

# AGROPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN THE POST COVID-19 ERA; CHALLENGES AND PANACEA: VIEWS OF SELECTED 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 selected 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 are usually faced with challenges (lack of start-up and running capital, insecurity, natural disaster, paucity of business skills, etc.) which affect the business growth or total 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 identified hurdles, following recommendations were made; concerted efforts by government to avail financial support in terms easy access to soft loans by small-scale farmers, organization of capacity building exercises to enhance acquisition of entrepreneurial skills by 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 with divergent socio-economic implications is undisputable but more prominent in many developing nations. Manpower Board and the Federal Bureau of Statistics (2019) stated that out of 80 million Nigerian youths which represent 60% country's population, unemployed and underemployed are 64 million and 1.2 million respectively [1]. Similarly, at the end of the second quarter of the year 2020, Nigeria's rate of unemployment as published by National Bureau of Statistics stood at 27.1%. Unfortunately, this soared to 33% in the first quarter of 2021 with the negative landmark of being the second highest on the global list. [2]. This increasing menace of unemployment and its attending socio-economic implications has continually been of great concern to successive administrations and entire citizenry. Several factors have been blamed for the prevalence of youth unemployment in Nigeria such as poor performance of various sectors that would absorb job applicants, corruption, nepotism, and favouritism as major determinant for job placement and replacement [3]. While Egwuatu, Oso & Nnorom [4] alluded that the causes of unemployment in Nigeria are excessively supply of unskilled labour and absence of population control due to lack of birth and migration checkmate,

Ukazu [5] argued that it is the inability of Nigerian's government to create meaningful job opportunities that has socially dislocated many Nigerians particularly the youths. The issue of many Nigerian youths jostling for few job opportunities is not novel, rather the notion of many graduates aspiring for government or "white Kolar" jobs has become a reality that it is a mirage. This was recently re-emphasized by the president of Nigeria Muhammadu Buhari 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 [6].

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. Chukwuorji & Iorfa [7] stated that almost 80% of Nigerians depend on daily businesses and proceeds devoid of high income and strong savings treasury to survive the lockdown directive by the government. By implication, there were various incidences of severe hunger of divergent magnitude amongst 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 [8]. Precisely on the contributions of small and medium businesses to Nigerian's economy, Osayi [9] opined that small and medium businesses 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 [10].

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 an increase in the number of small-scale poultry farmers in recent time. The obvious reason is due to lack of job opportunities and lack of access to start-up capitals of medium and large-scale businesses. This is in view with Olufemi [11] who asserted that current research shows that because of economic crisis that has massive implications on the rate of unemployment, there is an upward engagement of youths in entrepreneurship activities. Premised on uncertainty of economy and paucity of formal jobs and other career opportunities, many youths are inevitably pressured into search for

self-employment [12]. These self-sustaining efforts by the youth apparently face stumbling block due to Coronavirus outbreak. This study x-rayed the views of selected 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 elicit first-hand information needed for the study from the farmers via interview instrument. Purposive sampling technique was deployed by the researchers to select respondents that have right information for the study. 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 [13]. In 1989, the defunct Idemili local government area was divided into Idemili North and Idemili South local government areas. Idemili North local government is surrounded by Oyi, Dunukofia Njikoka, Anaocha, Idemili South and Onitsha South local government areas respectively. 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 [14]. Below is the map of Idemili North Local Government Area.

Fig.1 Map of Idemili North Local Government Area

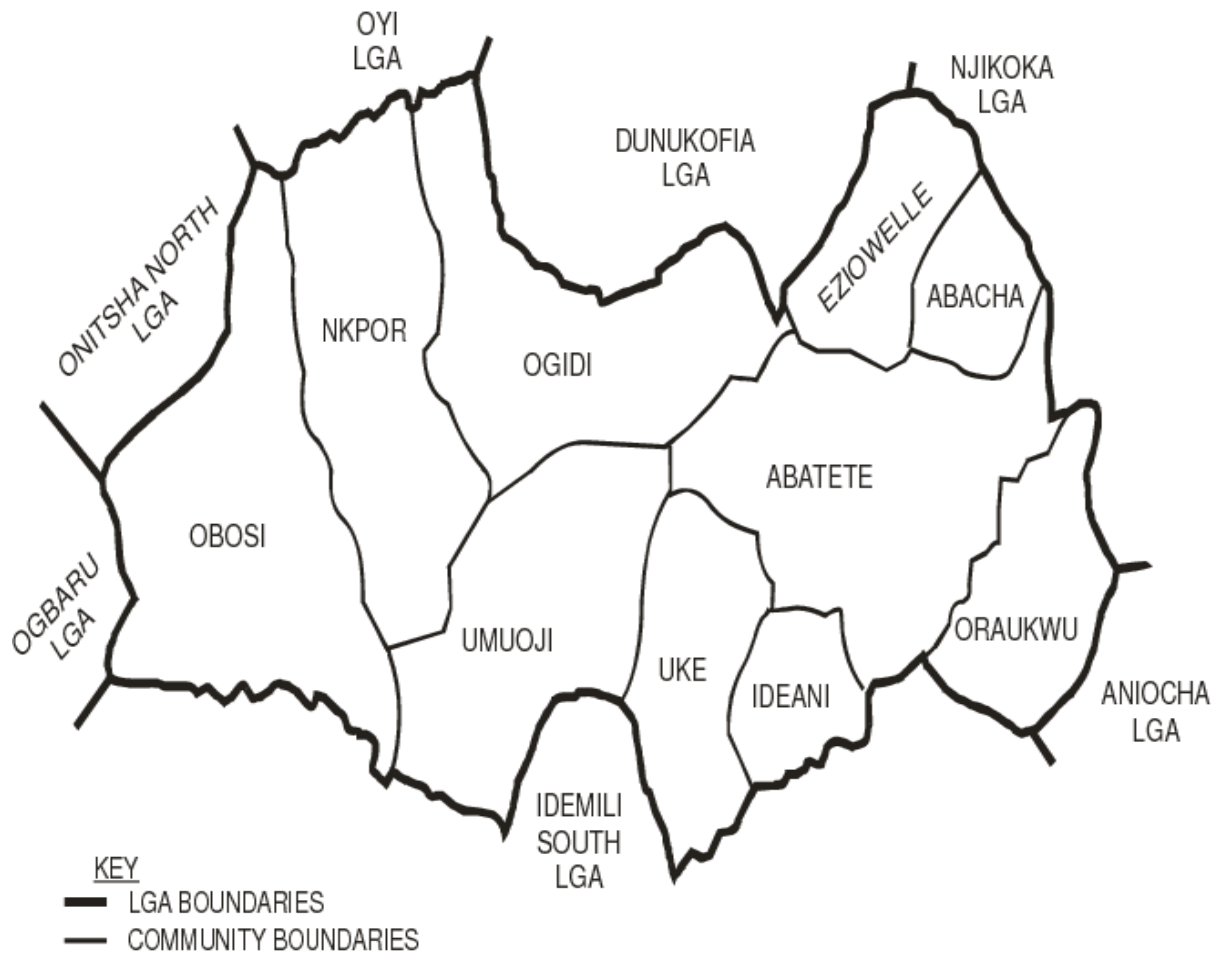


Figure 1

Source: [15].

## **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 viewed it as the process of mindset and skill construction. Chang & Wyszomirski [16] opined that in the field of research, the concept can be said to be relatively novel. The concentrated efforts are geared towards exploring the management aspects of entrepreneurship such as innovation, creativity, capacity for adaptability, creation of imaginative alongside socio-economic value. In describing the concept of entrepreneurship as veritable tool for creation and success of new business, Barot [17] asserted that entrepreneurship is fundamental to success and everybody that creates a new organization of business means entering 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 [18]. This summarized the core values of entrepreneurship to be invention and innovation of new and existing business ideas respectively.

### **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 it to embrace a candid departure from what is obtainable in contemporary agriculture sector particularly in developing countries where the mundane ways of soil cultivation still prevail to a more modernized business-like practice with new ideas.

### **Small Scale Enterprises**

Various scholars have described the concept of small-scale business from divergent views based on various countries, industries, and financial institutions. Osadi [19] posited that different criteria are used in defining small scale enterprises. For instance, when a cost of project is chosen as the yardstick for quantifying the size of a firm/business, an increase in price (inflation) over time could make the definition meaningless. If the staff strength of an organization or engaged workers in a firm is used as criteria for measurement, it may be unrealistic because while some businesses need huge capital outlay with few numbers of workers, other businesses employ greater number of workers with minimal capital outlay. In describing the key attributes of small-scale enterprises, Obi [20] stated that a small-scale enterprise can be described as any business that is relatively large in terms of size, dimension of operation, fiscal resources and human resources involved. Greater number of small-scale enterprises are possessed by an entrepreneur. That is why small-scale enterprise is mostly described as a firm or business 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 have few employees, limited capital investment and small-scale operation.

### **Agropreneurship Development in Nigeria**

According to Adams [21], in 1960's and 1970's in Nigeria, agricultural sector was the dominant force in terms employment opportunities with more than 70% job creation. Regrettably, with the era oil discovery and boom, economic activities swiftly diverted to the oil sector which unfortunately has low capacity of job creation. This is to the detriment of the agricultural growth and development which continued to decline. Unfortunately, this situation has ushered in more severe incidences of joblessness because oil sector could not only absorb few numbers of workers but also strictly require professionals. Uzonwanne, [22] opined that Nigerian agricultural sector has been bedeviled for many years by various factors such as: negligence, poor inducement for farmers by the government, unsuitable government policies and policy inconsistency, paucity of needed infrastructures (good road network, storage facilities, security, etc.) and numerous administrative hiccups in the agricultural programmes and polices among government institutions. This situation calls for innovation in agriculture sector within which frame the concept of Agropreneurship emanated

According to FAO Country Programming Framework (2017), currently, development of agriculture in Nigeria is structured by two planned schemes that geared towards developing agricultural sector towards achieving enhanced food security, employment opportunities, higher earnings, and alleviation of poverty at the rural level. These planned schemes have established the basis, mandates, and acceptability for frameworks/programmes like the National Agricultural & Food Security Programme and the National Agricultural Investment Plan (NAIP). Another framework was Nigerian Vision 20: 2020 with the intention to enhance the standard of living of Nigerians and position Nigeria in the ranks of top 20 world economies by the year 2020. The scheme also targeted overhaul and transformation of Nigerian agricultural sector for sustainability and commercial viability of agricultural products both local and international. Other frameworks include National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy, Millennium Development Goals, Seven-Point Agenda, amongst others.

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, through the Central Bank of Nigeria, a scheme called Targeted Credit Facility was introduced. This scheme brought about disbursement of fifty billion naira (#50b) by the federal government to various agricultural firms particularly

small and medium agribusinesses to cushion the effects of the pandemic. The loan was configured to have three years life span with the termination date of December 31st, 2024. It has two structured interest rate payment with initial 5% and subsequent 9% after the month of March 2021 [23]. In furtherance of ensuring that farmers access finance in the entire states of the nation through the Nigerian Incentive Based Risk Sharing for Agricultural Lending (NIRSAL), Central Bank of Nigeria made available the sum of seventy-five billion naira (#75b). This is to support established small and medium agricultural businesses. This financial support is done through the Agricultural Small and Medium Enterprises Investment Scheme (AGSMEIS) [24]. It is stated that the scheme disburses as much as ten million naira (#10m) loan with seven years life span and benchmark of 9% interest rate annually. This support is meant for qualified emerging and existing entrepreneurs in agriculture. Similarly, there is reduction in the interest rates from 9% to 5% annually and extension of repayment period by one year from existing interventions like Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme and Anchor Borrowers' Programme by the Apex bank [25].

- ii. **Nigeria Economic Sustainability Plan:** In May 2020, the Federal Government of Nigeria established Nigeria Economic Sustainability Plan (NESP). The mandate of this plan is to challenges in agricultural sector in respect to Mass Agricultural Programme (MAP). The project which was estimated to worth six hundred and thirty-four billion naira (#634b) was targeted to create 5 million employment opportunities via cultivation of twenty thousand to hundred thousand ha of farmland in all states of federation and effectively use other dormant schemes [26]. The expectation of the project is to within one year, transform the agricultural value chain. This will enhance small-scale farmers through input services like clearing of land, supply of farm tools, seedlings, fertilizers, and other extension services [27]

However, assessment of the effects of these agricultural schemes continues to be debatable. While some scholars opined that the prime targets of these schemes which are the poor have benefited from them, others question the efficacy of these programmes owing to their non-translation to measurable indicators like poverty reduction, food security, etc. [28].

## 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 respondents 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 [29] who asserted that the outbreak of the Coronavirus triggered hike in prices of food items in the face of economic crises and low earnings.

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 to secure their passage and supply the items to us”*. In line with this, Akinfenwa [30] stated, presently, the restrictive measures (transportation restrictions) initiated by the government ushered negative effects on the chain of food supply which occasioned decline in 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 Olufemi & Ojekunle [31] who lamented that the lockdown measure enacted by the government to curtail the spread of the virus drastically affected commercial activities and movement vehicles/persons in various states of the nation, increase in hunger became inevitable due to hike in price of foodstuffs and many agricultural products.

➤ **Drastic Drop of Sales and Unhealthy Competition in the Market from Large Scale Farmers:** The complete cycle of production process is the sale of the products. Products sale 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 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 only 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 unhealthy competition has adverse effects on the Nigerian small-scale business environment, create market failures, erase job creation, and wealth creation within the economy. Milano [32] 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 [33]. Adequate business knowledge, skills and financial resources are prerequisite for successful business management. Experiences of 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 businesses”*. 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 2020 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 by Enesi & Ibrahim [34] 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 Milano [32] 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, Onyewuchi [35] 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 different unidentifiable 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 ensuring availability and accessibility of soft loans for the small-scale business owners. This can serve as incentive and encouragement especially in this era of devastating Coronavirus effects. Osakwe et al. [36] 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. Multiple revenue collection and use of numerous revenue collectors have shown to be one of the major challenges as lamented by small-scale farmers. There is need for government to consider special tax amnesty for small-scale business owners who are still recuperating from Coronavirus effects. More so, government should unify different revenue collectors and assign a clear identify to them to enable business owners know the legal and illegal revenue collectors. Finally, relevant agencies should ensure regulation of market prices to encourage and protect small-scale and infant businesses.

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#### **Authors' contributions**

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

#### **Competing Interests**

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.