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## YELLOW PEPPER FARMING AS A POTENTIAL AGROTOURISM ACTIVITY IN NSUKKA, NIGERIA

<sup>1</sup>Favour M. ANOSIKE, <sup>2</sup>J. Kelechi UGWUANYI and <sup>\*3</sup>Uchenna H. OBIELUEM

<sup>1, 2&3</sup>Department of Archaeology and Tourism University of Nigeria, Nsukka

\*Corresponding author: [uchenna.obieluem@unn.edu.ng](mailto:uchenna.obieluem@unn.edu.ng)

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### Abstract

*Among the different species of pepper in Nigeria, Nsukka yellow pepper has proven to be outstanding because of its unique flavor and high demand. This paper examined the potential of Nsukka yellow pepper farming on Agro-tourism development in the area. Open-ended interview guide and personal observations were used to generate qualitative data. Purposively, fourteen (14) yellow pepper farmers from Lejja, Nguru and Ede-oballa and six (6) dealers in Ikpa commodity market, all in Nsukka local government area were interviewed. The data collected from the research were thematically analyzed using a descriptive approach. The study revealed that Nsukka yellow pepper farming is one of the townspeople's major agricultural activities and livelihood sources. However, it was gathered that the integral components of tourist attraction which are accommodation, accessibility and sustenance, are lacking in the communities studied. The paper argues that yellow pepper farming cannot, on its own, attract tourists to the region, rather, the government, corporate bodies or other concerned individuals should provide a conglomerate of these facilities to develop yellow pepper farming as an agrotourism activity in Nsukka.*

**Keywords:** *Nsukka yellow pepper, yellow pepper farming, Agrotourism, Nigeria*

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### Introduction

The production of indigenous vegetables is essential to the subsistence farming system generally practised in West Africa. Among the important vegetable crops commonly cultivated in Nigeria, pepper is ranked third in terms of importance after onion and tomatoes (Uzo, 1984 in Maga, 2012). It is an indispensable spice commodity and an integral component of many cuisines worldwide due to its appealing flavour, taste and pungency (Bosland & Votava, 2000). Nsukka is an agricultural zone that engages in the cultivation of different economic crops such as pepper (*Capsicum annum*), garden egg (*Solanum gill*), tomatoes (*Solanum lycopersicum*), etc. The region cultivates three different species of pepper, namely yellow pepper (*Capsicum annum*), red pepper (*Cayenne annum*) and Shombo pepper (*Capsicum frutescens*). Among these three different species of pepper, it is the researcher's interest to study the yellow pepper species because of its unique attributes /peculiarity. Nsukka yellow pepper (*Capsicum annum*) occupies an enviable position among the varieties of pepper grown in Nigeria. For many years, the inhabitants of Nsukka agricultural zone have been cultivating Nsukka yellow pepper for its fruit, characterized by its unique aroma and yellow colour. It is peculiar to Nsukka, hence it is called *Ose Nsukka* (Nsukka yellow pepper), although it is cultivated in some parts of Kogi state (Ugwu, 2016) because of its closeness to Nsukka, the epicenter of its production. Asogwa (2006) noted that the distinctive aroma of Nsukka yellow pepper enhances its acceptability in the market. Consequently, it attracts higher prices than other pepper in Nigeria's local and urban markets (Mama, 1999). The unique attributes of Nsukka yellow pepper have attracted the interest of many scholars and researchers and thus, measures have been established to enhance the production. Ugwu (2016) noted that these innovations do not occur in isolation;

rather they occur within a system that involves farmers, researchers, marketers and input suppliers. He argued that this approach has helped improve the quality of Nsukka pepper over the years.

Yellow pepper farming has been one of the major agribusinesses coming into a more explorable aspect of spice and vegetable farming in Nigeria. It could be regarded as one of the major agricultural activities engaged by the farmers in Nsukka Local Government, the case study of this research. Considering the economic benefits of the pepper, its production rate has increased. The pepper could be seen in all the known markets within the region and extensively, some of the major markets in Nigeria. This validates the popularity and common use of the pepper.

However, despite its economic importance and popularity, yellow pepper farming is yet to receive the required attention needed to boost and develop its potential for agrotourism in the area. This might have resulted from the ignorance of the people and other concerned bodies on the potential of this pepper farming for agrotourism development, which is another avenue for economic diversification in the area hence, this research is initiated. The general objective of the study is to ascertain the potentials and viabilities of Nsukka yellow pepper farming as an agro-tourism activity within the region. Specifically, this study centred on the identification of the production processes of Nsukka yellow pepper, examined the socio-economic potentials of Nsukka yellow pepper farming as well as the possible ways through which Nsukka yellow pepper farming can be used to attract more visitors to the region. However, the findings of this research will therefore be relevant to yellow pepper farmers in Nsukka as it will help them harness the potential of yellow pepper farming for agrotourism to improve farmers' income and the economy of the communities. The research findings will also help the government, policymakers and private investors to identify and prioritize areas of investment needed for the development of agrotourism through pepper farming. It will help policymakers to identify and implement strategies favourable to the development of agrotourism through pepper farming in the region. Additionally, the findings will be helpful to scholars seeking to improve knowledge and form the basis for subsequent research.

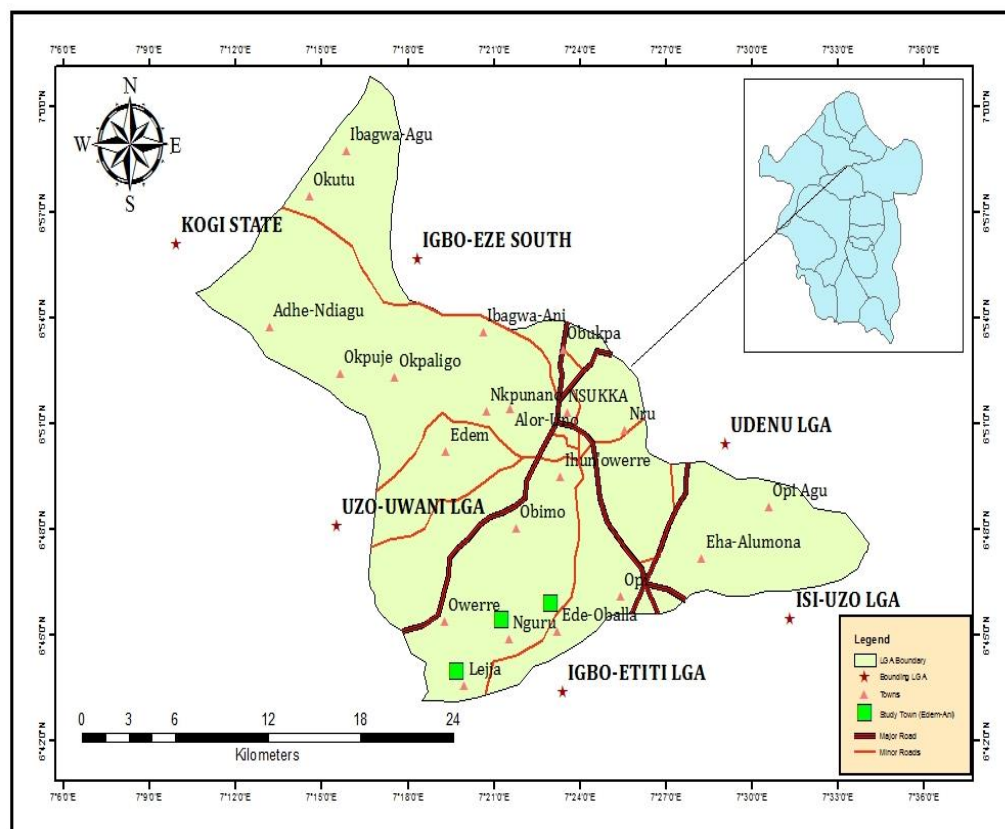
### Methods

The research used a qualitative research approach where an open-ended interview guide and personal observation were employed to generate primary data. A purposive sampling technique was used to select fourteen (14) yellow pepper farmers in the three communities of Lejja, Nguru and Ede-oballa all in Nsukka local government area of Enugu state, Nigeria. Additionally, six (6) yellow pepper traders in *Ikp*a commodity market in Nsukka town were also selected purposively. Yellow pepper farmers were chosen because they are directly involved in the production processes and would be in the right position to provide the necessary data needed for the study. Yellow pepper traders were sampled during the pre-field investigation as an avenue to determine the major communities from where yellow pepper farmers supply the product to them in Nsukka urban market. The evidence generated from the field was thematically organized and/or analyzed using a descriptive and interpretive approach and finally assessed in relation to the information from the literature.

### Study Area

The study was conducted in three communities in Nsukka local government area of Enugu state popularly known for yellow pepper farming. To ascertain the major yellow pepper farming communities in Nsukka, we asked some of the yellow pepper dealers in *Ikp*a commodity market with the aim of discovering the main communities that constantly supply yellow pepper to them. From such enquiry, we deduced that Ede-Oballa, Nguru and Lejja are the three major yellow pepper farming communities in Nsukka and we limited the study to these communities. Lejja community is located in the South-West of Nsukka town. It is bounded to the North by Obimo, to the South by Aku in Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area, to the East

by Ede-Oballa and to the South-east by Ohodo and Ozalla. The community is trisected by three parallel ridges of the southwest extension of Nsukka-Udi plateau and it situatesata height of about 1,500ft above sea level(Ozor, 1998). Nguru is bounded in the eastern part by Odoru Nsukka, in the western partby Edem, in the north by Isiakpu, and Umuakashi, and in the south by Lejja and Obimo communities. The community is located in a valley and surrounded by hills. Traditionally, Nguru people are farmers and this serves as their main source of livelihood. Ede-Oballa is a suburban area of Nsukka. It is bounded in the northeast by Nsukka, in the southeast by Eha-alumona, and in the west and southwest by Opi and Ohodo respectively. It is important to state that these three communities are connected geographically and share some cultural affiliations(see Figure 1).



**Figure 1: The geographical map of Nsukka showing the studied communities**

**Source:** Google earth map as modified by cartographic unit, Archaeology and Tourism Department University of Nigeria, Nsukka

**Findings**

The processes of pepper production in Nsukka start generally from December, and the harvest period lasts from June to November. The farming processes include:

- **Extraction of pepper seeds**, locally known as *ak’ose*. Towards the end of the previous harvest season, a good amount of pepper is harvested and slowly pounded in a mortar to extract the seeds. After pounding, water will be added to it for sieving. The good seeds that will be planted will sink down the water while the bad ones sails on top of the water and this will be poured away because

they cannot grow when planted. After sieving out the bad ones, the good seeds are poured into a local basket tray and kept under the sun for drying. After drying, it will be poured into small cellophane and kept in a well-enclosed bucket to avoid air and ants penetration. There, it will be preserved till the next planting season.

- **Nursery bed preparation:** Nsukka yellow pepper farming starts with the preparation of the bed wherein the pepper would be nursed for a period ranging from one to three months. An enclosure locally known as *Uho* is built to house the nursery bed. Inside the enclosure, a flat ridge is made with a mixture of sand and manure. The pepper seeds must have been soaked overnight or for about twelve to twenty-four hours before spraying on the ridges. After spraying, the seeds are covered with sand to prevent ants from eating up the seeds. After this, it will be watered and covered tightly with wide polythene to avoid the influx of air because it will dry up the seeds and will then, cause it not to germinate as supposed (see figs. 2&3). Chemicals are also spread to keep the seeds from drying off. After some interval, the polythene would be removed permanently. While in the nursery bed, the seeds are watered twice a day. However, watering is moderate because over-watering can make the seeds soft and susceptible to diseases such as damping off.



Fig. 2&3: Yellow pepper nursery bed  
Source: fieldwork, 2022.

- **Transplanting:** The proposed farmland for transplanting will be properly cleared and ploughed, and ridges would be formed before the transplanting takes place. After nursing the seeds in the nursery bed, it is transplanted to the main farmland. Ridges or sand heaps are made with the use of tractors or bare hands (i.e. hoes). The seeds are then, inserted in the middle with small sand pored at the root to support it. Manure is added some days after planting and fertilizer is added after a month when the flowers must have taken enough water and can stand firm. Fertilizer helps to spring forth the flowers which produce the pepper. When the flowers start coming out, chemicals would be sprayed on them to avoid withering caused by a particular ant locally known as 'nka'. The crop is watered twice daily till the period of rainfall (see fig. 4). Generally, yellow pepper stays for about three to five months in the open field to produce ripped pepper seeds for harvesting.



**Figure 4: The watering of the yellow pepper at the farm after the transplant**  
**Source: fieldwork, 2022.**

Nsukka yellow pepper, locally known as *OseNsukka* is a unique vegetable crop that is sought and used in many parts of Nigeria. *Ose Nsukka* attracts dealers from diverse places in the country such as Onitsha, Enugu, Port Harcourt, Lagos, Abuja, Akwa Ibom, Owerri and the northern states as a result of its uniqueness. Ikem (2018) noted that Daily Sun visited *Ikpa* commodity market, Nsukka where the yellow pepper is sold and packaged for onward transport to cities like Port Harcourt, Lagos, Kaduna, Abuja and others. During this visit, the chairman of the *Ikpa* market yellow pepper dealers association described the Nsukka yellow pepper as simply the best, given that people from different parts of Nigeria, despite the perishable nature of the pepper still travel from far distances to buy the pepper down here in Nsukka.

It was noted among the studied communities that most of the visitors are business tourists (buyers) who come around mainly during harvest seasons. However, students and researchers also visit on a rare basis for academic purposes. These buyers do not normally sleep over in the villages when they visit. However, in rare situations where they choose to sleep over due to certain reasons that prevented them from returning to their destinations the same day, they would normally do so in the farmers' house, usually offered free to the visitor. Most times, the farmers also provide them with sustenance (food and water) for the night. Apart from the farmer's house, they also make use of the houses that are owned by people who live in the city. Here, it is the duty of the farmer to meet the caretaker of the house and plead that his or her customer be allowed to sleep in the house for the periods he/she will be spending in the community. This accommodation is also provided free and the visitor could use it for up to a month or more, especially during the harvest season. This act is proof that people in this studied area are hospitable and accommodating. Thus, accommodation is not a challenge to them when it concerns attracting and retaining visitors/buyers during the yellow pepper harvest seasons.

Although the act of providing accommodation and sustenance to the buyers can be seen as a business strategy employed by the farmers to help attract more customers to the area, one can say that it is a loss to them (i.e., the farmers) as the aim of every business venture is to maximize profit (return on investment). They produce the pepper and had to also provide accommodation and sustenance for their customers who come to buy them to sell to make a profit. In addition to this shortcoming, there is the challenge of attracting more buyers and tourists to the community (especially Lejja) as a result of a bad road network. The community and the farm areas cannot be easily accessed. The issue of a bad road network here has affected other areas that could contribute to visitor's satisfaction. They include the cost of transportation both into and around the community, which is higher; the prices of goods and services have been affected and there is no existing daily market or well-stocked shops where people can comfortably buy things at

their convenience. In addition, the major challenge to pepper farming is finance and lack of financial assistance. The cost of production is high because it involves the use of manure, fertilizer and water, and an average farmer can rarely afford these things without taking loans. Finance is a major concern because when there is enough financial assistance either from the government or corporate bodies, the cultivation and yield of yellow pepper will increase, thereby, attracting more buyers and visitors to the community. In Nguru, it is very rare for customers to sleep over because they would normally discuss with the farmer on the phone with regards to the day they would be coming for purchases as well as the quantity needed. The farmer will then make available, the needed quantity on the agreed day so that once the customer comes, he/she will collect the produce. However, any customer who wishes to sleep over does so in a hotel, especially at Isiakpu, a neighbouring community to Nguru. Here, the farm areas are not meant for settlement. Hence, there are no existing accommodation facilities and means of sustenance. More so, in some cases, the buyers do not come to the farm to make their purchases but rather wait for farmers in their house till they return with the pepper. The informants unanimously agreed that structuring an accommodation facility where the buyers can lodge while they continue their purchases would be a nice idea because it is one step toward community development. The accommodation will help to initiate other tourist attractions such as means of sustainability (food and beverage shops) that will help to ensure visitors' satisfaction.

In Ede-Oballa, it was noted that the buyers, especially those involved in waybills normally stay for a longer period (most times throughout the harvest season which is from June to November). Accommodation facilities are made available for them in individual houses. It depends upon the individual to decide whether or not to charge the buyers. Thus, while some individuals charge the buyers, others do not. Unlike in the other communities (Lejja and Nguru), there is a skeletal building in the form of a hall at *Otobo Odenigbo* where buyers stay to load their goods. During the harvest seasons, the villagers come there to sell different food items and drinks. It was noted that the business thrives very well because the buyers usually come in good numbers. The road that leads to the community and the farm areas is not very much accessible as one's car can break down on the way. The community does not have any serviced accommodation facility. However, the informants agreed that providing serviced accommodation facilities will be a good and welcomed development considering the number of customers that come to the community during the harvest seasons.

From the above discussions and the findings of the study, the researchers are of the view that a standard agrotourism practice goes beyond visiting the farm areas to make purchases or buy pepper alone. Thus, to adequately practice agrotourism, certain attractions alongside farming activities must be put in place. Tourists find it difficult to visit an area that does not have things to guarantee their comfort and satisfaction throughout their stay. Hence, visitors' comfort and satisfaction form a major consideration or basis towards the development and sustenance of agro-tourism in any region.

In the opinion of Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert and Wanhill (2007) in Emeafor & Okpoko (2018), attractions offer the single most essential reason for leisure to destinations. Many of the components of tourist trips which include transport and accommodation are demands triggered by consumers craving to enjoy what a destination has to offer in terms of things to see and do. The aforementioned is an indisputable fact. However, it should be borne in mind that while attractions bring visitors to a destination, the availability of quality infrastructure makes their stay worthwhile. Results of this study have shown that there is non-availability of the basic infrastructures and amenities necessary for the development of agrotourism in the region such as good accommodation facilities, electricity, good transport facilities and road network, stable internet network and food/beverages stores especially in Lejja and Nguru. Thus, the

absence or unavailability of the above infrastructures and amenities is seen as a major weakness towards attracting agrotourists and other visitors to the region.

In the view of Ayeni and Ebohon (2012), due to a lack of basic infrastructure for tourism, tourists do not stay overnight at destination communities. Hence, the income expected to accrue to the local economy in terms of tourist spending is diverted to the city. This may be witnessed in Nsukka community where yellow pepper farming thrives. According to Agro-tourism Association (ATA), the basic principles to bear in mind in the establishment of agrotourism includes: ensuring that there is something in line with agricultural activities for visitors to see, such as farm tours, historical recreations, food processing demonstrations, crop arts and crop landscaping, natural features (such as waterfalls, a jungle, stream, spectacular view of mountains etc); Ensuring that there is something for visitors to do; and finally, having something for agrotourists to buy, such as food and beverages, gifts and souvenirs. The provision of all these basic tourist facilities, attractions and amenities will surely add market value to pepper farming as an agrotourism activity in the region as well as leading to the community's economic and general development.

### **Conclusion/Recommendation**

The study focused on how Nsukka yellow pepper farming can be used to attract visitors to the farm areas in the studied communities. Yellow pepper farming is a lucrative business in Nsukka, and it forms one of the people's major livelihood sources. A higher percentage of the community members take part in this process. While some cultivate on a larger scale, others cultivate on a medium and smaller scale due to a shortage of land, funds and/or labour. More so, buyers come from different parts of the country during the harvest seasons for purchase. Considering the influx of buyers during the harvest season of Nsukka yellow pepper, it could be summarized that the potential of Nsukka yellow pepper farming towards agrotourism development within the region is higher. The findings of the study reveal that some of these buyers spend days and weeks in the community as they go about purchasing the yellow pepper. While they abode in the community, some of them stay with the farmers while others board hotel accommodations in nearby communities. These buyers make up the cycle of visitors that come to the communities during yellow pepper harvest season. This shows that agrotourists and other visitors who come for educational, entertainment and other purposes are rarely seen. Hence, to improve the inflow of tourists and other visitors, there is a need for good accommodation facilities, good transport facilities, good internet connection and other side attractions in the farm areas. This is because, a higher percentage of tourists want to visit a place where they can feel at home, have fun and gather as much experiences as possible. Yellow pepper farming cannot on its own suffice in attracting agrotourists and visitors to the region; it needs the assistance of other key components of tourism attractions and infrastructures. As tourists seek more authentic, rich and satisfactory experiences, providing touristic activities and infrastructures in agro-processing regions is one of the ways to increase and improve the multi-functionality of these regions. Thus, to ensure the availability of these touristic activities and infrastructures, the government (at federal, state, local and community levels), investors, policymakers and other concerned individuals should put hands on deck. Also, more capital inputs should be provided to increase the output of Nsukka yellow pepper. This could be done by establishing channels that will give the farmers access to credit facilities for procuring the necessary capital inputs.

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