Corporate Governance and the Management of Public Corporations: A Study of Akwa Ibom Water Company Limited

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Abstract
This study examined the corporate governance process and management of public corporations in Akwa Ibom State regarding Akwa Ibom Water Company Limited (AKWCL), its problem of non-compliance with Codes of Corporate Governance which resulted in low performance of the company and its inability to meet the MDGs 50% targeted access to water needs of the citizens. Stakeholder and Structural Functionalism theories were adopted to analyze the functional roles of the managers and stakeholders towards improving performance. Descriptive research was employed and secondary data were analyzed contextually. The study, among others, revealed that: non-compliance to the codes/principles of corporate governance in AKWCL impacted negatively its performance in terms of the volume of water supply. Data showed 66.01% population of the state had no access to water in 2015 while 65% population had no access to water in 2021; weak internal control mechanisms such as auditing, monitoring and evaluation committees contributed to rent-seeking activities by the board of directors/managers which negatively affected access to safe water supply, profitability and investment in AKWCL. The study concluded that a good corporate governance process guarantees high performance, and recommended strict enforceability of codes of corporate governance practice in AKWCL; policy review by the board of directors of AKWCL to improve access to safe water in the state; the creation of more water distribution points and revitalisation of abandoned ones; training and re-training of the board of directors and managers on new management skills; strengthening of auditing, monitoring and evaluation committees to ensure public accountability and disclosure.

Keywords: Corporate Governance, Management, Public Corporation, Shareholders, Stakeholder

Introduction
The idea of corporate governance has been in existence for more than three decades and it has attracted the interest of many scholars worldwide. Its evolution dates back to the activities of major chartered companies in the 16th and 17th centuries. It became popularized in the 1970s by the United States due to the strong economic growth recorded by them after the Second World War which was attributed to the impact of corporate governance and the establishment of the security and exchange commission in 1934 and its introduction of corporate governance reform of 1976 in the USA in which most corporations in the early 2000s still adopted to limit corporate scandals and financial crises (Price, 2018, as cited in Harlem, 2022).

Corporate governance is concerned with financial and managerial accountability, board structure and shareholders' rights in corporations, which are lacking in many corporations across the globe. It was introduced to help reduce inefficient management of human and material resources in companies as well as promote the welfare interest of other stakeholders. Several factors such as globalization, technological advancement, population growth, and free market contributed to a shift in governance processes such as the Companies and Allied Matter Act (CAMA) of 1990 in Nigeria to corporate governance. CAMA was established to superintend the activities of companies, with challenges in safeguarding shareholder's interests due to institutionalized corruption, the absence of independent auditors to check the activities of boards to prevent corruption, poor monitoring and enforcement of the Act which made shareholders/stakeholders to lose confidence in the accounting and reporting ability of boards and auditors under CAMA, hence, the agitation for corporate governance. In addition, modern literature claims that the Asian financial crisis of 1997 – 98, the 2001 Enron scandal in the United States of America and the global financial crisis of 2008 exposed the weak financial system, corporate mismanagements and abuses in big corporations across the world. The implication of these crises and lessons learnt led to the institutionalization of corporate governance as a more robust policy guide with well-established laws and regulations on the operations of boards for proper accounting, to encourage investors, build public trust and promote financial viability and investment opportunities in public corporations (Price, 2018, as cited in Harlem, 2022).

On the other hand, Public Corporations are established by the law of the state to provide essential services at affordable prices to the people in such a manner that ensure the promotion of the public good or well-being of the citizens, and also generates income for the state. A good example is the Akwa Ibom Water Company Limited. The incorporation of the company in 2001 was to reduce inherent civil service bureaucratic bottlenecks, increase efficiency in the management of the company, and attain high productivity of services to the populace in the state. Although the provisions of the codes of corporate governance practices are known to managers of AKWCL, the problem of non-compliance hinders performance due to inaccessibility to safe water supply and other services provided to its clientele.

The objective of this study is to examine the impact of the corporate governance process on the management of Akwa Ibom Water Company Limited (AKWCL), its benefits and challenges as well as suggest ways of improving corporate governance practices in AKWCL. For this purpose, the relevant questions considered are: what is corporate governance? Is there any significant relationship between the corporate governance process and the effective management of AKWCL? To what extent does Akwa Ibom Water Company Limited comply with the principles/codes of corporate governance in the course of service delivery to its clientele? What are the strengths/ benefits of corporate governance practices in Akwa Ibom Water Company Limited? What are the constraints or problems of corporate governance in Akwa Ibom Water Company Limited? The study adopts a descriptive research method, and secondary data would be employed with a contextual analysis of the variables.

Conceptual Issues

Corporate Governance

The concept and practices of corporate governance vary from state to state and from one corporation to another, but in most cases, they must conform to the global standard, principles and codes of corporate governance. The variations brought about divergent definitions of the concept.

According to Cadbury Committee (1992), corporate governance is defined as the system by which a company or corporation is directed or controlled to reflect a set of relationships between a company's management, its Board of Directors, its shareholders and other Stakeholders with the aim of prevention or mitigation of the conflict of interests among Stakeholders in the course of pursuing the organizations' set goals.

Furthermore, Blair (1995 as cited in Ekpo, 2014) sees it as a concern with "what the purpose of the corporation is, in whose interest the corporation is run, who control the corporation, how the corporation is controlled and how the risks and the returns from the governing activities are allocated". He further divided corporate governance into four categories of governance to include regulatory, market, stakeholders and internal (shareholder) governance. Thus, corporate governance is a process that deals with the mechanisms by which the stakeholders exercise control over corporate insiders and management such that their interests are protected (John and Senbet, 1998 cited in Okpara and Kabongo, 2010). OECD (2017, as cited in Oghenekohwodo and Biadu, 2019) defines corporate governance as the system by which business corporations are directed and controlled. The corporate governance structure specifies the distribution of rights and responsibilities among different participants in the corporation such as the board, managers, shareholders and other stakeholders, and spells out the rules and procedures for making decisions on corporate affairs.

Ultimate Business Dictionary (2003, as cited in Ekpo, 2014) defines it as "the managerial control of an organization which can reduce the risk of fraud, improve company performance, leadership and demonstrate social responsibility". In the words of (Wilson 2006, as cited in Oso and Semiu, 2013), corporate governance means "how corporations are directed, controlled and held accountable for effective leadership of the corporations to ensure that they deliver on their potential as the wealth-creating organ of the society in a sustainable manner". It involves the management of corporations through the board of directors that hinges on complete transparency, integrity and accountability of management.

In the perceptions of (Zingalis, 1998, as cited in Okpara and Kabongo, 2010), corporate governance involves institutions that affect the process of allocation of ownership, capital structure, managerial incentive schemes takeovers, board of directors, product market competition, and organizational structure in the society. The stakeholders in corporate governance include everyone ranging from the board of directors, management, shareholders, customers, employees and society.

In addition, three identified codes of corporate governance are often cited and explicitly referred to in the development of national codes for corporate governance globally and indeed, in Africa. According to Wilson (2006, as cited in Oso and Semiu, 2013), these codes are the Principle of Corporate Governance (1999) by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Principle of Corporate Governance by the Commonwealth Association for Corporate Governance (CACG) and either first or second King's Report on Corporate Governance for South Africa (IOD, 1991). Drawing from the trio of OECD, CACD and IOD's codes, Wilson argued that, some countries in Africa have developed and published their national codes for the practice of good corporate governance based on the above. He maintained that in Nigeria, the Codes of best Corporate Governance practices for Nigeria (CCGN, 2003) and all the existing codes and laws entrust the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC), Security and Exchange Commission (SEC), Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) etc, with the responsibility of regulating corporate governance to reflect some of the key elements of OECD and other global codes of best practices.

Reasons for Practising Corporate Governance

The rationale behind the practice of corporate governance and the subsequent application of corporate governance to the management of State enterprises are numerous and its contributions to the economic growth and development of the state can never be overemphasized. Some authors opine that the corporate governance process in public corporations enables them to manage more effectively their responsibilities and to be more competitive, efficient and transparent in carrying out their duties/services to society (Umofia, 2008, OECD, 2010).

It also helps to build corporate image, brand formation and development corporations by minimizing wastage, corruption, risk and mismanagement. It provides a specialized mechanism for regulating risks in corporate activities thereby averting corporate disasters, financial scandals, and losses to investors, staff and the public at large. It advocates high quality, stability, safety and sustainability of corporations.

It also helps to set up guidelines that govern the administration of corporations by best business practices such as corporate discipline, integrity and fairness as well as transparency, accountability, efficiency and responsibilities to shareholders/stakeholders in conformity with business ethical values and norms which are:
i) Separating the roles of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) from those of the Board Chairman.
ii) Prescription of Non- Executive and Executive Directors on the board.
iii) Improving the quality and performance of board membership.
iv) Introducing the merit system as the criterion to hold top management positions.
v) Introducing transparency, due process and disclosure requirements.
vi) Maintaining transparency on financial issues and annual financial reporting.
vii) Protection of shareholders' rights and privileges.
viii) Defining the composition, role and duties of the audit and other committees (Wilson, 2006, as cited in Oso and Semiu, 2013).

It also encourages transparency and accountability as keys to investment, economic growth and competitiveness. Hence, transparency and accountability are the major ingredients of corporate governance and as such, it is observed that public corporations that are transparent and accountable are more likely to conform to the rule of law, including respecting shareholder/stakeholder rights. Hence, they tend to enjoy a higher level of public trust and better access to capital (OECD, 2010).

It also strengthens easy communication and information dissemination during Annual General Meetings (AGM), using modern technological software like governance cloud with security measures to prevent hackers from penetrating the data bank of corporations. Technology enables the design of diligent software solutions with fully integrated and highly secured governance tools to help in innovations that assure transparency, accountability, efficiency and compliance with codes of corporate governance by corporations (Price, 2018, as cited in Harlem, 2022).

Further benefits of corporate governance are as follows:
i) It helps to establish a high level of confidence in the management of the corporation, as the presence of an active group of independent directors on the board contributes immensely towards ensuring confidence in the market.
ii) It assists to provide a conducive environment for foreign investors to invest in the economy of a state. Corporate governance is one of the criteria that foreign institutional investors demand before investing in any foreign economy.
iii) It promotes financial market integrity, economic growth, financial stability and economic efficiency of the corporation.
iv) It helps in enhancing popular participation and representation in the economic affairs of the state.
v) It fosters democratic practices like due process, rule of laws, separation of powers, good governance, transparency, accountability, justice, fairness and equity in a corporation's business (World Bank, 2004; Umofia, 2008; Ekpo, 2014; Oghenekohwodo, and Biadu, 2019). In addition, Sanusi (2002) believe that:
Corporate governance has become so pervasive in recent years and experiences show that corporate organizations have become major actors in the political economy of many countries. Under the current neo-liberal economic philosophy, they are regarded as "the engine of growth and development". Against this backdrop, it is stressed that good governance is a step in building

market confidence, encouraging stable, and long-term international investment flows into the country. Since the business corporation is an increasingly important engine of wealth creation and growth, not only in our economy but worldwide, companies must operate within the standards that keep them well-focused on their objectives and accountable to the shareholders, to be relevant (Sanusi, 2003, as cited in Oso and Semiu, 2013).

The Concept of Public Corporation

A public corporation can be defined as a business organization which is wholly or partly owned by the State and controlled by a public authority. Some public corporations are established and placed under public ownership of the State for social reasons, one of which is to help provide essential services or products to the public at affordable prices, and prevent private sector monopoly and exploitation. Such services include utilities (gas, potable water, electricity, etc.), broadcasting, telecommunications, and transport companies (Eminue, 2009). Public corporations are by definition intended to operate in the public interest. It is created by a special act of Parliament that defines its powers, management structure, and relationship with government bodies. The role of the state in the management of the economy is expected since the state alone can remove structural obstacles to development. Ekpe added other advantages to include:

i. Mobilizing domestic and foreign resources for development;

ii. Identifying potential niches within the global economy;

iii. Orchestrating incentives to ensure that domestic firms play their assigned roles;

iv. Ensuring that entrepreneurs have access to requisite factors of production;

v. Fostering local mastery of foreign technologies;

vi Participating directly in strategic investments where high risk discourages private investors (Ekpe, 2007).

Scholars like Eminue and Ekpe opine that the functions of the state are performed by the government in providing the enabling environment and security for economic activities or investment in the state; provision of guidelines for economic activities through policy decisions and laws; playing advisory role; provision of human capital; provision of material capital; provision of infrastructure; provision of industrial estates; formulation of guidelines; regulation of the economy; provision of insurance and relief functions (Ekpe, 2007; Eminue, 2009). Other reasons behind the establishment of public corporations in the state are:

To ensure adequate provision of goods and services to the public at affordable prices; to prevent the production of sub-standard goods; to ensure that harmful goods are not produced; to ensure the distribution of incomes; to promote a stable and high standard of living of the citizens; to protect infant industries against undue competition from foreign firms; to eliminate or at least minimize the level of economic fraud (exploitation) and save the investors' money; to enhance economic growth; to generate and expand employment opportunities; to correct balance of trade disequilibrium of the state.

The debate in modern times is no longer a question of whether or not the state should intervene, but how the state can best bring about positive growth as witnessed in the Asian miracle states of China, Singapore, Dubai, Thailand, Japan, Korea etc. The success of government intervention in the Asian Miracle States may justify the need for SOEs, to complement the market economy.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted Stakeholder and Structural-Functionalism Theories as the theoretical framework of analysis. Stakeholder theory was introduced in 1963 at Stanford Research Institute and further developed by R. Edward Freeman in the 1980s to address ill treatments/abuses of stakeholders by boards/managers of companies by ensuring full disclosure of financial transactions to the stakeholders. Since then, it has gained wide acceptance in business practice and

Strategic Management, Corporate Governance and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The major proponents of the stakeholder theory are R. Edward Freeman, Thomas Donaldson, Lee E. Preston, Ron Mitchell, D.J. Wood, Andrew L. Friedman, Samantha Miles and Robert A. Philips.

In the view of Freeman (1984), a Stakeholder is viewed as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives”. Friedman (2006, as cited in Oso and Semiu, 2013) added that the stakeholder theory clearly shows how organizations should group their stakeholders for purpose of managing their interests, needs and viewpoints, as stakeholders' management are often the responsibility of the managers of a firm. Thus, the whole essence of stakeholder theory is to provide acceptable measures by which managers manage the company for the benefit of its stakeholders and to ensure their rights and participation in the decision-making process of the corporation are protected. On the other hand, management must act as stakeholder agents by ensuring the survival of the firm and safeguarding the long-term stakes of each group. Therefore, the stakeholder theory is suitable for the study as it helps in understanding the overall corporate objectives of any organization. Hence, managers of business corporations need to understand, appreciate and deliberately apply the propositions of stakeholder theory for every individual or group that has stakes in the organization.

On the other hand, Structural Functionalism theory is associated with the works of Emile Durkheim (1917), Robert K. Merton (1968), Gabriel Almond (1960) and Talcott Parson (1979). It was first adopted to analyze political systems and processes. Functionalism considers society as a whole in terms of the functions that constituent elements perform within the society (Atakpa, et al. 2021). Its basic assumptions include: it sees society as a living organism made up of components which function harmoniously for the survival of the whole system; emphasizes the study of the whole system as the unit of analysis; it stipulates the performance of specific functions as requisite to the maintenance of the whole system; and demonstrates the functional interdependence of diverse structures within the whole system (Eminue, 2001).

In applying the theory to the management of public corporations, it is obvious that every system including AKWCL has structures that involve people performing certain functions, with the power to effect actions/policies that can affect the entire corporation. While functions connote duties and responsibilities, structures refer to organs. The structural functionalism approach is adopted because it offers the best explanation of the ways the various structures perform their functions in public corporations as a whole, aiming at service delivery to the populace. Public corporation as a system is made up of interrelated roles, structures and functions which must be performed to satisfy the needs of the people in the state.

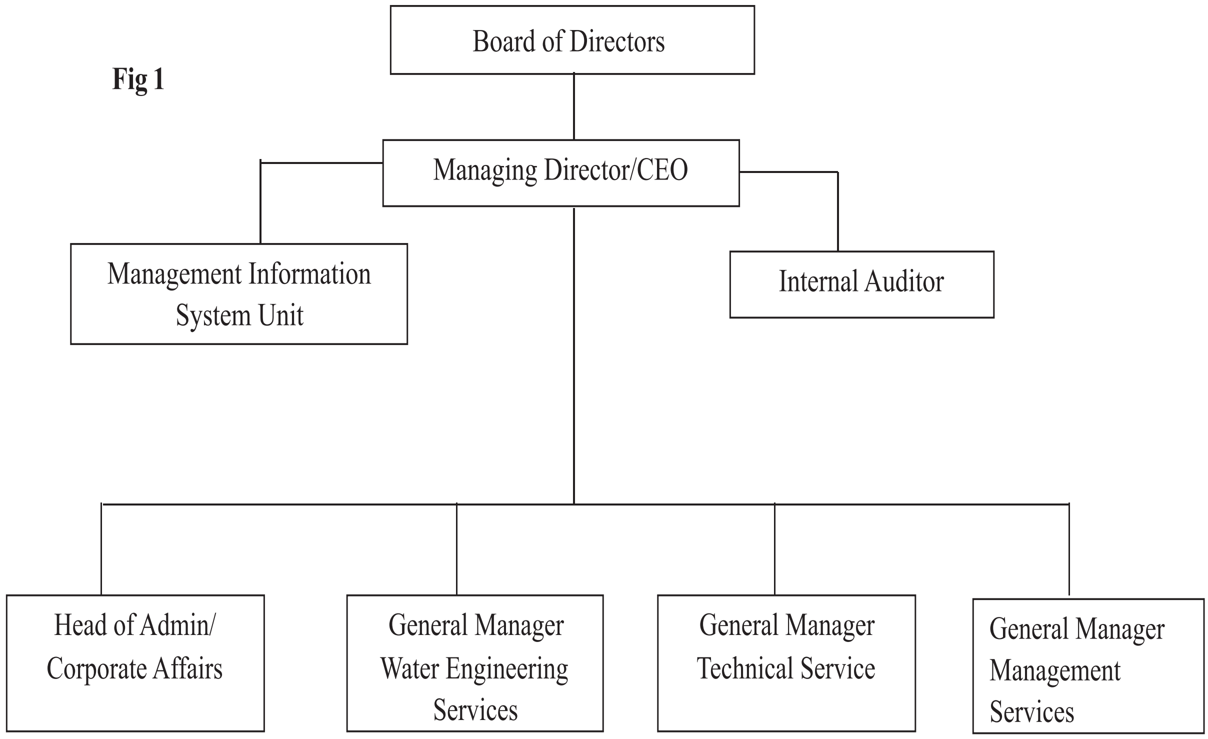
Akwa Ibom Water Company Limited and Corporate Governance Process

Akwa Ibom Water Company Limited was incorporated in 2001 to produce and distribute potable water to the citizen. Its operational Headquarters is in Uyo metropolis, with fourteen (14) area offices at Abak, Eket, Etinan, Ikot Abasi, Abiakpo, Ibiakpan, Itu, Oron, Ikot Ekpene, Ikono, Ukanafun, Uyo, Utut Uruan, and Utu Etim Ekpo. Each of these area offices has a pumping station from where potable water is produced and distributed through a network of pipelines to the primary consumers; the completion of the area offices enables the total water production capacity of the Company at 198,000 cubic metres per day with an estimated pipeline distribution network of 1,819km (AKWCL, 2020). Each area office also has a revenue collection point where consumers pay their water bills. Customers' billing is however centralized under the commercial section at the Headquarters. In addition, AKWCL has seven (7) members of the external board of directors and employs two hundred and seven (207) staff including the management staff (AKWCL, 2020).

The company derives its fund from external and internal sources: the external sources are government subventions received monthly, government grants, and the loan from financial houses, while Internal sources are water rates collected on properties and water supply, connection/reconnection fees, application/inspection fees, tanker services, water development fees, registration of contractors, hiring of equipment like compressor, crane and so on (Akpabio and Ekanem, 2009).

Organogram of Akwa Ibom Water Company Limited

Fig 1



Source: (AKWCL, 2020).

Fig. 1 shows the functional interdependency among various units in line with corporate governance process of the company as thus: The Board of Directors is at the apex of administration of AKWCL and is in charge of the policy-making and implementation in the company; The Managing Director/CEO is in charge of the general administration of sub-units, and helps in implementation of policies formulated by the board; the Management information system Unit is responsible for gathering of information to the board which helps the board in policy formulation and dissemination of information to the general public; the Internal Auditor is in charge of financial administration and proper auditing of accounts of the corporation and also keeps financial records; the Head of Administration/Corporate Affair is in charge of formulating and implementing policies that promote the corporate image, goals and corporate social responsibility of the company; the General Manager, Water Engineering Services, takes charge of the production and distribution of potable water to the public; the General Manager - Technical services is in charge of certain logistics and technical training of staff of the company; the General Manager - Management Services takes care of the planning, directing and controlling of the human and material resources in order to attain the company's set goals (AKWCL, 2020). Hence, good corporate governance in AKWCL requires a set of comprehensive internal control and policies established by the Board of Directors and implemented by skilled personnel which often leads to effective management of corporations.

Water Supply Activities of Akwa Ibom Water Company Limited

Table 1. Water supply coverage and access in Akwa Ibom State Communities

LGAs	Rural Pop	HPB	MWS	NSWP	%Access	% Coverage
Abak	111528	10	60	70	25.11	31.40
Eastern Obolo	24509	4	20	24	47.06	48.96
Eket	42797	10	55	65	65.30	75.94
Esit-Eket	38739	3	50	53	61.22	68.40
Essien Udim	211865	12	72	84	15.44	19.82
Etim Ekpo	105642	9	60	69	28.55	32.66
Etinan	88104	12	44	56	24.07	31.78
Ibeno	51956	3	39	42	38.11	40.42
Ibesikpo Asutan	143333	6	55	61	18.66	21.27
Ibiono-Ibom	182264	4	63	67	13.87	18.38
Ika	79294	3	80	83	50.61	52.34
Ikono	162012	5	84	89	22.53	27.47
Ikot-Abasi	93234	14	40	54	26.82	29.00
Ikot-Ekpene	12165	5	19	24	88.20	98.64
Ini	125608	8	70	78	24.68	31.05
Itu	127327	1	70	71	25.11	28.00
Mbo	118578	7	40	47	15.06	19.82
Mkpat-Enin	165219	10	78	88	20.54	26.63
Nsit-Atai	78965	11	60	71	36.22	44.96
Nsit-Ibom	79808	5	80	85	48.80	53.25
Nsit-Ubium	98219	10	62	72	34.44	36.65
Obot-Akara	114155	17	70	87	35.66	38.12
Okobo	75241	7	80	87	46.71	58.00
Onna	90457	15	66	81	40.66	44.77
Oron	19637	1	10	11	23.41	25.46
Oruk-Anam	223276	19	70	89	16.48	20.00
Udung Uko	40813	5	50	55	55.00	67.38
Ukanafun	12923	8	13	21	77.51	81.25
Uruan	81719	1	70	71	39.67	43.44
UrueOffong/Oruko	54150	9	50	59	53.15	54.48
Uyo	71275	4	70	74	49.71	51.91
State Total (%)	**292481 (72.66)**	**238**	**1750**	**1988**	**33.99**	**37.69**

HPB= Hand Pump Borehole, MWS= Mini Water Schemes, NSWP= Number of Safe Water Points.
Sources: (Atser and Udoh 2015, BudgIT Report, 2021).

Results and Discussion

Although several efforts have been made by the Akwa Ibom State government to institute sound corporate governance practices in the management of the public sector, very little achievement is recorded in terms of results, and this may be attributed to inadequate compliance with the codes of corporate governance practices by public corporations in the state. Over the years, Akwa Ibom State has invested huge money to improve water production and distribution by AKWCL and AKRUWATSAN, but the performance is very poor. Akwa Ibom State has a population of 3,920,208 with 12.11% urban dwellers and 87.89% rural population (NPC, 2006, as cited in Atser and Udoh, 2015). In table 1, water supply coverage and access in rural and urban areas indicate that Akwa Ibom State is yet to meet the MDGs goal of 50% access to safe water and FGN (2000) water policy which emphasizes that access to rural water supply should guarantee a minimum level of service to 250 and maximum to 500 persons per point. Data revealed that only seven LGAs out of 31 LGAs met the 50% access to water as demanded by the MDGs goal, while 24 LGAs are left out mostly in rural areas. This implies that AKWCL has failed in the supply of water to the teeming population in the state. As of 2015, the LGAs with the least access to water were Ibiono Ibom at 13.87%, Mbo had 15.06% and Essien Udim had 15.44% while the highest access to water LGAs were Ikot Ekpene at 88.20%, Ukanafun had 77.51% and Eket had 65.30% respectively. Data also revealed that the total access to water in Akwa Ibom State was 49% in 2012, while 33.99% in 2015, showed a decline in the supply of water. In 2015, the State's total water coverage was 37.69% including HPB= Hand Pump Borehole 238, MWS= Mini Water Schemes 1750, NSWP= Number of Safe Water Points 1988 (Atser and Udoh, 2015). Data also revealed that 22.7% of citizens resident in the state still got their water from unimproved sources of drinking water in 2020. 46.4% of the State's population still used unimproved water sources in 2021, making Akwa Ibom State the second highest in the South-South after Bayelsa State where 47.2% of residents still use unimproved water (BudgIT Report, 2021). Data shows that 66.01% population had no access to water in 2015 but reduced to 65% in 2021 (Atser and Udoh, 2015, BudgIT Report, 2021).

The study revealed that though Akwa Ibom Water Company Limited is aware of the corporate governance process, its compliance with codes/principles of corporate governance practices is a major challenge. It is deduced from the interactions with stakeholders that, the lack of effective internal control structures and regulatory framework mechanisms in AKWCL has been exploited by the board of directors and senior managers of the company at the expense of public interests. Although stakeholders' rights are provided by the existing laws and rules of the company, in actual practice, public rights are often trampled upon by managers through rent-seeking practices, non-involvement of stakeholders/public in the critical decision-making process and lack of public disclosure of information. Hence, negligence of these laws/rules by managers contributes to a lack of accountability, transparency and public disclosure which leads to increasing cases of corruption, inefficiency and economic wastage in the company, thus resulting in low productivity and poor service delivery to the public. This corresponds to the views of Ekpo (2014), that there is a significant relationship between non-compliance to the codes of corporate governance and lack of accountability, transparency and public disclosure in public corporations in Akwa Ibom State.

However, the inability of AKWCL to provide adequate water to satisfy the public needs causes the unwillingness of the public to opt for their services or pay bills, rather, they resort to unsafe water sources like boreholes, rainwater, streams and lakes etc. thereby ranking the State second in the South-South with unimproved water sources.

Nevertheless, the adoption of corporate governance practices in AKWCL is not a total failure as there are improvements in certain aspects of service delivery which include the production and distribution of potable water through a network of pipelines to some primary consumers in Eket, Uyo and Ikot Ekpene senatorial districts; increase in the total water production capacity from less than 100,000 cubic metres to over 198,000 cubic metres per a day with an estimated pipeline distribution network of 1,819km; the establishment of 14 area offices across the State where customers can conveniently access their services and also pay bills at ease is a welcome development. The siting of water kiosks in major streets in urban areas of Uyo senatorial district with the planned extension to Eket and Ikot Ekpene senatorial districts helps in the supply of water to the people, confirming the corporate governance process of participation and representation of stakeholders' interest (AKWCL, 2020). Therefore, if the corporate governance process in Akwa Ibom Water Company Limited conforms to the minimum standard of the national codes of corporate governance, there is a tendency of securing the long-term health of the business in the corporation as well as the State. Since corporate governance helps to improve transparency, accountability, efficiency, and access to capital and promotes public interests through high-quality services to the public, the study calls for improvement in corporate governance practices by AKWCL, as it is capable of enhancing the company's financial market competition, economic stability and public investment.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Corporate governance is a new management strategy which emphasises effectiveness and efficiency in service delivery for the betterment of the citizens in the state, and the creation of enabling environment for economic investment to thrive. Therefore, the corporate governance process is a veritable tool for enhancing the corporate image of AKWCL as well as a medium for attracting investment and economic growth into the state. The paper concluded that though several efforts have been made by Akwa Ibom State government to institute sound corporate governance practices in the management of the AKWCL very little achievement is recorded because of its inability to provide adequate water to satisfy the public needs, thereby ranking the state second in the South-South with unimproved water sources.

The study recommends the followings:

i. Stricter compliance to the national codes of corporate governance in Akwa Ibom State as the study observed that the low level of compliance in AKWCL contributed to its inability to meet the water needs of the citizens.

ii. Policy reforms in AKWCL to address governance issues and introduce production and distribution of bottled and sachet water for sale as it would improve citizens' access to safe water and equal supply to rural and urban areas in line with Sustainable Development Goal 6, and to generate revenue to the company.

iii. There is a need for a monitoring and evaluation committee to be set up by the state to periodically assess the performance of the company and report to the government.

iv. There is a need to strengthen internal control mechanisms such as the Non-Executive board of directors and the internal audit committee for proper auditing of transactions of the company to uncover crimes and prevent Corruption and rent-seeking practices capable of denting the corporate image of the company.

v. Public Disclosure of transactions/account of AKWCL should be encouraged to enable the shareholders/stakeholders' representation and participation in Annual General Meetings (AGM), which can bring about a community development approach to solving problems.

vi. The board of directors and management of the corporation should be properly trained through conferences, seminars and workshops on the relevant skills, to make them competent in handling the challenges of contemporary management performance of corporations.

viii. AKWCL should establish and maintain more water distribution points to meet up with the national water policy of 250 – 500 persons per point.

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