

## **SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF POULTRY BUSINESS ENTREPRENEURS IN IMO STATE, NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The study focused on the socio-economic characteristics of poultry business enterprises in Imo state, Nigeria. One hundred and ten (110) entrepreneurs participated in the study. Most of the respondents (73.6%) were married, fell within the age cohort of 31 to 50 years (70.9%) and had between 4-7 children (62.9%), while over 60% were also males. Acquisition of post primary education was a very important factor in going into the practice, with 56.4% of the respondents not having any formal training in any agriculture related discipline. Thirty (30), 18.2 and 14.5% of the practitioners had farmers, traders and teachers respectively as parents. However only 17.4% could trace their involvement in poultry business to parental influence. While 67.3% of the respondents have been in the business for 1 to 10 years, 61.8% were combining it with other means of livelihood with teaching and crop farming (30.9 and 30.0% respectively) predominating. Sixty-nine (62.7%) of the practitioners employed others to help them in their business while 68.1% of those employing workers, employed between 1 and 5 persons. Again, 98.2% of capital sources utilized in the business were personal, while 1.8% was from other sources. Seventy-four (67.3%) of the respondents own automobile, while 84 (76.4%) own landed properties, including personal houses and other tangible properties because of their involvement in poultry business enterprise. The results showed that poultry business is a lucrative one.*

**Key words: Nigeria, poultry business enterprises, practitioners, livelihood, poultry farmers**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In Nigeria, the livestock sector is an important component of the

agricultural economy that provides animal protein to the populace as well as employment for a considerable percentage of the population (Oyesola and Olujide, 2000). The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO, 2000) estimate for animal protein intake of Nigeria was about 5 g per person per day as against 60g per person per day for North America. The need for increased animal food products in the daily food intake of individuals can therefore not be over emphasized.

Over 80% of Nigerian livestock populations are however in the traditional herds owned mostly by illiterate pastoralists in the North more as a symbol of status than as meat animals (Ikeme, 1990). In the humid south, over 85% of rural families keep small ruminants and local fowls primarily as an investment and sources of manure or meat at home or during festivals (Okoli, 2003). Demand for animal products in the country however continues to rise and is driven by improvements in personal income, population growth and increasing urbanization (Delgado et al., 1998). There is therefore an urgent need for improvement in livestock production systems in Nigeria. This could begin with the reorientation of graduates of animal production science on the need to get involved in agro-livestock business as a form of self-employment.

Government policies in the country as touching agricultural production are promising and have served as stimulus for stirring and encouraging full-time livestock production (Bincan, 1990). The most recent step taken by the Federal Government of Nigeria is the ban on importation of frozen chicken and turkey parts, which aims at encouraging massive livestock production locally. The most common livestock production practiced in rural areas of southern Nigeria is poultry keeping. Recent surveys show that majority of poultry and pig farmers in Nigeria were typically middle aged, with less than ten years farming experience, have low level of formal education and produce in small scale (Ngur, 1987; Ikani et al, 2001). There is a need to change this trend because increased output is usually due to high level of managerial skills acquired through formal education.

Commercial poultry production has however increased tremendously in Nigeria in the last few decades (FAO, 2000). This business is attractive because birds are able to adapt easily, have high economic value, rapid generation time

and a high rate of productivity that can result in the production of meat within eight weeks and first egg within eighteen weeks of the first chick being hatched (Smith, 1990). Poultry comes fourth among sources of animal proteins for human consumption in Nigeria and contributes about 10% of the national meat production (Adu et al, 1996). There is scarcity of published information on the nature and characteristics of poultry business enterprises in Nigeria generally and the southeastern region in particular. Such up-to-date information needed for policy formulation on the poultry sector is particularly lacking for Imo state. The present study is therefore designed to investigate the socio-personal characteristics of poultry business enterprises practitioners in Imo State, Nigeria.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Imo state is situated in the southeastern rainforest vegetational belt of Nigeria and lies between latitude  $5^{\circ} 4'$  and  $6^{\circ} 3'$  N and longitude  $6^{\circ} 15'$  and  $7^{\circ} 34'$  E. The agro-ecological characteristics of the area have been reported (Okoli 2003). Imo state is divided into 27 local government areas (LGA) which are further grouped into three agricultural zones namely, Owerri, Orlu and Okigwe. Commercial poultry farming is popular in these zones and are more concentrated around the major cities.

The primary data used in the study were generated from a field survey conducted between 15<sup>th</sup> September 2003 and 8th of January 2004 covering the three agricultural zones of Imo state. The study was preceded by preliminary informal survey of the study areas through which the researchers became familiarized with the nature of agro-livestock businesses in the area and explained the purpose of the study to the participants.

In Owerri zone, Owerri urban and Mbaise areas were purposively selected for study because of their higher population density and relatively higher levels of livestock activity. In Orlu zone, Orlu and Mgbidi semi-urban towns were selected, while for Okigwe zone Añara and Okigwe semi-urban towns were also selected. In each of the locations, poultry business centers and major markets were purposively selected for study due the ease in their accessibility and the level of marketing activities undertaken in the centers

Hatcheries and veterinary centers were also included because of regular visits of farmers to such centers.

Information was elicited from participants with the aid of structured questionnaires and personal interviews. Respondents were selected based on their willingness to participate in the research and relay the required information. Questionnaires were developed, pre tested to eliminate ambiguity and then used during scheduled interviews to elicit relevant information required from the participants. Enough time and necessary explanations were offered to the respondents enabling them to give clear answers to the questions. Where the respondents were not sufficiently literate, questions were translated into their local language and their responses recorded. The time allocated to each respondent ranged from 1.5 to 3.0 hours. To ensure consistency in data quality, the same persons performed all the interviews. One hundred and twenty (120) questionnaires were distributed and at the end, 110 were valid. The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, percentage and tables.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 showed the age distribution of poultry business practitioners in Imo State. The age cohort of 31 – 40 years had the highest frequency of 46 (41.82%) and was followed by those of 41 – 50 (29.10%). Table 1 also revealed that more men (60.91%) than women were involved in the business, while 73.64% of these practitioners were married indicating probably that marriage is a strong influence on the decision to enter the business. The findings showed that 62.96% of married practitioners had between 4-7 children suggesting that poultry business enterprise in Imo State has a long life span and serves as a source of livelihood enhancement for many large families in the state. Lack of finance might be a major reason for respondents between the age ranges of 21-30 not being active in the business (Okoruen, 1993). The higher number of men in the business supports the fact that agro-livestock businesses are being used to supplement family income in the study area. Findings also revealed that a higher proportion (70.91%) of the studied poultry business practitioners were graduates of tertiary institutions. This was followed by the 22.73% that attended secondary

school. The findings suggest that Practitioners were generally educated, with higher proportion having tertiary education. Of these, 44 (56.4%) studied courses unrelated to agriculture, 26.9% studied animal science and 5.1%, other agriculture courses. While livestock, business has provided employment for both the educated and the uneducated populations of the country over the years thereby reducing unemployment; it would seem from the present data that the educated class is more involved in commercial poultry business. It is however obvious that graduates of agro-livestock related courses are not practicing the profession, probably due to either lack of proper orientation or financial constraints.

Table 2 showed the occupation of the parents of the practitioners with about 30.00% of them having farmer parents. Only 4.55% of the respondents had agro-livestock farmers as parents. It is probable that early influences of farming or business parents have lasting effects on their offspring and may have contributed to the decision to enter poultry business enterprise later in life. However findings showed that only 17.43% of the respondents could correctly attribute their involvement in poultry business to parental influence. This seeming contradiction is not surprising since most adults fail to recognize the remote influence their informal environment may have had on them. The findings also showed that 69 (62.73%) of the practitioners employed others to help them in their business thereby providing an important avenue of employment for the state. It was found that 68.1% of those employing workers, employed between 1 and 5 persons, while 11.59% employed above 10 persons. It was further observed that most of the employees harbored the ambition of starting their own poultry business in future.

Table 3 revealed that an increasing number of persons are going into poultry business enterprise in Imo state as the year goes by. In the last 10 years for example, a greater percentage of respondents went into the business. This trend may lead to increased production of animal products in the near future. (1999) reported that the average Nigeria diet contains about 7 gm/caput/day animal protein as against the recommended intake of 28 gm/caput/day

normal health. In addition, Ikpi (1992) reported Nigerian's domestic production of meat to be only 50% of the total meat requirement. An increase in meat production can be achieved with the increased interest in poultry business as reported presently. The study equally showed that all the respondents wished to continue in the business throughout their lifetime.

Table 3 revealed 98.18% of capital sources utilized in the business to be personal, while 1.82% was from other sources. None indicated government either at state or federal level as source of capital. All the respondents however showed their desire to expand their business in the near future if only the capital for such expansion will be available. It would seem that government funding of poultry business enterprises in the country have not gotten down to the real farmers in Imo State. Ubosi (2000) has highlighted the need for government to consciously increase and stabilize the number and amount of loans guaranteed to the livestock sub-sector.

Table 3 also showed that 74 (67.27%) of the respondents own automobile, while 84 (76.36%) own landed properties, including personal houses and other tangible properties because of their involvement in poultry business enterprise. Ownership of automobiles and landed property are good indicators of relatively better social status in most Nigerian societies. The present data may therefore be pointing at the profitability of poultry business in Imo State and the fact that the business is a viable means of livelihood enhancement. Paul et al (1997) reported that in Bangladesh, the sum generated from the sale of livestock and their products can be used to cover costs relating to services and other social obligations. Although majority of the female respondents have been in the business for years, they did not indicate ownership of personal automobile and landed properties. This probably is because according to Farooq et al (2000) and Gueye (2002), the benefits gained from livestock production do not go exclusively to the practitioners, especially when they are women. These benefits are in many cases distributed directly or indirectly to all family members thus contributing significantly to the overall well being of their households.

## **CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The present study showed that poultry business enterprise in Imo state, Nigeria is attractive and that practitioners are willing to continue in the business throughout their lifetime. A reasonably higher proportion of the entrepreneurs had no formal training in agriculture. This is worrisome and has implications for agricultural development. Professionals are hereby encouraged to venture into poultry business and prove that they can do better in their field. It is worrisome that entrepreneurs that have no training in agriculture have dominated the business. It is possible that the trained agriculturists have a wrong perception of the business. They should go into the poultry business so that the livestock industry can benefit from their contributions and agricultural development can be genuinely guaranteed.

**Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of poultry business entrepreneurs in Imo State.**

<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
21 – 30	20	18.18
31 – 40	46	41.82
41 – 50	32	29.10
51 – 60	8	7.27
Above 60	4	3.64
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	67	60.91
Female	43	39.09
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	29	26.36
Married	81	73.96
<b>Number of Children</b>		
1 – 3	27	33.33
4 – 7	51	62.96
Above 7	3	3.7
<b>Educational level</b>		
Primary	7	6.36
Secondary	25	22.73
Tertiary	78	70.91
<b>Courses studied</b>		
Animal Science	21	26.9
Vet-Medicine	9	11.5
Agriculture	4	5.1
Others	44	56.4



**Table 2: Occupation of parents and parental Influence on poultry business enterprises practitioners in Imo State**

Parents Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Teaching/Lecturing	16	14.55
Trading	20	18.18
Farming	34	30.91
Priest	1	0.91
Brick Layer	1	0.91
Civil Servant	15	13.64
Livestock Farmers	5	4.55
Vet. Doctor	1	0.91
Plumber	2	1.82
Nursing	5	4.55
Tailor	10	9.1
<b>Parental influence</b>		
Influenced	19	17.27
Not Influenced	91	82.73
<b>Employment Status</b>		
Employed others	69	62.73
Employed none	41	37.27
<b>Number of persons employed (n=69)</b>		
1 – 5	47	68.12
6 - 10	14	20.30
Above 10	18	11.59

**Table 3: The duration and continuity of poultry business enterprises in Imo state**

<b>Duration practice</b>	<b>of Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1 – 5	40	36.36
6 – 10	34	30.91
11 – 15	14	12.73
16 – 20	12	10.91
Above 20	10	9.09
<b>Continuity in business</b>		
Life time	100	100
<b>Sources of capital</b>		
Personal	108	98.18
Government	-	-
Others	2	1.82
<b>Automobile ownership</b>		
Yes	74	67.27
No	36	32.73
<b>Landed properties ownership</b>		
Yes	84	76.36
No	26	23.64

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