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SOURCES OF AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION ON POULTRY TECHNOLOGIES AMONG BENEFICIARIES OF IMO STATE YOUTH AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMME

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ABSTRACT

The study assessed the sources of agricultural information on improved poultry farmers. The study area was Imo state agricultural zone of Imo State. 100 poultry beneficiaries of the Imo state youth agricultural programme were selected for the sample for the study. The data for the study was obtained through the structured interview technique whose items border on the various sources of information. The data obtained was analyzed using the percentage method. The study revealed among other things that the poultry farmers in the state obtain information on poultry technology through two main sources namely agro input stores and through their friends and relatives. The study suggested that extension service delivery should be overhauled, agricultural information be related to agro input stores owners among others.

Keywords: Agricultural Information; Improvement; Poultry Farmers

Introduction

Agriculture serves as one of the major mean surveys in most developing country in the world as it contributes to more 50% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Youth engagement in agriculture perceived vital for sustainable agricultural economy due to their productive competency and work force. Youth unemployment is an intricate and serious economic challenge in Nigeria (Ngboawaji et al., 2024). It is a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the system and its unswerving high rates over the last two to three decades has led so many youths into various criminal activities and vices such as cybercrime, oil bunkering, political thuggery, pipeline vandalization, violence, kidnapping of oil workers, armed robbery and internet fraud (Virk et al., 2024). As a matter of fact, these factors conceivably present a significant threat to the security, economic and development of a nation (Olurounbi, 2021). The alarming rate of youth unemployment, ranging from 40.8% in the second quarter to 53.4% in the fourth quarter of 2020 has positioned Nigeria as the second highest country in global ranking (National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2020), this increase may be attributed to several factors, such as, a mismatch between education and job market skills, limited infrastructure, inadequate private sector engagement, delayed allocation of capital budget by the federal government, implementation of employment freeze in several public and private sector organizations, and the

growing population of recent graduates who are unable to get suitable employment opportunities (Ngboawaji et al., 2024). In 2023, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) estimated that over 60 percent of Nigeria's population, under 30 years of age, about 33 percent of that demographic are unemployed. This upsetting figure reflects the severe certainties of what millions of Nigerian youths face daily and paints a disconcerting picture of a country full of potential but held back by inadequate chances for its youths (National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) 2023).

Youth unemployment hinders Nigeria's economic growth, aggravates poverty, and impends the country's social and economic stability (Sodiq, 2024). The extensive spread of joblessness asphyxiates innovation, efficiency and development, leading to a wrinkle effect that deteriorates the economy (Virk et al., 2024). The absence of decent job opportunities in the country repudiates youth their right to appropriate standard of living, thus putting many into low-paying, casual jobs or illegal activities; this frustration leads into rising crime rates, insurgency, and social unrest, as seen in the EndBadGovernance remonstrations, where Nigerian youths took to the streets, not just against the government but against the systemic letdowns restraining their opportunities (Sodiq, 2024). Youth unemployment exerts negative influence on various socioeconomic aspects, extending beyond the unemployed youth themselves (International Labour Organization, 2023). Similarly, Adeyanju et al., (2021), averted that lack of job can have an unfavorable effect and convey negative message to individuals at large, as such, this can amount to increase in youth restlessness, increase in poverty, rural-urban migration, low productivity, among other factors (Ibekwe, 2021).

The Federal Ministry of Youth Development (2022), indicated that only a marginal of the youth demographic is employed within the formal sector; though unemployment rates do not often apprehend the adequacy or inadequacy of available employment opportunities since they do not take employment quality into account. The low unemployment and underemployment rate amongst Nigerians and sub-Saharan Africa youths, partly replicates the circumstance that many youths have resorted to insecure and often low-productive jobs in the informal sector instead of remaining unemployed and economically reliant on parents and guardians (International Labour Organization, 2022). Precisely, female youths, face momentous barriers and challenges to unemployment; especially those from economically underprivileged or low-income backgrounds are forced to accept risky, unskilled and low-paid jobs, such as beer/Liquor shops (locally known as beer parlor), Local food joints/shops (locally known as mama put) beer promotion for alcohol producers and marketers, waiters at night club or places where they are vulnerable to sexual harassment from predominantly male patrons (Dumbili & Nelson, 2022). Eromedoghene et al., (2023), asserted that job creation through specialized innovation, innovativeness, entrepreneurship education, opportunity recognition, and infrastructural improvement increases the economic possibilities to lessen the degree of unemployment, and will support the expectation for everyday indulgences of youths and drastically diminish the involvement of youths in criminal activities, vices caused by unemployment. Similarly, Amadi & Nnodim

(2018) averted the necessity of entrepreneurship development in Nigeria by the fact that entrepreneurship development is a major factor in economic growth and development and most importantly the permanent solution to extreme hunger and poverty. Thus, to curb youth unemployment and its accordant undesirable consequences, the Federal Government of Nigeria introduced entrepreneurship studies in the curriculum of tertiary institutions, an approach and effort which aims at promoting a shift from the predictable formal government provision of employment towards entrepreneurship (Akande, 2019). These efforts were reflected in several agricultural training programmes designed to equip young people with the necessary skills needed as entrepreneurs to boost agricultural production, increase food security and eradicate poverty (Ogunmodede et al., 2020). Though, in preceding years, various scholars perceived the importance of utilizing entrepreneurship to achieve economic advancement of the country; however, not much resources were devoted to it as the country was over dependent on revenue from oil (Okeke et al., 2020). The unwarranted dependence of Nigeria on oil revenue led to a neglect of other sectors of the nation's economy; it reduced agricultural and industrial productivity, enlarged dependence on imported goods, amplified unemployment, especially among the youths, and knotted the country's economy to the whims of international oil price fluctuations (Ngboawaji et al., 2024). As a result of this, the National income and Nigeria's foreign reserves diminished drastically over the years, thus creating economic difficulties, widespread poverty, joblessness, under-employment and youth restiveness all around the country; in the look of the foregoing difficulties which Nigerian youths currently encounter, developing youths apparently as entrepreneurs seems to be a conceivable solution (Njoku et al., 2020).

Youth entrepreneurship has become the focus of several government authorities (Amadi & Nnodim, 2018). Entrepreneurship education, innovative skills, vocational abilities, empowerment, provision of infrastructures and other indispensable variables are very imperative in present dispensation (Eromedoghene et al., 2023). Similarly, Omeje et al., (2020) opined that youth entrepreneurship is a useful tool for Nigerians and other African countries for economy diversification. He further noted that youth entrepreneurship is captured as a premeditated means of recovering from increasing unemployment and boosting the economic growth. In a proposition to address youth unemployment, Nigerian governments both at the Federal and State levels simultaneously over the years, initiated several agricultural development policies, projects and programmes in order to refocus on the nation's potentials of farming, boost food production, reduce unemployment rate and achieve food security (Nwoye & Nwalieji, 2019). At the Federal level, these programmes included but not limited to Agricultural Development Project (ADP) 1974; National Special Programme on Food Security (NSPFS) 2002; Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) 2013; National Directorate of Food and National Fadama Development Programme (NFDP) 1990; Root and Tuber Expansion Programme (RTEP) 2001; National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) 2003; and Implications of Policy and Agency-Based Development Initiative. Whereas at the State level, specifically in Delta State, programmes like Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs

Programme (YAGEP) 2015 and Skill Training and Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP) 2015; were among the job and wealth creation programmes initiated and implemented by the State Government (Adeyanju et al., 2020). According to Livingstone-Attorneys (2020), these youth agriculture empowerment programmes were targeted to empower the unemployed youth population in order to make them self-reliant and dependent, develop the skills and knowledge through capacity building that will enable them seize control of their lives socially, politically, economically and psychologically. Thus, in the face of the foregoing hitches which Nigerian youths currently encounter, developing youths to be entrepreneurs appears to be a possible solution (Okeke et al., 2020). It is for this reason that the Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurial Programme (YAGEP) was initiated by the Nigeria's Delta State government in 2015 to prepare, train, develop and advance youth entrepreneurship in farming and agribusiness with the sole purpose of equipping participants to establish their own enterprises (YAGEP, 2021).

The YAGEP is an integral part of the Delta State Government's agenda to curb youth unemployment and develop the agricultural economy of the State for wealth creation; It was designed to be trainee-centered, service-oriented and results-oriented with a focus on transforming unemployed youths into entrepreneurs, leaders, and managers. The Programme seeks to engage and motivate the youths to actively participate in agricultural enterprise by providing them with the necessary skills, knowledge, and opportunities. More so, fostering and emphasizing an entrepreneurial mindset among the youth, innovative thinking, problem-solving, and risk-taking (Eboh, 2022).

In YAGEP, the scope of training covers agricultural subject matter, enterprise management, leadership and life skills, group organization and group farming; Participants were supported to establish and run their own enterprises through the provision of starter packs of day-old chicks, feeders, drinkers, provision for warmth equipment, doses of required vitamins and supplements; In addition, participants received, buffer stipends during the enterprise gestation period and some working capital to purchase inputs and/or working materials. YAGEP has ran seven successive cycles from 2015/2016 cycle to 2021/2022 cycle with a total of number of 1,520 YAGEP beneficiaries who were trained, established and supported in various poultry ventures such as, egg and meat production, poultry feed formulation, chicks brooding and hatchery, slaughtering, processing and packaging, poultry health management, pest & disease control and management, among other ventures (Delta State Government, 2021). Salami et al., (2021), asserted that the poultry industry plays a key role in economic development in sub-Saharan Africa especially in Nigeria. Poultry is special because it has the highest feed conversion rates and produces the least expensive and best sources of animal protein. It has been described as the fastest means of solving the problem of protein deficiency in Nigeria. poultry meat (chicken) and eggs are delectable and widely accepted, with little or no cultural or religious restrictions. As components of a nutritious, well-balanced diet, eggs and chicken (poultry meat) are crucial for kids, expectant and nursing mothers and sick individuals in particular. Similarly, Andrew (2024) noted that the poultry meat industry earns £9.4 billion in turnover, more than a third (34%) of this was produced by poultry farmers, who raised chickens, turkeys,

ducks and geese. The outstanding 66% was produced by poultry processors who slaughtered, cleaned, prepared and created poultry food products. Through these activities, poultry meat industry will be calculated to create an estimated of £2.4 billion gross value, an added contribution to UK GDP. He further explained that, around £1.1 billion of this gross value added (46%) was created by the poultry farming sector. The remaining £1.3 billion (54%) can be attributed to the poultry processors. About 108,100 jobs across the UK in 2022 (35,400 workers; 33%) were employed directly by the poultry meat industry with some 27,100 involved in poultry meat processing, and 8,300 engaged in poultry farming. It was estimated that the total economic output and employment sustained by the poultry meat sector generated £1.6 billion in tax revenues (Udoh et al., 2024).

Imo State Government drives towards achieving an abundant supply in the poultry production industry as poultry provides funds in an emergency, serving as a "safety net". It plays a huge part in rural livelihoods of each farm enterprise. Additionally, it offers a high-nutrient source of animal protein in the form of meat and eggs (Andrew, 2024). Udoh et al., (2024), reported that poultry products should be enough to feed the people and enhance their standard of living, generate income and create employment. Although, several unemployed youths are reluctant to embark in agriculture as they scavenge the ecosystem in search of white-collar jobs or engage in various unprecedented vices.

One of the principal challenges that poses an imperative risk to Nigeria's security and socio-economic progression is the lasting issue of youth unemployment (Ngboawaji et al., 2024). Consequently. the issue of unemployment led to a rise in criminal activities and acts of violence among the youth demographic (Okechukwu & Nwekwo, 2020). This was witnessed during the End-SARS protest of October, 2020, where the army of subjugated Nigerian youths served as key actors; the peaceful protest transformed into a resolute and harmonized response to youth marginalization and segregation when the state responded with the use of firearms against defenseless youths who converged at the present notorious Lekki tollgate in Lagos, Nigeria (Akanle & Uzieyi, 2023). Youths bear the effect of democratic inequalities, a condition that renders them vulnerable to mobilization for violence (Collier & Hoeffler (2004); Virk et al., (2024). The phenomenon of youth unemployment condenses young individuals to be susceptible to radicalization and the proliferation of unlawful activities, as such poses a significant threat to the fundamental pillars of society (Ngboawaji et al., 2024).

In Imo State, Nigeria, unemployment ranked third among the South-South States with an average rate of 40.36% while underemployed rate was at 20.1 % (Chovwen, 2021). In a report addressed by Shimfe et al., (2020), Over 1.4 million youths in the State scrambled for 5,000 job openings advertised by the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC); an evidence of acute unemployment issue. Similarly, approximate fifty thousand applicants applied for one thousand vacant teaching jobs in 2019; only a handful was employed, dismissing a substantial amount of angry youths back to roam the street; yet another loosed end of unfulfilled dreams (Ajaino et al., 2023).

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To address this issue of youth unemployment, the Imo State Government's sponsorship through Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs programme has been emphasized as a strategy established to affect farmers' investment behavior and productivity in agribusiness; though the concrete effectiveness of the programme (i.e. after about seven years of operation; 2015 – 2022) in achieving their intended aims & objectives remained vague, enquiries lingered on the beneficiaries' level to participate in the programme, adopt poultry technologies, their perception on the impact of the programme and the reasons for the limited accomplishment of past initiatives. It was discovered that one of the problems faced by beneficiaries of the youth agricultural programme in the Imo State was that of inadequate information on poultry technologies. They are various sources of agricultural information in the present-day society now the question is what are the means through which the beneficiaries of this programme sources they information whether they are adequate or not.

Objective of the study: The objective of to ascertain the sources of agricultural information on poultry technology among beneficiaries of the Youth Agricultural Programme.

Research question: The research question for the study: what are the sources of agricultural information on poultry technology among the beneficiaries of the Youth Agricultural Programme?

Population of the study: The population of the study comprises the 150 poultry beneficiaries of the Youth Agriculture Programme in Imo State.

Sample size: A multi-stage involving purposive and random sampling procedure was used to select one hundred (100) poultry farmers from the Orlu agricultural zone.

Method of data collection: The data for the study was collected through structured interview technique.

Method of Data Analysis: The data collected was analysis using the Percentage method.

Source Of Agricultural Information Among on Poultry technologies

Responses	Agree	Disagree	% agree	% disagree
Mass media	20	80	20%	80%
Extension contact	0	100	0	100%
Agro stores	70	30	70%	30%
Friends/relatives	90	10	90%	10%
Town meetings	5	95	5%	95%
Religious centres	4	96	4%	96%
Cooperative groups	0	100	0%	100%
Public lectures	10	90	10%	90%

Result Discussion

From the table of analysis above, only 20**%** of the poultry farming from the mass media while 80**%** of them do not. None of the fish farmers obtain agricultural information through extension contact while 70**%** of the farmers obtain the information from agrio stores but 30**%** do not. 90**%** of the poultry farmers obtain the information from friends and relatives while only 10% do not. Only 5% of the farmers obtain information from town hall meetings while 96% do not. 4% obtain the information from religious centres while 95 do not. None of the farmers get the information from cooperative groups. Finally, 10% of the fish farmers obtain their information through public lectures/trainings but 90% of them do not.

Conclusion

The study revealed that the fish farmers in Orlu agricultural zone of Imo State from mainly agro inputs stores and friends and relatives which are not reliable sources while few of them obtain the information from public lectures/trainings, mass media, town meetings, religious centres. Extension sources which are most reliable are grossly neglected. However, it is not out of place to assert that the fish farmers lack adequate information. If the fish farming industry would be security needs of the Nigerian society and Imo State in particular, the extension service delivery system has to be overhauled by employment of more qualified agents which are grounded in poultry production and engaged to reach out to the poultry farmers. The poultry farmers should be informed about the need t be reaching the extension agents to obtain reliable information on fishery. Agricultural information on fishery should be made available to agro store operators since the farmers regularly patronize them. Mass media houses should endeavor to be accessing important information on poultry farming and relay them through regular broadcast. Poultry farmers should be encouraged to form cooperative societies and groups and extension agents should transmit recommended practices to the farmers through the cooperative. Since communities and towns hold regular meetings, extension agents should endeavor to be relaying information to the farmers through the various community/town leaderships. Public lectures/seminars and trainings should be organized to farmers through religious centres, town hall meetings for farmers to be obtaining information. The government and non-governmental organization and relevant private sector organizations should help in finding avenues for information transmission or poultry farming. School children should be taught poultry farming.

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