot borrow reliably, sell remnants or menial labor output (e.g., firewood).	Weak/none; socially isolated due to stigma or inability to meet social standards.	Minimal; only recognised during elections, no real influence or aid access.	Vulnerable: ill health, death of loved ones, crises; little resilience, shocks push to poorest level.
Poor	Average 2 times daily; basic diet (e.g., garri, rice, vegetables); no balanced nutrition.	Modest: mud houses with thatch/zinc roofs; some rent, occasional electricity (disconnected if unpaid).	Children attend public school up to primary/secondary; limited skills (e.g., farming, petty trading).	Some inherited land, basic electronics (e.g., radio); livestock possible but minimal.	Limited ability to buy/sell (e.g., petty trading); borrowing difficult, rarely repayable.	Weak; limited support, unable to assist during shocks; some ties via work/religion.	Very little; voting rights but no influence or access to aid/palliatives.	Susceptible: ill health, theft/fraud, unfulfilled promises; shocks can push to lower levels.
Not Poor but Not Rich	2-3 times daily; improved diet (e.g., garri, rice, vegetables, fish, meat); sufficient in good times.	Better: mud/zinc houses or rented apartments; access to electricity, some own concrete homes.	Children attend public/private schools up to secondary/university; farming, civil service skills.	Own land, motorcycles, taxis, household items (e.g., TV, radio); can borrow and repay in good times.	Active: buy/sell goods, hire labor occasionally; savings possible in good times.	Moderate; ties through religion, work; can offer limited help but not beyond capacity.	Moderate; some party membership, low-level political roles, but not influential.	Moderate resilience: ill health, death, natural disasters; savings drained in bad times, may drop levels.
Rich/Resilient	Eat 3+ times daily; balanced diet at will	High quality: concrete houses,	Children attend private schools up	Significant: own lands, cars, motorcycles	Strong: healthy trade networks,	Strong: local political power,	Influential: connections with politicians/b	Resilient: withstands ill health, political

Wellbeing Level	Food and Nutrition	Housing Conditions	Education and Skills	Assets and Resources	Economic Relationships	Social Relationships	Political Relationships	Shocks and Resilience
	(e.g., meat, fish, crayfish); no food scarcity.	personal generators, public electricity; own multiple properties.	to university; skilled in civil service, business.	, substantial household equipment; hire labor.	lend money, hire labor; socially recognised economically.	assist others within capacity; wide social networks (e.g., politicians).	ankers; some local leadership roles.	changes; rarely fall to lower levels.
Very Rich	High quality, city-based; no specific details as they live outside the village (e.g., Uyo).	City-based; own properties abroad or in cities, rarely invest in village (e.g., use father's old house).	City-based; assumed high education (university); no specific village data.	Extensive: own large assets (e.g., hectares of land, shops); specifics unavailable as they live in cities.	Robust in cities; own multiple businesses, lend with high interest; minimal village economic ties.	Limited in village; influence-based, rarely assist locals; city-focused networks assumed.	High influence outside village; minimal village political engagement beyond ownership.	Assumed resilient due to wealth; specifics unavailable as they reside outside the community.

Source: Curated from the FGDs Project data

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