

POULTRY FARMING START-UPS AS A GATEWAY FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA'S AGRO SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

The agricultural sector in Nigeria remains a critical area for economic development, particularly in addressing youth unemployment. Poultry farming, an increasingly popular segment of the sector, offers a viable opportunity for youth entrepreneurship and job creation. This review explores the potential of poultry farming start-ups as a gateway to employment for young people in Nigeria; examining key factors such as accessibility, profitability, and the challenges encountered by young entrepreneurs. Through an analysis of recent literature and industry reports, this article investigates the theoretical and conceptual frameworks relevant to agro-entrepreneurship, discusses the results of various studies, and identifies best practices. The study concludes with recommendations on policies and support mechanisms to enhance youth participation in poultry farming as a means of achieving economic stability and growth.

Keywords: Poultry, Start-ups, Youth, Job creation, Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, often referred to as the "Giant of Africa" due to its population and economic potential, faces a dual challenge: harnessing the demographic dividend of its youthful population while addressing the widespread issue of youth unemployment. With nearly 60% of its 200 million-plus population under the age of 25, Nigeria has one of the youngest populations globally (National Population Commission of Nigeria, 2021; Edewor *et al.*, 2023). However, this youthful demographic has been met with significant socioeconomic challenges. Youth unemployment and underemployment remain pressing concerns, with an estimated 34% of young people in Nigeria either unemployed or underemployed, making job creation for this group a critical national priority (Musa, 2022).

The agricultural sector in Nigeria, which accounts for about 25% of the country's gross domestic product and employs over 50% of its labor force, holds considerable potential to absorb and provide sustainable employment for Nigeria's youth (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2021). Recognized as a sector with substantial opportunities, agriculture encompasses various areas, including crop production, fisheries, forestry, and livestock. Among these, poultry farming has emerged as a viable entry point for young entrepreneurs due to its relatively low initial capital requirements, short production cycles, and consistently high demand for poultry products, especially eggs and chicken meat, within both urban and rural communities (Isholla, 2019; Adenle *et al.*, 2020).

The global rise in poultry consumption, driven by population growth, urbanization, and increasing preference for white meat over red meat, has further solidified the poultry industry as a high-potential area within Nigeria's agro-economy. As a result, policymakers and stakeholders have increasingly focused on promoting youth participation in agriculture, particularly in poultry farming, as a strategy to mitigate youth unemployment, boost food security, and foster innovation and sustainability in the agro-sector. This push toward agro-entrepreneurship has led to a notable increase in poultry farming

start-ups, particularly among urban and peri-urban youth who seek to capitalize on the business potential and scalability of poultry ventures.

Despite its promise, youth-led poultry farming ventures face several challenges that hinder their growth and sustainability. Access to finance remains one of the most significant barriers, as young entrepreneurs often struggle to secure capital from traditional financial institutions due to a lack of collateral, credit history, and high-interest rates on loans. In addition, many young people interested in poultry farming lack the technical knowledge required to run successful operations, including expertise in disease management, feeding practices, and efficient production systems. These knowledge gaps often lead to high mortality rates and poor farm productivity, limiting profitability and growth potential (Obiora and Uddin, 2019).

Another key challenge faced by young poultry farmers is the fluctuation in feed prices, which are subject to various factors, including global supply chain disruptions, domestic inflation, and changes in the costs of raw materials. Feed accounts for approximately 70% of production costs in poultry farming, and price volatility can significantly impact the profitability and sustainability of small-scale farms. Young poultry farmers are often disproportionately affected by these cost increases due to limited access to affordable inputs and economies of scale. Furthermore, the lack of adequate market access and infrastructure hampers young farmers' ability to scale their operations and connect with broader markets, both locally and regionally, further constraining their business growth.

This article aims to provide a comprehensive review of the role of poultry farming start-ups as a gateway for youth employment in Nigeria's agro-sector. It examines the current landscape, highlights the challenges faced by young entrepreneurs in the poultry industry, and suggests effective support systems for overcoming these barriers and achieving sustainable growth. By examining the intersection of youth employment, agro-entrepreneurship, and policy support, this review seeks to underscore the potential of poultry farming to empower

Nigeria's youth, alleviate unemployment, and contribute to economic diversification and resilience. Succinctly, this this ought to achieve the following specific objectives: To identify the potential of poultry farming for youth employment; to identify the challenges facing youth in poultry farming; and, to examine the case studies and success stories.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this study is built on three foundational theories that explain the dynamics of youth entrepreneurship in poultry farming: The theory of planned behavior (TPB), the entrepreneurship theory of innovation, and the youth livelihood theory. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive lens through which to understand the motivations, innovative potential, and livelihood strategies necessary for youth to succeed in the poultry farming sector in Nigeria.

TPB (Ajzen, 1991)

The TPB emphasizes that individual intentions are shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. For youth considering poultry farming start-ups, TPB suggests that positive attitudes toward agriculture, coupled with the belief that farming can lead to profitable and stable careers, are crucial in influencing their decision to engage in agro-entrepreneurship. In addition, this theory highlights the role of social influences-such as peer encouragement, familial support, and community acceptance-as subjective norms that shape youth attitudes toward pursuing poultry farming. For example, if family and friends view poultry farming positively, young people are more likely to see it as a legitimate career path. Perceived behavioral control, or the belief that one has the resources and ability to succeed, further underscores the importance of accessible resources and support systems. Access to loans, agricultural education, and mentoring programs can significantly enhance youths' confidence and willingness to invest in poultry farming.

Entrepreneurship theory of innovation (Schumpeter, 1942)

Schumpeter's theory places innovation at the center of entrepreneurship, suggesting that novel approaches and improved processes are essential for entrepreneurial success. In the context of poultry farming, innovation can manifest in various forms, such as advanced breeding techniques, automation in feeding and watering systems, disease control methods, and efficient waste management. Adopting these innovative practices can improve farm productivity, reduce labor costs, and increase profitability, thus making poultry farming more attractive to young entrepreneurs. Schumpeter's theory also emphasizes "creative destruction" – the process by which new innovations replace outdated practices. Young entrepreneurs, who are often more open to adopting technology and new practices, can serve as key drivers of change in the sector, reshaping poultry farming with sustainable, scalable innovations that ensure long-term success.

Youth livelihood theory (Bennell, 2007)

This theory addresses the socio-economic factors influencing young people's livelihood choices, stressing that sustainable employment requires access to a combination of resources, skills, and support systems. In poultry farming, the Youth Livelihood Theory underscores the importance of both hard (e.g., equipment and financial capital) and soft resources (e.g., knowledge and networks) in creating stable livelihood opportunities for youth. The theory also considers the role of supportive policy frameworks, such as government grants and subsidies, which can mitigate risks associated with farming. Furthermore, Bennell's theory emphasizes that youth participation in agriculture is likely to thrive when there is alignment with broader social and economic support systems, including access to healthcare, education, and agricultural extension services. In this sense, a thriving poultry farming venture requires not only personal drive and resources but also an environment conducive to entrepreneurial growth, ensuring youth can secure a sustainable livelihood in the long term.

Collectively, these theories highlight the importance of individual intent, innovative practices, and supportive ecosystems in empowering

youth to pursue poultry farming as a sustainable career path, while also pointing to areas where interventions may be most effective.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this study focuses on the interplay of youth motivation, entrepreneurial resources, and sectoral challenges that shape the growth, sustainability, and success of youth-led poultry farming ventures in Nigeria. By exploring how these factors interact, the framework provides insights into potential policy and practical interventions that can enhance youth engagement and success in poultry farming.

Youth motivation

The motivation of young people to enter poultry farming is driven by multiple factors, including economic necessity, the desire for autonomy, and a growing interest in agro-business. In a country with high unemployment rates, many youths view poultry farming as an alternative path to stable income and self-employment. In addition, the growing demand for poultry products in Nigeria's domestic market contributes to the sector's perceived profitability. Market trends show a consistent rise in poultry consumption, driven by population growth and a preference for affordable protein sources (Babu *et al.*, 2020; Kariuki, 2023). For youth, the relatively quick return on investment and the opportunity to scale operations provide further motivation. However, understanding these motivations is crucial for policy makers aiming to craft incentives that resonate with youth. Targeted awareness campaigns, educational programs, and government initiatives highlighting successful youth poultry farmers can strengthen youth motivation and positively shape attitudes toward agro-entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurial resources

The availability of entrepreneurial resources is a critical factor in the success of poultry farming ventures. These resources encompass financial capital, technical training, physical infrastructure, and networking opportunities. Financial capital is perhaps the most immediate need, as starting a poultry farm requires initial investments in infrastructure, feed, and livestock. However, limited access to credit facilities, high interest rates, and stringent loan requirements create barriers for young entrepreneurs. Training is another essential component, as technical knowledge in areas such as feed formulation, disease prevention, and waste management directly impacts farm productivity and reduces operational risks. Many young farmers also lack access to infrastructure, such as cold storage facilities, hatcheries, and reliable transportation, which are essential for maintaining product quality and expanding market reach (Clearinghouse, 2022). Finally, access to support networks – such as mentorship programs, industry associations, and digital platforms that connect farmers to suppliers and markets – can provide critical guidance, foster innovation, and improve market integration (Bhawar *et al.*, 2023). Programs offering tailored financial assistance, technical support, and resource access can play a transformative role in equipping youth with the tools that they need to establish and grow poultry farming businesses.

Sectoral challenges

Youth-led poultry farming ventures are vulnerable to a range of external challenges that threaten stability and growth. One of the most significant challenges is volatile feed costs, driven by factors such as global market fluctuations and domestic supply chain issues. Feed often constitutes up to 70% of production costs, making young farmers particularly susceptible to price spikes that can erode profits. Disease management poses another critical challenge, as outbreaks of poultry diseases can lead to high mortality rates and substantial financial losses. Many young entrepreneurs lack the resources to invest in preventative health measures, such as vaccinations and biosecurity protocols. Regulatory challenges add further complexity, as complex licensing requirements, high compliance costs, and inconsistent policies can discourage new entrants. For instance, government restrictions

on certain imports or price controls can disrupt access to affordable feed or equipment. Market accessibility is also a notable barrier, as poor road infrastructure and a lack of organized markets limit young farmers' ability to distribute their products widely. To overcome these challenges, targeted interventions are needed, such as subsidies for feed, investment in veterinary services, streamlined regulatory processes, and improved market infrastructure. By addressing these sectoral challenges, Nigeria can create a more enabling environment for youth-led poultry enterprises to thrive.

In summary, this conceptual framework identifies and examines the critical factors affecting youth-led poultry farming in Nigeria. Youth motivation drives initial interest, while entrepreneurial resources determine the feasibility and sustainability of ventures, and sectoral challenges pose external risks that require targeted policy intervention. Understanding these factors is essential for creating supportive programs and policies that empower young Nigerians to pursue poultry farming as a sustainable livelihood.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study systematically analyzed the data sourced from journals, conference proceedings, monographs, edited books, etc., in arriving at its results and discussion. Extensively, the literature was explored so as to get insightful information for proper and valid inferences.

RESULTS

Potential of poultry farming for youth employment

The potential of poultry farming as a gateway for youth employment in Nigeria is supported by both market dynamics and the sector's unique attributes. Poultry farming provides an accessible entry point into the agricultural sector, primarily due to its lower capital requirements compared to other farming activities, its short production cycles, and the consistently high demand for poultry products. Nigeria's rising population, increased urbanization, and growing middle class have led to a steady increase in the consumption of poultry meat and eggs, driving demand within local markets (FAO, 2020; Agbugba, 2023). In addition, poultry products are recognized as a relatively affordable protein source, which makes them an essential component of the average Nigerian diet.

Studies highlight the economic viability of poultry farming for small-scale operations. According to Ayinde *et al.* (2021), small-scale poultry farms often achieve profitability within their first few production cycles, which typically last about 6 weeks for broilers. The fast maturity of chickens allows young farmers to reinvest quickly, fostering a cycle of rapid growth and scalability. The relatively low risk of loss, coupled with high returns, makes poultry farming particularly attractive to youth who may be risk-averse or lack experience in more complex agricultural ventures.

Moreover, poultry farming aligns with the aspirations of many Nigerian youth who are drawn to the potential for scalability and innovation within agribusiness. For instance, the short gestation period (6–8 weeks for broilers) enables young farmers to establish consistent revenue streams that can support expansion. Abimbola and Dada (2020) reported that youth engagement in poultry farming has the added benefit of diversifying income sources, especially in rural areas where job opportunities are limited. This enables young entrepreneurs to reinvest in other agricultural activities, contributing to broader rural economic development. In addition, poultry farming allows for vertical integration opportunities, such as establishing feed mills, hatcheries, or processing plants, which can create additional employment opportunities and add value along the supply chain.

Challenges facing youth in poultry farming

Despite its potential, several challenges inhibit young entrepreneurs from successfully entering and sustaining poultry farming businesses. Addressing these barriers is essential to enable young people to leverage poultry farming for economic empowerment.

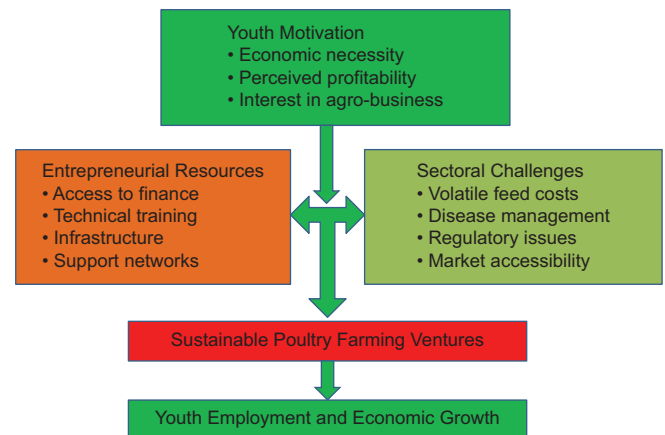


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework

Access to finance

Access to start-up capital remains a pervasive issue for young Nigerians interested in poultry farming. Poultry farming requires investments in basic infrastructure, feed, vaccines, and initial livestock. However, stringent loan requirements from financial institutions, high-interest rates, and the requirement of collateral often prevent youth from securing needed funds (Ekunwe *et al.*, 2020; Lose, 2021). According to the Central Bank of Nigeria, only a small percentage of agricultural loans are granted to young people due to perceived risks associated with youth-led start-ups. To address this, some organizations and government programs, such as the Anchor Borrowers' Program, have aimed to provide financial support to young farmers, but coverage and accessibility remain limited, especially in rural areas.

Technical skills and training

Poultry farming requires specific knowledge in areas such as disease management, feed formulation, and farm management to achieve optimal productivity. Many young people lack access to these skills, leading to issues such as high poultry mortality rates, low production yields, and increased operational costs. Ogunleye and Fakoya (2019) emphasize that providing vocational training, agricultural extension services, and mentorship specifically tailored to youth can significantly improve farm success rates. Extension services are also vital for disseminating information on best practices, which can help young farmers adopt improved methods for feeding, housing, and disease control. At present, however, these services are underfunded, and access to formal training opportunities remains limited, especially in rural and peri-urban areas.

Market accessibility

Reaching profitable markets poses another challenge for youth in poultry farming. Poor infrastructure, such as inadequate road networks and limited transportation options, increases the difficulty and costs associated with getting products to market, particularly in rural areas. In addition, young farmers often have limited access to established supply chains and distribution networks, which affects their ability to reach urban consumers, where demand is highest. The volatility in feed prices and the impact of government policies on imports also complicate the profitability of poultry farming. For example, trade restrictions on feed ingredients can lead to price hikes, further straining small-scale farmers who operate on tight margins (Obiora and Uddin, 2019). Consequently, developing organized market structures and improving logistics could help young farmers optimize their earnings.

Social perception and support

In Nigeria, agriculture is still frequently perceived as a less prestigious career, especially among youth who may associate it with poverty and low social status. This perception can discourage young people from fully engaging in poultry farming as a long-term career choice. According

to Adenle *et al.* (2020), changing this narrative is essential for attracting more youth into agriculture. Successful role models and success stories within the poultry sector can positively influence youth perceptions, demonstrating that poultry farming can lead to financial stability and personal fulfillment. Media campaigns, public endorsements, and entrepreneurship programs that highlight the success of youth-led poultry start-ups can help shift attitudes and encourage more young people to view agriculture as a viable and respectable career path.

Case studies and success stories

Several case studies and success stories illustrate the viability of poultry farming as a business model for youth, highlighting both the challenges and the potential for innovation and growth in the sector.

Farm360

Farm360, a youth-led poultry farming start-up founded by recent graduates, has demonstrated the profitability of small-scale poultry operations. This venture was able to leverage local resources and innovative farming techniques to improve efficiency and profitability. Within 2 years, Farm360 reported significant growth, partly due to its adoption of cost-effective feeding strategies and a focus on high-demand poultry products. Their approach highlights the importance of training and local knowledge in overcoming common challenges such as feed costs and disease control, showing how a structured approach with adequate support can result in a successful business model (Adeyemi and Odunayo, 2022).

Agritech Nigeria

Another example is Agritech Nigeria, a social enterprise focused on empowering young poultry farmers through technology. This organization provides young farmers with digital tools for monitoring flock health, tracking feed consumption, and managing financial records. By integrating technology into poultry farming practices, Agritech Nigeria has helped youth-led farms reduce mortality rates and optimize their productivity, demonstrating how tech-based solutions can address common operational challenges.

Oyo state poultry initiative

The Oyo State government launched a youth-focused poultry initiative that provides starter kits, training, and mentorship to young farmers. Participants receive support in form of funding, access to veterinary services, and market linkages. This initiative has successfully empowered hundreds of young people, many of whom have gone on to establish independent poultry farms. The program underscores the role of government in fostering youth agro-entrepreneurship by offering resources and reducing entry barriers.

These success stories demonstrate that with the right support structures, youth-led poultry farming ventures can overcome sectoral challenges and achieve profitability. By providing tailored resources, training, and market access, both government and private initiatives can empower youth to establish sustainable poultry farms that contribute to Nigeria's food security and economic development.

DISCUSSION

These findings highlight the significant role that poultry farming can play in addressing youth unemployment in Nigeria. However, the success of youth-led poultry ventures hinges on overcoming certain challenges. Access to finance, for example, is essential for start-up capital, while access to training can greatly enhance productivity and operational success. Programs that offer affordable loans, agricultural training, and market access could help bridge the gaps that currently limit youth participation in poultry farming. Furthermore, shifting societal perceptions through awareness campaigns and success stories could elevate the appeal of agriculture among Nigerian youth.

The success of youth-led poultry enterprises in Nigeria, as illustrated by Farm360 and Agritech Nigeria shows that with innovative practices and

adequate support, poultry farming can be a profitable and sustainable career for young people. By addressing sectoral challenges and fostering a supportive environment, stakeholders can help unlock the potential of poultry farming to transform Nigeria's agro-economy and address youth unemployment.

The insights gathered from these case studies underscore the importance of a multifaceted approach—one that includes financial support, skills training, and structural support—to help youth overcome entry barriers in poultry farming. With the right policies and programs in place, poultry farming can indeed serve as a pathway to economic independence, sustainable employment, and improved food security for Nigeria's youth.

CONCLUSION

Poultry farming presents a promising avenue for youth employment in Nigeria's agricultural sector, offering an accessible, profitable, and scalable business model. However, realizing the full potential of poultry farming as a gateway for youth employment requires addressing critical challenges such as access to finance, technical training, and market accessibility. By enhancing support systems and creating an enabling environment, policymakers and stakeholders can empower Nigerian youth to become successful agro-entrepreneurs.

Recommendations

Increased access to financing

Governmental and non-governmental organizations should develop loan programs specifically for youth in agriculture, with low interest rates and minimal collateral requirements.

Training and capacity building

Establish vocational training centers focused on poultry farming skills, disease management, and feed optimization. These should be made accessible to rural youth to ensure widespread impact.

Strengthening market linkages

Improve infrastructure and supply chain systems to enhance market access. Government partnerships with private sector players could facilitate direct market channels for youth poultry farmers.

Incentives and public awareness

Incentivize youth participation through grants, awards, and recognition programs that celebrate success in agro-entrepreneurship. Raising awareness about the profitability and sustainability of poultry farming can help shift perceptions.

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