

Original Research Article

AGROPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN THE POST COVID-19 ERA; CHALLENGES AND PANACEA: VIEWS OF SMALL-SCALE POULTRY FARMERS IN IDEMILI NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT OF ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

ABSTRACT

This study x-rayed the challenges of Agropreneurship development since the outbreak of Coronavirus with views of small-scale poultry farmers in Idemili North Local government Area of Anambra State Nigeria. The potency of small-scale businesses in driving the socio-economic growth and development of nations particularly developing nations with emerging economy is incontrovertible. The owners of small-scale businesses are also known as entrepreneurs who incur losses sometimes and are faced with challenges which could lead to closure of the business. These challenges have been compounded by the outbreak of Coronavirus globally at the end 2019. The study employed descriptive survey design and thematic method of analysis was adopted to analyze generated data. The study found out some challenges facing the small-scale poultry farmers to include hick in prices of chick, feed and drugs, drastic drop of sales and unhealthy competition in the market from large scale farmers and lack of government support. In line with these hurdles, following recommendations were made: concerted efforts by government to avail financial support in terms accessible soft loans to small-scale farmers, organize capability building exercises to enhance entrepreneurial skills acquisition of small-scale business owners and regulation of market prices to protect infant businesses.

Key Words: Agropreneurship, Post Covid-19 Era; Challenges, Panacea, Small-Scale Poultry Farmers, Idemili North Local Government, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The global trend of unemployment is undisputable but more prominent in many developing nations with divergent socio-economic implications. According to the statistics from the Manpower Board and the Federal Bureau of Statistics (2019), Nigeria has a youth population of 80 million, representing 60% of the total population of the country. 64 million of them are unemployed, while 1.6 million are under-employed [1] (Agboye, 2020). According to the National Bureau of Statistics Nigeria's unemployment and underemployment rates are a combined of 55.7% at the end of the 2nd quarter in the Year 2020 [2]. Several factors have been blamed for the prevalence of youth unemployment in Nigeria. Nigeria has the highest population in Africa, with a population of about 177 million people and about 70% are Youth [3]. This was recently re-emphasized by the president of Nigeria who stated that Federal Government has no more job vacancies which has been compounded by the incessant cases of insecurity in the country that deter both local and foreign investors [4].

The outbreak of the global pandemic (Coronavirus) ushered in different dimensions of social-economic hurdles to all nations of the world particularly developing countries. Nigeria as a nation got massive share of socio-economic complications considering the micro nature of her economy. [5] reported that nearly 80% of Nigeria's population lives on daily income without any strong savings base to cope with the lockdown order; consequently, there were experiences of difficulties and hunger with varying degrees among majority of the citizens. Small scale Enterprises were also devastated by the effects of Coronavirus. Small-scale businesses play considerable part in the transformation of socio-economic development of many nations. The expansion and spread of small-scale businesses across developing nations is a significant record of acknowledgement that is a viable strategy for poverty reduction and eradication [6]. Precisely on the contributions of small and medium businesses to Nigerian's economy, [7] states they are the backbone of the country's economy, accounting for 96% of Nigeria's businesses, 84% of its labor force, and 48% of its GDP. And SMEs also provides room for diversification and ameliorate over reliance on oil.

Entrepreneurship has been proposed by various authors as one of the viable strategies not only to curtail ever increasing unemployment rate in Nigeria but also contributes to all round national growth and development. It has been instrumental in economic diversification, private sector enhancement, job creation, micro and small-scale enterprises, curbing of unemployment rate, utilize human resources, self-sufficiency, and economic buoyancy [8].

In Anambra state, 80% of the entrepreneur site their ventures like schools, firms, industries, recreational centers, hospitals, etc. mostly in Onitsha, Nnewi and Awka which are the metropolises of the state. This is due to the absence of prevailing conditions and needed facilities such as deplorable nature of road network, security, inadequate power supply, poor access to financial facilities, etc.

Communities in Idemili north locality both rural and urban have witnessed up increase in the number of small-scale poultry farmers. This obviously is as a result of lack of job opportunities and lack of access to start-up capitals of medium and large-scale businesses. This is in view with Olufemi [9] who asserted that recent research on youths and their involvement in entrepreneurship activities is gaining ground seriously due to the economic downturn that increases unemployment. Many young people are forced into self-employment due to uncertainties in the economy and the inadequate availability of formal paid jobs and other career opportunities [10]. These self-help efforts by the youth apparently face stumbling block due to Coronavirus outbreak. This study x-rayed the views of small-scale poultry farmers on challenges they are facing since the outbreak of Coronavirus in Idemili North Local government area of Anambra state Nigeria.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

This study employed descriptive survey. Observation and interview which are elements of descriptive survey avails the researcher the opportunity to visit the small scale poultry farmers, make personal observation within and around their businesses environment and also elicit first-

hand information needed for the study from the farmers via interview. Thematic method of analysis was adopted to analyze generated data.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA

The study covered Idemili North Local Government Area of Anambra state. The area covers 390 square kilometers with estimated population of 162,808 [11]. Idemili North local government area was created out of Idemili local government area in 1989 (<http://idemili.org/facts/>). It is bounded on the north by Oyi and Dunukofia local government areas, on the east by Njikoka and Anaocha local government areas, on the south by Idemili South and west by Onitsha South local government area. Idemili North Local Government Area has its headquarter at Ogidi. Towns that make up the local government are Abacha, Abatete, Eziowelle, Ideani, Nkpor, Obosi, Ogidi, Oraukwu, Uke, Umuoji. Idemili North LGA is a trade hub with the area hosting several markets. Major commercial activities in Idemili North Local Government Area happen in Obosi, Nkpor and parts of Ogidi [12]. Below is the map of Idemili North Local Government Area.

Fig.1 Map of Idemili North Local Government Area

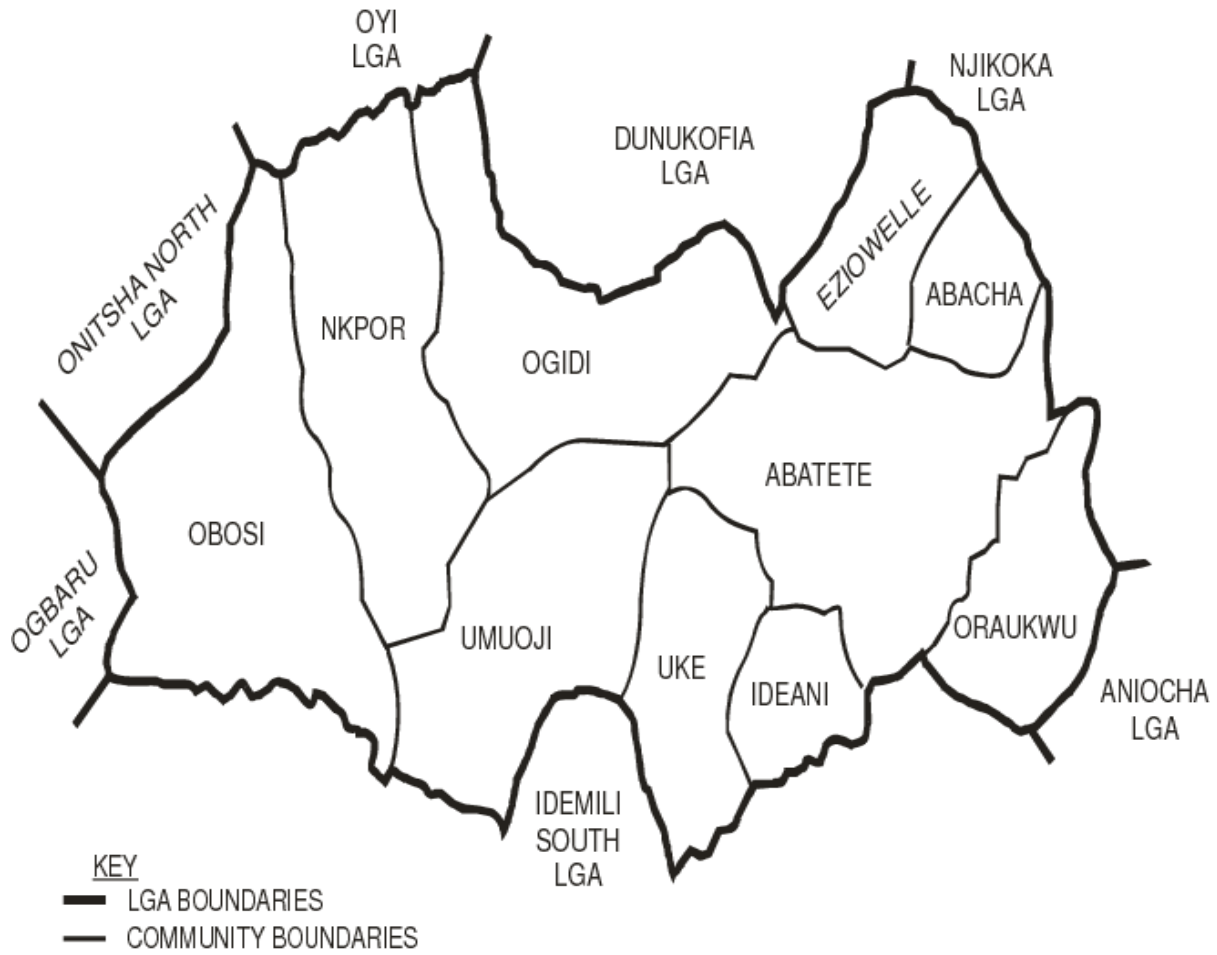


Figure 1

Source: [13].

UNDER

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Entrepreneurship

Many scholars have described the concept of “Entrepreneurship” from divergent perspectives. While some see entrepreneurship as a process of successful organization, others define entrepreneurship as building mindset and skills. [14] stated that entrepreneurship is relatively new topic of research, and the focus area are exploring the management process of entrepreneurship such as creativity and autonomy, capacity for adaptability, and create artistic as well as economic and social value [15] also stated that entrepreneurship is a key to success and every individual that creates a new organization of business means enter a new paradigm of entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, the entrepreneurship is an activity that shifted the old habits into the new one with fully discipline and independent [16].

Agropreneurship

The concept “Agropreneurship” emanates from two concepts- agriculture and entrepreneurship. Therefore, the merger of both concepts gave birth to Agropreneurship. The concept heralds entrepreneurship development in the agricultural sector. It is an important policy thrust to increase the value of agricultural production and open up the sector for businesses. The essence is to embrace a candid departure from what obtains in contemporary agriculture sector where the mundane ways of soil cultivation still prevails.

Small Scale Enterprises

The definition of small-scale business varies from country to country, from industry to industry and from one financial institution to another. [17] argued that different criteria are used in defining small scale enterprises. For instance, if project cost is used as the criteria for measuring the size of a business, price inflation may render the definition meaningless over time. If the number of employees engaged in a business forms the yardstick for measurement, it may not be realistic bearing in mind that some firms are capital intensive needing only very few employees. Other firms are labour intensive employing large number of people but utilizing only small capital fund. In describing the key attributes of small-scale enterprises, [18] stated that a small-scale enterprise is a business that is not large, in terms of its size, scope of operation, financial involvement and the workforce involved. Most small-scale enterprises are owned by one entrepreneur. Sometimes a small-scale enterprise is said to be a firm that is owned and managed individually.

The Committee for Economic Development in the United States of America considered a business to be small when, at least, two of the following features prevails:

- The person managing the business is the owner
- Capital is provided by the individual owner(s) of the business
- The area of operation is local
- The size of the business within the industry is small when compared with the bigger units in its field. The World Bank defined small scale enterprise as any on-going concern whose total

project cost is not more than N30,000.00. In summary, a small-scale enterprise is a business with few employees, limited capital investment and small-scale operation.

Agropreneurship Development in Nigeria

According to [19], the Agricultural sector has been the leading provider of employment in Nigeria since the sixties and seventies, when the sector provided employment for more than 70 percent of the Nigerian population. Unfortunately, in the wake of oil discovery, the attention on this sector of the economy was gradually and myopically shifted to the oil sector where employment opportunities were very low and the traditional agricultural exports have been on a progressive decline. Regrettably, the scenario has given rise to acute unemployment as oil sector could only employ limited number of the population and worse still, only experts. [20] opined that today, agriculture has suffered from long years of neglect, mismanagement, inconsistent and poorly conceived government policies, lack of government meaningful incentive to farmers, lack of basic infrastructure and a lot of bureaucratic bottlenecks in executing policies and agricultural programmes among government agencies. This situation calls for innovation in agriculture sector within which frame the concept of Agropreneurship emanated

According to FAO Country Programming Framework (2017), presently, agricultural development in Nigeria is guided by two strategic frameworks that provide broad priorities for development of agriculture to improve food security, create jobs, increase incomes and reduce rural poverty. These strategic frameworks have therefore informed and provided the basis, rationale and legitimacy for the CAADP National Agricultural Investment Plan (NAIP), the National Agriculture and Food Security Programme and FAO's priority action plans for assistance to the country. These overarching frameworks are: (i) National Agricultural and Food Security Strategy now embedded in the Agriculture Transformation Agenda; (ii) Nigeria Vision 20:2020 Economic Transformation Blueprint, which is Government's overarching national plan for economic growth. Vision 20:2020 is an expression of Nigeria's intent to improve the living standards of her citizens and place the country among the top 20 economies in the world with a minimum GDP of USD 900 billion and a per capita income of no less than USD 4000 per annum by the year 2020. The Nigerian Vision 20:2020 (NV20:2020) aims to transform agriculture to a sustainable profitable sector with focus on increasing agricultural productivity and production for direct consumption and processing for local market and export. To this end, the Vision seeks to attract large-scale investments for mechanized production/processing of agricultural produce in which Nigeria has comparative advantage (e.g. tubers, cereals, oil palm, cocoa), as well as agricultural produce that serves as inputs to processing plants (e.g. citrus fruits, pineapple, hide and skin). This Vision is a harmonized view of the key principles and thrusts of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), MDGs, and the Seven-Point Agenda within a common perspective that is consistent with Nigeria's long-term national aspirations. The country's sector objectives and goals are clearly linked to FAO's own Strategic Objectives. In order to achieve the broad objectives, a National Implementation Plan (NIP) 2010-2013 (the first of its kind) was launched with specific goals and key strategies to enable accelerated pro-poor growth, achieve an average GDP growth rate of 13 per cent, raise the GDP per capita from USD 1,075 in 2009 to USD 2,009 by 2013, generate jobs, improve the nation's global competitiveness and raise public confidence in governance and the political system. These are geared towards attaining the MDGs by 2015 and moving the nation towards achieving its

Vision. This development paradigm shift has macro, socio-economic and environmental implications. FAO can bring its global experience and play a crucial role in advising about the pros and cons of the various development paradigms being adopted by the country.

More recently, the outbreak of Coronavirus ushered more challenges into the agricultural sector just many sectors globally. Nigerian government however initiated various policies to cushion the effects of the pandemic on the agricultural sector and more importantly encourage agropreneurship. Few of these programmes are discussed below:

- i. **Provision of Agricultural Loan:** In order to cushion the spontaneous shock created by the Coronavirus across the agricultural value chain, the CBN introduced the Targeted Credit Facility (TCF) where they disbursed ₦50 billion loans to firms in the agricultural value chain and to support households and small and medium enterprises (SME) impacted by the pandemic. The loan was designed to have a maximum repayment period of three years and an exit date of 31 December 2024 and comes with interest rate of 5% initially and then 9% after March 2021 [21]. To further ensure the accessibility of farmers to finance across the States the CBN under the Nigerian Incentive-Based Risk Sharing System for Agricultural Lending (NIRSAL) approved the disbursement of a ₦75 billion, funding support programme known as Agribusiness Small and Medium Enterprises Investment Scheme (AGSMEIS) for micro, small and medium enterprises [22]. The scheme provides up to ₦10 million loan at 9% interest rate per annum for repayment period of seven years to eligible start-ups and existing entrepreneurs. Nonetheless, the Apex bank reduced the interest rate for all its previous intervention funds like ABP and ACGS from 9% to 5% per annum and extended the moratorium on payment of principal by one year [23].
- ii. **Nigeria Economic Sustainability Plan:** The FGN in May 2020 officially launched Nigeria Economic Sustainability Plan (NESP). The plan had different components but the component that addresses the agricultural sector specifically is the Mass Agricultural Programme (MAP). The estimated cost of the project is ₦634 billion and the aim is to provide five million jobs by bringing into cultivation between 20,000 to 100,000 ha of new farmland in various states of Nigeria, as well as utilizing abandoned farm settlement schemes [24]. The project is expected to span the agricultural value chain from farm-to-table with a timeline of one year. It will support small holder farmers directly or throughout grower schemes with services and inputs such as land-clearing, ploughing, provision of equipment, agro-inputs such as seedlings, pesticides, fertilizers, storage facilities and extension services. There is also provision for low-interest input financing. The increased production will be purchased by private sectors (e.g., large conglomerates), agro-processors, commodity exchange and procurement for government strategic reserve [25].

However, the impact of these programmes remains contentious. Some analysts have argued that these policies have benefited the poor while others opined that despite positive real growth, poverty had been on the increase [26].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 Socio-Economic Characteristics

S/N	Name	Business Name	Age	Level of Education	Source of Capital	Farm Capacity	Years of Business
1.	Mr. Christian	Paraclete Agro Resources	35	HND	Private savings and borrowing from relations	1,700 birds	Six
2.	Mr. Bath	Masterz Agro Farm	34	B.Sc.	Private savings and borrowing from friends	2,000 birds	Eight
3.	Mr. Chinedu	Okwytex Farm	36	B.Sc.	Private savings	1,500 birds	Five
4.	Mr. Alloysius	Ichie Onyenwee Farm	36	B.Sc.	Private savings and borrowing from relations	2,500 birds	Seven

Source: field work, 2021

The table 1 above shows the socio-economic features of the respondents which are important in any research findings. The role of these attributes of respondents such as age, income, level of education to mention a few may determine and shape pattern of responses to research questions. The table indicates that the respondents are on the average years of 35 and good education qualification that places them in the right position to handle their businesses. The table as shows their relative experiences in the business, their farm capacities and sources of their capital which has influence on the operation of the business.

CHALLENGES TO SMALL-SCALE POULTRY FARMERS

It is no longer news that the outbreak of Covid-19 ushered in different forms socio-economic challenges in diverse sectors all over the world. Most affected groups are developing economies and small and medium scale firms. Below are the views of the small-scale farmers on hurdles they are facing since the outbreak of the virus:

➤ **Hick in prices of Chick, Feed and Drugs:** In a poultry business, apart from the cost of erecting the physical structures, birds, feed and drugs are other key factors that upward or downward shift in their prices can negatively or positively influence the outcome of the business activities. In terms of cost of chicks, one of the participants Mr. Christian comments that: “*prior to the outbreak of Coronavirus, we used to buy agrited chick at the cost of #250 to #280 per chick. But since the outbreak of the Coronavirus, we bought per chick from #330, #350, #400 #480 and currently #600 per chick.*”

On the aspect of prices of feed, Mr. Bath recalls: “*within this locality, we use varieties of feed such as New Hope, Ultima and Chikun feed. For New Hope feed, we used to buy the starter at the cost of #4300 to 4350, finisher, #4000. But the moment Coronavirus came, we started buying the starter 5000 to 6000 and currently 8600. Also, finisher increased to #4800, #5900, and currently #8450*”. In the view, another respondent Mr. Chinedu laments: “*before the outbreak of Coronavirus, we buy Ultima starter at the cost #3800 and finisher at the cost of #5500. But when the Coronavirus started, we started buying starter at the cost of #5000, #5500 and currently #7500. Finisher also rise from #5500 to #6400 and #7400 Currently*”.

Mr. Christian also expressed that: “*apart from hike in prices of chicks and feed, the prices of drugs equally increased. For instance, we used to buy Doxy-gen #2800 but with the outbreak of Coronavirus, it became #3800, Vitacox that was 1800 became #2200, Abiovit that was #800 became #1300 and finally, kenflox that we used to buy #1100 became #1700*”. This high cost of commodities is buttressed by the views of Olufemi & Ojekunle [27] who asserted that Nigerians suffer food price surges amidst dwindling income since the outbreak of Coronavirus.

In probing the possible causes of hike in prices of these items since the outbreak of Coronavirus, it is no longer news that the outbreak of the virus ushered in a great scare all over the world which triggered various governments to initiate divergent pharmaceutical or non-pharmaceutical measures to curtail the spread of the virus. Nigerian government imitated measures like lockdown, ban of social gathering, closer of markets and religious places, etc. Mr. Bath asserts: “*the lock measure contributed to hike in prices of these items because our suppliers found it difficult to transport the feeds and chicks to us. Few that succeeded spent heavily via the payment they made to security operatives in order to secure their passage and supply the items to us*”. In line with this, [28] stated, currently, the restrictions have negatively impacted the food supply chain with the tightening of transportation and port capacities, which has resulted in the shortage of food supply. Mr. Alloysius also lamented: “*Coronavirus really affected the producers and distributors of feed and importers of drugs. Till now, some big distributors and producers have not resumed their usual operation due Coronavirus. Therefore, few individuals or companies that have these items sell them in relative higher prices which invariably results to increase in price of selling our birds in the market*”. This is in consonance with Akinfenwa [29] who lamented that the lockdown occasioned by the spread of the Coronavirus pandemic grounds commercial, human and vehicular activities in some parts of the country, hunger has begun to stare Nigerians in the face as prices of foodstuffs and other agro commodities increase at an alarming rate.

➤ **Drastic Drop of Sales and Unhealthy Competition in the Market from Large Scale Farmers:** The complete circle of production process is the sale of the products. Sales of products have massive influence on the growth, sustainability or decline of any business enterprise. Sales declining have been one of the hurdles small scale poultry farmers face since the outbreak of

Coronavirus. One of the respondents Mr. Chinedu expressed: *“at the onset of outbreak, we experienced huge decline in the sales because of restrictions placed on ceremonies (marriage, funeral, etc.) where only 50 persons were allowed in any gathering. These ceremonies are key markets for me to sell my birds. The decline was so significant that I could barely sell 80 to 100 birds in a week as against 700 to 1000 birds I used to sell before the outbreak. Closure of markets as one of the measures took by Anambra state government in order to curtail the spread of the virus also contributed massively to the sales decline”*. Mr. Christian added different dimension of challenge that small-scale poultry farmers face in the market since the outbreak of Coronavirus. He explained: *“Even though that the cases of coronavirus and its restrictions have reduced drastically, I and other small-scale poultry farmers around this vicinity are not of suffering from depletion of start-up and running capital as result of high cost of chicks, feed and drugs, but are facing daunting challenge of competing with large-scale farmers in the market. The recent influx of large-scale farmers which are owned by influential figures in the society such as current governor of Anambra state with capacity of over 50, 000 birds located at Igbariam into the market has made it difficult for us to survive”*. Mr. Bath lamented *“I am faced with dilemma of selling my birds at the same prices as the large-scale farmers and end up losing my capital or rather stick to sell at higher price and end up taking my birds to market and back home without selling at all. These large-scale farmers use price reduction as strategy to lure customers which I am a victim”*. Globally, existence of competition in business enterprises is inevitable irrespective of the size, type and structure of the business. Healthy and fair competition is encouraged for innovation and creativity in the business cycle. However, unfair and healthy takes negative toll on the Nigerian small business ecosystem, create market failures, erase job creation, and wealth creation within the economy. [30] opined that Fair competition exists when no single buyer or seller can control the price or product in the market. The responses of these respondents show that these large-scale farmers are controlling the market prices which affects them adversely.

➤ **Lack of Government Support:** Assistance for the growth and sustainability of small-scale businesses is a win-win situation for the government [31]. Adequate business knowledge, skills and financial resources are prerequisite for successful business management. Experiences small-scale businesses in Nigeria have shown that deficit in the prerequisites for the businesses to start and thrive which is expected to be filled by an external body such as government and Non-government Organizations (NGOs). The views of the respondents show that they have not received expected support from the government particularly since the outbreak of Coronavirus when they needed the assistance most. Mr. Bath expressed: *“Government knows that we need her support now that Coronavirus depleted our capital. Some that couldn’t cope dropped out of the business. My take is not to get free money from the government but have access to soft loan that can help us to cushion the effects of Coronavirus on our business”*. On the aspect of skill and acquisition development, Mr. Christian stated *“the knowledge that helped me to start this poultry business was gotten from the empowerment workshop organized by three Oil companies as part*

of their Corporate Social Responsibilities in Enugu state (Aniri), Anambra state (Abatete) and Benue state (Gboko) in the year 2015". In the same view, Mr. Chinedu recalled *"the only and last contact I ever had with government officials since I started this business was in the year 2019 when they visited my farm, took photographs of the farm and said that the government of the state will support the business, till date, I have not heard nor seen anything from the government"*. This is described [32] as low government investment, incentives, security on small and medium scale enterprises. Mr. Alloysius lamented on the aspect of lack of government support: *"we are not only suffering lack of support by government but various dimension of extortions we suffer in the hands of so-called "government officers who claim to be generating revenue for the local and state government respectively"*. This is in line with the view of [30] Who asserted that despite the contributions of SMEs to the economic development and growth in Nigeria, it has been confronted with different challenges such as multiplicity of statutory levies and fares. Similarly, [33] lamented that aggressive revenue drive pose hurdles for SMEs in Nigeria. He asserted that the travails of entrepreneurs have been compounded by a renewed drive by governments to rev up revenue generation. It is an established fact that every government needs revenue to discharge its mandates. However, is pertinent for government to be considerate in deciding what to collect, when to collect and who collects the revenue. Complaints are not of that government collect revenue but most times, these revenues are collected by unauthorized officers which constitutes one of the major issues of revenue leakages to the government.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

Small- scale enterprise is an influential focal point of economic activities in many developing nations which is geared towards improving the socio-economic status and engage the skyrocketing number of unemployed citizens especially the youths. Various challenges that small-scale poultry farmers in Idemili North local government area of Anambra state just like many other small-scale business owners were facing have been compounded by the outbreak of Coronavirus. Concerted efforts from all relevant stakeholders (federal/state/local government, NGOs, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria, National Directorate of Employment, etc.) in order to cushion the effects on Coronavirus on small-scale business owners thereby enhancing their potentials of contributing to the socio-economic development of the nation at large.

Major sources of fund for small-scale business owners in Nigeria are personal savings of the borrowing from friends and relatives which has hampered their potentials. This study recommends concerted efforts by the government towards availability and accessibility soft loans for the small-scale business owners. This can serve as incentive and encouragement especially in this era of devastating Coronavirus effects. [34] precisely suggested that government should provide ₦50 billion grants to directly support small and vulnerable businesses to avoid closure and job retrenchments due to effects of Coronavirus. This can be achieved through special arrangement with micro financial banks. More so, entrepreneurship education and skill acquisitions are key for new and existing small and medium scale businesses.

Government should prioritize organizing periodic skill acquisition exercise for both aspiring and already existing small-scale business owners on vital areas such as risk management, financial management, human resources management, innovation and creativity, etc. Finally, relevant agencies should ensure regulation of market prices to protect infant businesses.

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