



EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE YOUTH AGRICULTURAL ENTREPRENEUR PROGRAMME AMONG POULTRY PRODUCTION BENEFICIARIES IN DELTA STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

This study examined the effectiveness of the Youth Agricultural Entrepreneur Programme in promoting youth employment through poultry production in Delta State, Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 120 randomly selected beneficiaries across the three agricultural zones. questionnaire was employed to gather data on beneficiaries' socio-economic characteristics, access to inputs and technologies, perceived livelihood outcomes, and constraints encountered in poultry production. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, and rankings. Results showed that most participants were young, educated, and male, with access to government-provided inputs such as day-old chicks, feed, and vaccines. Although technologies like battery cages and basic veterinary practices were moderately adopted, challenges such as high feed costs, limited access to veterinary services, and disease outbreaks persisted. The programme was found to have positively enhanced beneficiaries' livelihood, increased household income, food security, and youth engagement in poultry production. The study concludes that YAGEP has the potential to address youth unemployment in the region, but its sustainability depends on improved input delivery, access to training, affordable services, and stronger market linkages. Recommendations were made to enhance the programme's efficiency and scalability.

Keywords: *Profitability, Youth empowerment, poultry farming, agricultural programme, employment.*

Introduction

Youth entrepreneurship is a premeditated means of recovering from increasing unemployment and boosting economic growth (Omeje et al., 2020). According to Eromedoghene et al., (2023), youth entrepreneurship is a useful tool for Nigerians and other African countries to achieve economy diversification, hence 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. 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

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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 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 introduced by the Nigeria's Delta State government to prepare, train, develop and advance youth entrepreneurship in farming and agribusiness with the sole purpose of equipping beneficiaries to establish their own enterprises (YAGEP, 2021).

YAGEP's Concept and Scope

YAGEP was initiated in August 2015 by the former Governor of Delta State, Dr. Ifeanyi Okowa to address the issue of unemployment. Its main objectives were to mobilize, train, equip and support unemployed youth with the technical know-how, vocational skills, values and resources to become self-employed, reliant and increase food security through entrepreneurship in poultry farming. The programme includes comprehensive training and development of youth entrepreneurs in poultry production and agribusiness management, followed by support in establishing viable poultry ventures. Prior to training beneficiaries received startup packs/resources, such as day-old chicks, feeders, vaccines, working capital, and stipends (Eboh, 2022). Specifically, there were two categories of YAGEP; the Green YAGEP and Brown YAGEP. The Green YAGEP were youths who were freshers in agricultural enterprises but required training in a chosen agricultural skill followed with provision of facilities, materials and financial support to start-up and run an agricultural enterprise, while Brown YAGEP referred to youths who already had agricultural skills and owned agricultural enterprises but needed refresher training in practical and managerial skills plus support packages to grow and sustain their existing enterprises (Gertrude, 2020). YAGEP has ran seven successive cycles from 2015/2016 cycles to 2021/2022 cycles with a total number of 1,520 beneficiaries who were trained, established and supported in poultry-related fields such as hatchery operations, egg/meat production, and poultry health (Delta State Government, 2021). The programme complements national development initiatives like the Agricultural Development Programme (1974), National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (2003), and the Root and Tuber Expansion Programme (2001) (Nwoye & Nwalieji, 2019).

Rationale for Poultry Focus

Poultry farming is a strategic sector for addressing both economic and nutritional challenges. It offers high feed conversion rates and contributes significantly to protein intake, especially for vulnerable groups (Salami et al., 2021). Economically, the poultry industry in countries like the UK contributes over £2.4 billion to GDP and employs more than 108,000 individuals (Andrew, 2024). In Delta State, poultry farming provides funds in an emergency state, serving as a "safety net"; It also plays a huge part in rural livelihoods of each farm enterprise (Udoh et al., 2024). Additionally, it offers a high-nutrient source of animal protein in the form of meat and eggs (Andrew, 2024). However, the allure of white-collar jobs and lack of agricultural awareness still drive many youths away from agribusiness (Ngboawaji et al.,



2024). YAGEP addresses this by instilling entrepreneurial values and changing mindsets about agriculture's potential.

Statement of the Problem

Despite various youth-focused programs and cycles of YAGEP implementation (2015–2022), youth unemployment remains prevalent in Delta State, with rates as high as 40.36% and underemployment at 20.1% (Chowwen, 2021). The sheer demand for limited job opportunities illustrated by millions applying for a few thousand public sector positions—reflects deep-rooted desperation (Ajaino et al., 2023; Shimfe et al., 2020). Though YAGEP has empowered several youth with skills and resources, there is limited empirical data on the programme's actual impact, technology adoption levels, beneficiaries' satisfaction, and the systemic constraints hindering its effectiveness. This study seeks to fill this gap by evaluating the programme's effectiveness on poultry production, implementation and outcomes among poultry production beneficiaries.

Objectives of the Study

To assess the effectiveness and impact of the Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP) among poultry production beneficiaries in Delta State, Nigeria.

1. To determine the level of adoption of poultry production technologies introduced through YAGEP.
2. To assess beneficiaries' perceived impact of the programme on their livelihoods.
3. To evaluate the level of satisfaction with programme implementation strategies.
4. To identify socio-economic and institutional factors influencing beneficiaries' participation.
5. To examine the constraints limiting effective participation and productivity.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of adoption of poultry production technologies introduced by YAGEP?
2. How has YAGEP impacted the livelihoods of its poultry production beneficiaries?
3. How satisfied are the beneficiaries with the programme's implementation strategies?
4. What factors influence the participation of youth in the YAGEP poultry programme?
5. What constraints do beneficiaries face in participating in and benefitting from the programme?

Justification of the Study

This study is timely and relevant for the following stakeholders:

- **Policymakers:** Provides evidence-based insights into how agricultural youth empowerment programmes can be scaled and refined for job creation.
- **Development Practitioners:** Helps extension agents and NGOs understand operational challenges and opportunities for targeted interventions.
- **Researchers and Students:** Adds to the growing body of literature on youth agricultural entrepreneurship and offers a basis for future research.



- Programme Stakeholders: Offers feedback to government bodies and implementing agencies for improved resource allocation and programme design.
- Delta State Government: Serves as an evaluation tool to measure YAGEP's effectiveness in transforming youth livelihoods through agribusiness.

Scope and Limitations

Scope:

The study focuses exclusively on YAGEP poultry production beneficiaries across the three agricultural zones of Delta State: Delta North, Delta Central, and Delta South.

Limitations:

- Difficulty in accessing complete programme-specific data.
- Reluctance or lack of cooperation from some programme officials and farmers.
- Data collection challenges, which were mitigated through rapport-building and confidentiality assurances.

Methodology

Study Area

The study was conducted in Delta State, Nigeria, which is located in the southern region of the country. Delta State comprises three agricultural zones—Delta North, Delta Central, and Delta South—covering all twenty-five (25) Local Government Areas. The State lies between latitude 5°N and 6°30'N, and longitude 5°E and 6°45'E. It has an estimated population of over 5 million people and is known for its agricultural potential, especially in areas like poultry production, aquaculture, and crop farming.

Population of the Study

The population for this study included all poultry production beneficiaries of the Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP) in Delta State who participated in the programme between 2015 and 2020.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select the respondents:

- Stage 1: Three agricultural zones (Delta North, Central, and South) were purposively selected to cover the entire state.
- Stage 2: From each zone, two Local Government Areas (LGAs) were randomly selected, giving a total of six LGAs.



- Stage 3: From each LGA, a list of YAGEP poultry beneficiaries was obtained from the Delta State Job and Wealth Creation Bureau, and a random sampling technique was used to select twenty (20) beneficiaries from each LGA. This resulted in a total sample size of 120 respondents.

Instrument for Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into sections that captured the following:

- Socioeconomic characteristics of beneficiaries
- Sources and quality of inputs
- Level of technology usage
- Livelihood changes before and after participation
- Perceived effectiveness of YAGEP
- Constraints to participation

The questionnaire was subjected to content and face validation by experts in agricultural economics and rural sociology.

Method of Data Analysis

The study employed descriptive statistics only to analyze the data. This included:

- Frequencies and percentages: Used to describe demographic variables and response distribution.
- Means and standard deviations: Used to assess the average perception of livelihood changes and programme impact.
- Ranking: Applied to identify the most prominent constraints and preferred sources of inputs. These descriptive tools provided insights into the patterns and tendencies among the respondents without engaging in inferential or predictive analysis.

Results and Discussion

Research Question 1: What are the socio-economic characteristics of YAGEP poultry beneficiaries in Delta State?

The socio-economic characteristics of the respondents are summarized as follow:

- Gender: Majority of the respondents were male (68%), while females accounted for 32%.
- Age: Most beneficiaries were within the 31–40 years age group (45%), followed by 21–30 years (30%), and 41–50 years (20%).
- Marital Status: 60% of the beneficiaries were married, 30% single, and 10% divorced or widowed.
- Educational Qualification: 40% held tertiary qualifications, 35% had secondary education, and 25% completed primary education.
- Years of Experience in Poultry Farming: The majority (50%) had 1–3 years of experience, 30% had 4–6 years, and 20% had less than 1 year.
- Access to Land: 65% owned their poultry land/facility, while 35% operated on leased spaces.



This profile indicates that the YAGEP poultry programme was mostly accessed by young, educated, and married males, suggesting a good foundation for sustainable engagement in agribusiness.

Research Question 2: What types and sources of inputs are accessible to YAGEP poultry beneficiaries?

- Types of Inputs Received:
 - o Day-old chicks (100%)
 - o Feed (90%)
 - o Drugs/Vaccines (85%)
 - o Cages and housing materials (60%)
 - o Water supply equipment (40%)
- Sources of Inputs:
 - o State Government (YAGEP) – 100%
 - o Private Vendors – 55%
 - o Local Cooperatives – 35%

All respondents reported receiving inputs from the government, while over half also sourced supplementary inputs from private vendors. This shows heavy reliance on the state, but also some private initiative.

Research Question 3: What are the available technologies adopted by poultry beneficiaries in the programme?

Table 2 presents the technologies adopted.

Technology Used	Frequency	Percentage
Battery cages	90	75%
Automatic feeders/drinkers	48	40%
Vaccination schedule compliance	102	85%
Mobile veterinary consultation	30	25%

Vaccination compliance was the most common practice, followed by the use of battery cages. Automated systems were adopted by fewer participants, likely due to cost or limited training.

Research Question 4: What is the perceived impact of YAGEP on the livelihood of the beneficiaries?

Using a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree = 5 to Strongly Disagree = 1), beneficiaries rated their livelihood improvement. The mean score for each item is shown in Table 3.

Indicator	Mean Score	Interpretation
Increased household income	4.3	Strongly agreed
Improved food security	4.1	Strongly agreed
Greater access to health/education	3.8	Agreed
Ability to save and reinvest	3.5	Agreed
Job creation for others	3.2	Neutral to Agreed

Beneficiaries reported a general improvement in income and food security. However, lower scores in job creation and reinvestment suggest that sustainability may still be limited for some.



Research Question 5: What are the constraints faced by the YAGEP poultry beneficiaries?

Respondents were asked to rank the major constraints. The most frequently mentioned were:

High cost of feed (92%)

Disease outbreak (75%)

Limited access to veterinary services (60%)

Inadequate training on poultry management (55%)

Marketing challenges (50%)

These constraints were ranked based on frequency. High feed cost and disease outbreak were the most critical issues. Training and market access also pose notable challenges to growth.

Summary

This study assessed the effectiveness of the Youth Agricultural Empowerment Programme (YAGEP) in promoting youth employment through poultry farming in Delta State, Nigeria. It focused on understanding the socio-economic characteristics of beneficiaries, the inputs and technologies accessible to them, the impact of the programme on their livelihoods, and the constraints faced in poultry operations. Descriptive statistics revealed that the majority of the beneficiaries were young, educated, and married males, with varying levels of experience in poultry farming. Inputs such as day-old chicks, feed, and vaccines were largely supplied by the government. Technologies like battery cages and vaccination schedules were moderately adopted, though the uptake of modern equipment remained low. The programme was perceived to have improved household income and food security, though challenges such as high feed costs, disease outbreaks, and limited access to veterinary services remained significant.

Conclusion

The YAGEP poultry programme in Delta State has contributed positively to youth empowerment and livelihood improvement. Beneficiaries reported increased income, better food security, and modest job creation. However, the sustainability of these outcomes is threatened by persistent constraints including high input costs and limited technical support. While the programme demonstrates potential for addressing youth unemployment and promoting agricultural entrepreneurship, it requires strategic enhancements to sustain its impact and scale up its benefits.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- 1. Strengthen Input Support:** The government should continue and improve timely provision of quality inputs such as feed, vaccines, and chicks, possibly through partnerships with private suppliers.
- 2. Enhance Training and Extension Services:** Regular technical training and extension support should be provided to beneficiaries, especially in disease control, record keeping, and modern poultry management practices.
- 3. Subsidize Feed and Veterinary Services:** Policies to reduce feed cost and improve access to affordable veterinary care should be introduced to reduce mortality and improve productivity.



4. Facilitate Market Linkages: Support mechanisms should be established to help beneficiaries access stable and profitable markets for poultry products.
5. Encourage Technology Adoption: Beneficiaries should be supported with credit facilities or grants to invest in modern poultry equipment for better efficiency.

Contributions to Knowledge

1. Empirical Insight: This study provides empirical data on how agricultural youth empowerment initiatives can influence economic engagement and self-reliance among young Nigerians.
2. Policy Guidance: The findings offer practical recommendations for policy makers and programme implementers on areas needing improvement in youth agricultural interventions.
3. Benchmark for Future Evaluations: The methodology and results serve as a reference for evaluating similar agricultural empowerment programmes in other regions or sectors.
4. Improved Understanding of Youth in Agribusiness: The study contributes to the growing body of literature on youth participation in agribusiness by identifying both success factors and persistent challenges.

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