

Animal Husbandry in Colonial Annang, Calabar Province, Nigeria, 1900-1960

Emmanuel Toby

*Department of History and International Studies
University of Benin*

Abstract

A highly neglected area in the economic history of Annang is animal husbandry. The neglect is surprising because animals have a long history in Annang for various purposes. Therefore, a study of animal husbandry, showing developments in rearing animals for their various uses, is an important aspect of Annang economic history. The major task of this paper is, therefore an attempt to redress part of the neglected aspects of the economic history of the people. It adopted the historical method, relying extensively on primary sources obtained from oral interviews and archival sources to interrogate how animal husbandry was carried out by the Annang people during the period. Because, it is micro-study of economic history of Annang, it is difficult because of the scarcity of relevant source material. Even the oral sources that are available and their accurate interpretation are threatened by the rapid rate at which knowledgeable elders are dying off. Economic history of Annang must therefore focused on this neglected area particularly the colonial period so as to collaborate what the European documented about the people for posterity and before the sources get lost.

Keywords: Animal Husbandry; Annang; Calabar Province

Introduction

Annang people occupy the North-Western part of Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria which lies within the Cross River Basin, between latitudes 40.25' and 70 North and longitudes 70.15' and 90.30' East.¹ Pre-colonial Annang was made up of thirty four kingdoms (*Aduk*) which included Adiasim, Ekpenyong Atai, Ikpe, Odoro Ikot, Okon, Ukana, Amanyam, Ikot Abia, Nto Edino, ObotAkara, Abak/Midim, Ibesit, Nung Ikot, Ito Ika, Ika Annang, Obong, Uruk, Utu, AfahaAdatIfang, Afaha, Ukanafun, Abak, Ediene, Afaha Obong, Midim, Obio Akpa, Ekparakwa, Ibesit, Inen, Nung Ita, Nung Ikot and Otoro.² Each of these kingdoms had its own independent political institutions headed by a king (*Okuku*). Therefore, there were thirty-four kings in Annang. During the colonial period, the Annang were majorly found in Ikot Ekpene and Abak Divisions in Calabar Province, with some other sub-sets occupying 150 square miles in the north of *Opobo* Division in Rivers

Province with sixty-eight villages.³ These communities had a common cultural bond and they all look up to Afaha Obong where the Annang supreme deity is situated as their place of origin and traditional headquarters.⁴ To the North, Annang is bounded by Ini and Ikono Local Government Areas and to the South by Ikot Abasi Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. To the West, Annang is bounded by Ngwa and Azumini communities of Abia state and Ndoki community of Rivers State and to the East by Uyo and Mkpattenin Local Government Areas of Akwa Ibom State. Geographically, Annang lies almost entirely in the rain forest belt of Southern Nigeria. The area has a level landscape, covered by relatively low vegetation and myriad of palms. There is a mean annual rainfall of 2030 - 2540mm. Annang has a tropical climate with wet and dry seasons. The wet season spans from March to October when the monsoon winds blow from the South-West, while dry season spans from November to February when the harmattan (*ekarika*) blows from the North-East. The landscape is generally flat and low-lying with no point rising above 300ft and no part less than 100ft feet above sea level. It has a level landscape covered by relatively low vegetation and myriads of palms.⁵

At present, Annang with a population of more than one million people is the second largest ethnic group in Akwa Ibom State.⁶ The Annang are found in eight of the present thirty-one Local Government Areas in Akwa Ibom State namely; Abak, Essien Udim, Etim Ekpo, Ika, Ikot Ekpene, Obot Akara, Oruk Anam and Ukanafun yet they are culturally homogenous.

Animal Husbandry in Pre-Colonial Period

It is a branch of agriculture concerned with the production and care of domestic animals. In addition to farming, Annang people were also engaged in livestock production. The people reared domestic animals. These domestic animals were goat, chickens and sheep. With the exception of chickens which were regarded as properties for women and children, other animals were owned by adult men, although, they were looked after by all members of the village. owner of the animals had no need to keep them locked up in pens”.⁷ Apart from the provision of sleeping spaces for the smaller and weaker animals, pre-colonial animal owners left their animals to sleep in the open spaces in the village rather than in their own homes. For the purpose of identification, each owner of the animals had to put an identifying mark or brand on his animals. This mark was known to him and to other members of his family. The mark for example could be the piercing or the cutting of the ear of the animals in a distinctive way.

The Annang women played major roles in livestock production. They were mainly responsible for the feeding, protection or care and sale of reared animals. Although, the men also played supportive roles in this regard, particularly providing, through farm

products, feeding materials for the animals and birds; women were very sensitive to the condition of these animals in that they knew when animals were sick, lean or lacked appetite for eating. They were very good in providing for the animals or birds, effective preventive medicinal substance. They were also quick to know whether or not the number of particular livestock was complete, particularly when animals came home in the evenings. They were the ones who raised alarm when some of the livestock were missing, and the ones to find the reasons for this as it was not common for animals to be stolen in pre-colonial Annang.

This method of taking care of animals was popular because it was cheap and effective. Putting animals in a pen would have raised the cost of feeding them. In addition, it would have increased the risk of contagious diseases which would have resulted from crowding the animals in pens in the absence of adequate veterinary services. Furthermore, allowing the animals roam the streets was a labour saving device for the farmer who saved the labour of cutting grass for goats and sheep, and providing feed for the birds.

Special care was given to the hen during their brooding period to guarantee the safe hatching of all the eggs laid by them. The owner prepared laying spots for them by placing sand and dry leaves in corners away from domestic traffic. In cases where a fowl laid its eggs in nearby bushes, the owner removed those eggs to safer spots and laid the hen at lying time covered over with a basket. Pregnant goats were tethered with a long rope to restrain them from going too far away from the owner's home.

The people had various ways of treating and preventing animal diseases. These included the pepper and bitter leaf treatment, where a mixture of grinded pepper and water was given to livestock that they believed took ill due to cold. The treatment was thought to help in raising the body temperature of the animals. In this case, the bitter leaf treatment was also applied when the animals appeared to be suffering from diarrhea. The bitter leaf juice was squeezed into the water and was given to the animals to drink. For skin diseases, oil palm was used as ointment which was rubbed into the affected spots.⁸

Individuals could acquire livestock in any of the following ways: firstly, by direct acquisition in which the individual bought the livestock. Secondly, livestock was also acquired as a gift from friends and relatives either by purchase or as a gift from friends or relatives. By this practice, which was traditionally referred to as *nnonkama*, animals, usually a female, were given to a friend or relation to take care of. The person to whom such animals were given to do not have absolute ownership over the animals, as the animals could be withdrawn from him at any time with or without his consent. The offspring of the animals were shared from time to time between the owner and the keeper of the animals. Most often, the sharing was in the ratio of two to one in favor of the owner

of the animal. The third way of acquiring animals was by inheritance, whereby domestic animals were shared among the children of the deceased. It was in this way that most farmers in Annang raised their own stock of goats and sheep. Outright gifts of goats and sheep were rare but gifts of fowls were common because fowls were ubiquitous and practically everybody had at least one. The *nnonkama* method of acquiring animals was used to established and maintained friendly relationships between the owner of the animals and their keepers.

Animals were used for different purposes. The chickens were used mostly for reproduction and exclusively for sacrifices after which it was cooked and shared by those that participated. The crowing cock was also used to monitor the passage of time. Goat and sheep were slaughtered at important feasts. It must be stated that the practice of animal husbandry in Annang was on a small scale and it had never been a full-time occupation

British political intervention in Annang began in 1901 when one of the columns of the British expedition forces passed through Ikot Ekpene village while pursuing the Obinkits Aro westward.⁹The expedition was the “severest single blow” that the British military patrol dealt to the Aro oligarchy in Annang.¹⁰The punitive expedition was justified on the grounds of stopping slave raiding, abolishing the fetish practices and stimulating legitimate trade in Annang which the Aro were seen as obstructing.¹¹This expedition had serious political consequences on the Annang people. For instance, after raiding Arochukwu, the four columns of the British expedition forces led by Lt. Col. Morrison launched war of conquest against Annang which swept through northern Annang kingdoms of Adiasim, EkpenyongAtai, Ikpe, Odoro Ikot, Okon, Ukana, Amanyam, Ikot Abia, NtoEdino and Obot Akara with the aim of bringing the people under colonial rule.¹²The people’s reaction to this aggression by British forces was one of surprise and resolve to protect their land and sovereignty from foreign forces hence they did not easily succumb to British ‘Maxim Gun’ without stiff resistance.

The people thus resisted the British forces despite their maxim gun for about ten years (1901-1912), before the whole of Annang was brought under the control and influence of British colonial authorities. As a result of such resistance from the people, British subjugation of Annang was initially confined to such kingdoms as Abak/Midim, IbesitNung Ikot, Ito Ika, Ika Annang, Obong, Uruk, Utu, Afaha Adat Ifang, Ukanafun, Abak, Ediene, Afaha Obong, Midim, ObioAkpa, Ekparakwa, Ibesit, Inen, NungIta and Nung Ikot.¹³The stiff resistance put up by the people was enhanced by the fact the people did not belong a single kingdom ruled by a single King.(*Okuku*). So, the British expedition forces had to fight and defeat each of the thirty-five kingdoms of Annang before the people were finally subjected in 1912. With the subjugation of Annang and

imposition of colonial rule on the people, the British government was set to implement some reforms in the Annang economy. One aspect of the economy that witnessed a major reform was livestock production.

Livestock Production in Colonial Period

Colonial authorities encourage the Annang people to engage in large scale production of sheep, goat and poultry to supplement game from the forest. Although, the people were used to keeping livestock before the imposition of colonial rule it was not, however done on a large scale. Before the colonial period, domestic animals such as goat, sheep and fowls were allowed to roam about the villages. The owner of the animals had no need to keep them locked up in pens as they left their animals to sleep most time in the open spaces in the village rather than in their own homes. Even without providing special locations for their abode, particularly at night, these animals especially goat and fowls, used to naturally find their permanent sleeping places around their owners houses or yards.¹⁴ On rare occasions would they be forced into their sleeping places at night. Depending on the designs of houses, animals were allowed to sleep either in the backyard or side yard of a house. Goat preferred loose wood structure or rough mud enclosures, covered on top against rain, some slept in the open premises that were protected from rain. Fowls preferred sleeping in high or elevated places, but where these were not available, they would cluster together in some loosely protected areas o open enclosures beside their owners' houses. Occasionally, fowls would also occupy spaces near goats at night. These animals, particularly fowls, were always the first to wake up in the morning.¹⁵ This method of taking care of animals was cheap and effective for the owners against a new method that was advocated and encouraged by the colonial authorities which involved keeping the animals in pens.

There were, however, some dangers to livestock production in the colonial Annang. For example, the roaming culture of livestock exposed these animals to disease and. Also, the colonial authorities had argued that allowing the animals, particularly goats to move around freely in the villages could led to the destruction of food crops such as yam, cassava, vegetables that were planted by the people. They argued that this could add to the problem of food shortages in the area. Even with this kind of argument from the colonial authorities, the people did not welcome the new method of keeping animals in pens because it would be more costly to the people to do so. In his memo No 67/15, March, 1940, the Agricultural Officer to the District Officers, Ikot Ekpene and Calabar, explains thus:

I do not see any hope of establishing a unit farm in Calabar Province at present and I do not think that any useful purpose would be served by making special

efforts to hold a discussion on the matter just now, unless you particularly wish it. Unit farms involve the keeping of livestock and it would appear that in general the people of the Province are not “livestock minded”. Any attempt to begin a unit farm would therefore require very careful supervision and I feel that it is impossible to give such supervision at the present time.¹⁶

When the issue of establishing a unit farm at Ikot Ekpene came up again, the Agricultural Officer further communicated to D. O Ikot Ekpene, when he wrote in November 1940:

On the topic on meat production, we were ask to approach the natives and talk to them so that they might be induced to take an interest in herds of cattle or sheep and goats with a view to keeping them for meat production. The Technical Assistant and myself have visited Nto Edino area where we spent 3 days and going from village to village and from house to house telling the people to take interest in keeping of livestock. Some of them were interested but complained of lack of capital to start the business, others said they would like the idea but added that domestic animals do a lot of havoc to farmers’ crops hence the owners of these animals would be troubled. We have explained to them that if they undertake the business they should be ready to get labourers who would care for the livestock.¹⁷

Another major challenge the people faced in adopting the new method was that they were not skilled in the act of keeping animals in pens as doing so would increase the risk of contagious diseases which would have resulted from crowding the animals in pens in the absence of adequate veterinary services. These challenges made the initiative of keeping the animals in pens from becoming a significant enterprise. This is evident from the fact that even in contemporary times; the people still allow their animals to roam about the community.

Poultry Production

In order to increase animal nutrition in the diet of the people, the colonial authorities began poultry production at Ikot Abasi, Mbiaobong Mbat Ikot Iduk with special breed of birds which were obtained from poultry farm at Calabar.¹⁸ These were to serve as experiments and demonstration centres that were to afford the would-be poultry farmers the opportunity of acquiring first-hand information and knowledge about poultry farming. This effort did not attract the interest of the local people that viewed the initiative of keeping birds in cages as novel and alien to them. As such the people did not show much interest in acquiring the knowledge of poultry since it did not fit into either their traditional agricultural practice or cash crops production. They turned their back against poultry production and continued with the traditional free-range methods of allowing

fowls to roam about in the villages only to receive occasional attention from their owners when they were sick. In attempting to solve this problem, the colonial authorities enlisted some persons for poultry training at Okija model farm .¹⁹Seven persons were sent to Okija in 1953 for poultry training. The table below shows the name and addresses of the trainees.

Table 38: Poultry Trainees

	Names	Addresses
1.	Miss Eno Udo Ebie	Ukpom
2.	Miss Arit Inyang Mbekwe	Otoro
3.	Akpan Tom Eponyon	Mbiabong
4.	Sunday Udo Ikot	Mbiafun
5.	Nana Akpan Nkanem	Mbiabong Ukan
6.	John Udo Umo	Uquok Ikot Idut
7.	Peter Akpan Essien	Nung Imo

Source: N. A. E. (A. D.) ABADIST 13/1/37, Poultry Trainees, 1953, p.17

In addition to training, efforts were made by the colonial authorities to establish, build and equipped poultry centres in Mbiafun, Ukanafun, Abak, Ikot Ekpene and Ikot Okoro.²⁰These efforts were to encourage the people from these communities to go into large scale production of poultry. However, the attempt though fairly well successful in urban areas, was not successful in the villages as the people did not embrace the keeping of their fowls in pens apart from few individuals, especially the urban dwellers such as court clerks, messengers, colonial domestic staff and the educated elite that build cages for their birds. These categories of individuals that acquired the skills and knowledge of poultry however practiced on a small scale in their backyard and on a part-time basis. The major reasons why poultry enterprise was not acceptable in the rural areas of Annang was the fact that poultry keeping was both expensive and labor intensive.²¹ First, it involved acquiring a parcel of land for construction where the cage will be kept, second it involved regular purchase of feed which were often not available in Annang, third, the maintenance of poultry required daily labor which the people could not afford due to their involvement in cash crop production and other economic activities and four, there was danger of losing their entire birds in the poultry as a result of diseases. This was seen in a memo No 2020/1/98, February 28, 1952, sent by the Acting District Officers, Ikot Ekpene to the Agricultural Officer, Abak thus:

As you say there has been an extremely high mortality of birds in recent months, so much so that prices of birds have doubled or more than doubled. I understand the veterinary Department has solved the problem in some places through a large scale inoculation in public places, chiefly markets. As there is little ground in believing the cholera is entirely dead in this division. I should be grateful if you would arrange a similar thing in this division. Arrangement could be made to get birds in a public place.²²

Following this request by the Acting District Officer, Ikot Ekpene, one Veterinary Assistant arrived in the Division and had various birds inoculated against bird cholera and Typhoid.²³ This efforts by the District Officer did not made the people to embrace poultry business. Due to the challenges of poultry, the people were skeptical of going into the business. Against this reason, there was no known large scale poultry farmer in Annang during the colonial period.²⁴ Without doubt, livestock was the least affected by the impact of colonial rule on economic activities on Annang. Unlike other areas like farming, which, though to a very little extent, adopted the new farming method, livestock production in Annang was not seriously affected by modern methods throughout the colonial period.

Conclusion

Animal husbandry has always been an important component of the economic activities of the Annang. It provided employment and income for a large proportion of the people and serve as an important source of protein in their diet. Despite the important of animal husbandry to the people, its growth and development has not been adequately studied. In the face of constraints posed by scarcity of sources, the study has attempted to document the activities of animal husbandry in colonial Annang. During the pre-colonial period, livestock production was the preoccupation of both men and women and it solely depended on traditional methods because people were not receptive to some innovation introduced by the European. It must be stated that even when great effort was made by the colonial authorities, through the schools of agriculture, to make the Annang learn the modern method of animal husbandry, the people stuck very rigidly to their traditional way of animal husbandry. Therefore, animal husbandry method in colonial Annang was not at all different from that of the pre-colonial period until late 1940s when poultry production was to some extent, influenced by those trained in Agriculture school. Even at that, little interest was shown by the people, except a few who had, by virtue of their financial security, accepted, to some extent to try the newly introduced method.

Endnotes

1. J. C. Messenger, "Religious Acculturation among the Annang and Ibibio," in Bascom and Herskovits (eds.), *Continuity and change in African Culture*, Chicago, 1959, p.279.
2. Ekong E. Ekong, *Sociology of Ibibio: A Study of Social Organisation and Change*, Calabar: Scholars Press, 1983, pp.198-207.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Ephraim Stephen Essien, "Annang Philosophy: Foundations and Outline", *British Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 13 (11), 2013, p.167.
5. J. P. Udondata and J. B. Ekanem, *History of Annang Nation*, Nigeria: Elohum Educational Ventures, 2011.
6. According to the 2006 National Population Census.
7. J. I. Osagie, "Economic Development in Esan in the Colonial Period", Ph.D Dissertation, Department of History, University of Benin, 2005, p.26.
8. Interview with Chief C. A. Ntang, 69 years, Clan Head of AbakMidim and Later Paramount Ruler OrukAnam, at Ikot AkpanEssien, on 24/1/2012.
9. *Ibid.*
10. N. A. E. E. (M. G.) MILGOV 1/3/17, G. Hawesworth, Northern Annang Group, Ikot Ekpen Division.
11. N. A. E. (C. S.) CSE 11/85/16323, J. V. Dewhurst, Otoro Group of the Otoro Clan Abak District, 1935.
12. *Ibid*
13. N. A. E. (C. S.) CSE11/85/4782, S. E. Johnson, AfahaObong, Annang Sub-Tribe, Abak District, 1932.
14. See JumokeOloide "Staple Food and Livestock Production among the Yoruba of Colonial Nigeria: The Ekiti Experience" *African Research Review*. Vol. 7 No. 4, 2013, pp. 120-137
15. *Ibid*
16. N. A. E. (C. P.) CALPROF 25/5/536, Monthly Report, 1942, p.12.
17. N. A. E. (C. P.) CALPROF 13/1/44, Meat Production, 1940, p.42.
18. N. A. E. (E. D.) EKETDIST 1/2/50, p.29
19. N. A. E. (A. D.) ABAKDIST 13/1/37, Poultry Trainees, 1953, p.17.
20. N. A. E. (I. D.) IOKTDIST 13/1/583, p.98.
21. N. A. E. (I. D.) IKOTDIST 13/1/583, p.144.
22. *Ibid*
23. *Ibid*
24. *Ibid*