

## EXPLORING AGRI-STARTUPS IN BENGALURU: SECTOR INSIGHTS AND ENTREPRENEURIAL PROFILES

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explores the vibrant Agri-Startup ecosystem in Bengaluru, Karnataka, focusing on the sectors in which these startups operate and the characteristics of the entrepreneurs. Through a comprehensive survey and analysis, the research identifies key trends within this sector and provides insights into the unique entrepreneurial landscape of the region. The study reveals a diverse range of Agri-Startup operating in various sectors, including agri-tech (71.42 %), food processing (07.14 %), organic (14.28 %), and dairy Startups (07.14 %). The Agri-Startups are at different stages of development ideation (21.43 %), validation (37.50 %), early-traction (30.36 %) and scaling up stage (10.71 %) enterprises. Entrepreneurs in Bengaluru's Agri-Startup scene exhibit a mix of educational backgrounds and professional experiences, with a strong focus on innovation and sustainability. The major findings of the study revealed that about one-third (33.93%) of the Agri-Startups had acquainted with incubators, accelerators (10.71%) and mentors (42.86%). Education, experience, and training significantly influence stakeholder support, with higher education correlating strongly with incubators and accelerators. Overall, this study offers valuable perspectives on the state of Agri-Startup profile attributes of entrepreneurs in Bengaluru, serving as a guide for investors, policymakers, and other stakeholders interested in supporting and nurturing this dynamic sector.*

**Keywords:** startup, agri-startup, entrepreneurs, agri-tech and entrepreneurial profile characteristics

### INTRODUCTION

India, the world's third-largest startup ecosystem after the United States and China. The nation ranks second in innovation quality, particularly in scientific research and university excellence among middle-income economies. In the 2023 Global Startup Ecosystem Index, India was ranked 20<sup>th</sup> globally, with Bengaluru leading the way at 20<sup>th</sup> place, followed by Delhi and Mumbai (Startup Genome, 2023). Notably, the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DPIIT) recognizes startups across 56 diverse sectors, including agriculture, which accounts for 13 per cent of all startups. Bengaluru, known as the "Silicon Valley of India," has become the primary hub for tech startups, hosting 43 out of India's 110 unicorns (Government of India, 2022). The city's vibrant startup ecosystem has been further enhanced by government initiatives, including the Karnataka Startup Policy 2015-20; 2022-2027, which aims to broaden and diversify the entrepreneurial community. With over 15,851 recognized Agri-Startups as of September 2024, the state leads in Agri-tech innovations that leverage advanced technologies across various agricultural value chains (Startup India, 2024). These Agri-Startups are crucial for enhancing agricultural productivity and sustainability, as

more than 70 per cent of India's rural population relies on agriculture for their livelihoods (AgShots, 2023). Overall, Bengaluru's dynamic Agri-Startup landscape highlights the potential for innovation and growth in the Indian agricultural sector, attracting entrepreneurs and investors alike. This study delves into the unique characteristics of entrepreneurs within Bengaluru's Agri-Startup landscape, examining their educational backgrounds, professional experiences, and commitment to innovation while analysing the sectors in which they operate.

### OBJECTIVES

- (1) To study the profile characteristics of Agri-Startup entrepreneurs in Bengaluru and the stakeholder support they receive.
- (2) To analyse the relationship between entrepreneurial profiles and the support received from stakeholders.

### METHODOLOGY

As of December 2020, Bengaluru had 281 Agri-Startups, including 193 Agri-Tech, 18 Dairy farming, 49

Organic farming, and 21 Food processing Startups (Startup India, 2020). A random sample of 56 Agri-Startups was selected through multistage stratified sampling based on their operational stage and sector. The profile of these selected Agri-Startups, including their sector, stage of development, establishment year, location, ownership, customer base, and stakeholder support, was analyzed using cumulative frequency distribution. The co-efficient of correlation was computed to know the relationship between entrepreneurial profiles and the support received from stakeholders. The results were discussed under relevant sub-headings.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Profile of Agri-Startup entrepreneurs**

**Agri-Startup sectors:** Table 01 exhibited that nearly three-fifth of the selected Agri-Startups belonged to ‘Agri-Tech sector’ (71.42 %) as the Agri-Startup entrepreneurs were finding Agri-Tech sector as revenue generating segment due to their potential to address the challenges from the very beginning with the new technological interventions in Agriculture. While, a significant percent (14.28 %) of Agri-Startups represented ‘Organic sector’ due to rise in consumer demand for healthy, organic food and followed by ‘Food processing’ and ‘Dairy sectors’ contributed equal sizable portion of 7.14 per cent each.

**Table 1: Distribution of Agri-Startups based on sector** (n=56)

| Sector | Agri-Tech |       | Dairy |      | Organic |       | Food Processing |      | Total |     |
|--------|-----------|-------|-------|------|---------|-------|-----------------|------|-------|-----|
|        | F         | %     | F     | %    | F       | %     | F               | %    | F     | %   |
|        | 40        | 71.42 | 4     | 7.14 | 8       | 14.28 | 4               | 7.14 | 56    | 100 |

It could be due to the fact that majority of Agri-Startup entrepreneurs believe ‘Agri-Tech Sector’ offers more attractive immediate solutions through IT/IoT-based

technological interventions. Hence, more attention needs to be paid in promoting other sectors of Agri-Startup, such as ‘Food processing and Dairy Sector.’

**Stages of Development**

**Table 2: Distribution of Agri-Startups based on stage of development** (n=56)

| Sr. No. | Stage                 | Agri-Tech |       | Dairy |      | Organic |      | Food Processing |      | Total |       |
|---------|-----------------------|-----------|-------|-------|------|---------|------|-----------------|------|-------|-------|
|         |                       | F         | %     | F     | %    | F       | %    | F               | %    | F     | %     |
| 1       | <b>Ideation</b>       | 8         | 14.29 | 1     | 1.79 | 2       | 3.57 | 1               | 1.79 | 12    | 21.43 |
| 2       | <b>Validation</b>     | 16        | 28.57 | 1     | 1.79 | 3       | 5.36 | 1               | 1.79 | 21    | 37.50 |
| 3       | <b>Early-Traction</b> | 13        | 23.21 | 1     | 1.79 | 2       | 3.57 | 1               | 1.79 | 17    | 30.36 |
| 4       | <b>Scaling</b>        | 3         | 5.36  | 1     | 1.79 | 1       | 1.79 | 1               | 1.79 | 6     | 10.71 |

It is perceptible from the above Table 02 that over one-third (37.36 %) of the Agri-Startups were present in ‘validation stage’ at this stage they had a ready prototype and needs to validate the potential demand of the products/ services before entering into the big market. A significant per cent of Agri-Startups were present in ‘early-traction stage’ (30.36 %), where startup successfully launched its products or services in the market. While, 21.43 percent of the Agri-Startups were present in ‘ideation stage’, where entrepreneur has an idea and is working on bringing it to life, and a sizeable portion of Agri-Startups (10.71 %) were in the ‘scaling stage’, where the Startups were developing their client bases and revenues while gaining market share. According to aforementioned results a large majority of Agri-Startups were still in their early phases of business development.

with 12.50 per cent during 2014-2016 and 08.92 per cent from 2004-2013. This trend is likely due to various initiatives and policy changes implemented after 2015, including the Government of Karnataka’s Startup policy launched in November 2015 and the central government’s ‘Startup India’ initiative in 2016, which significantly boosted startups in the country. These findings align with Shailesh’s (2022) observation that most Agri-Startups emerged after 2015.

**(2) Age**

Table 03 illustrate that majority of the Agri-Startup entrepreneurs (53.57 %) belonged to age group of 26-35 years, while 39.29 per cent belonged to 36-50 years age group and only 07.14 per cent were more than 50 years of age. This indicates a significant trend of younger individuals (up to 35 years) pursuing entrepreneurship in agribusiness, suggesting they are more willing to take risks. Younger entrepreneurs tend to be more energetic, physically vigorous,

**(1) Year of establishment:**

Table 03 shows that a significant majority (78.57%) of Agri-Startups were established between 2017 and 2021,

**Table 3: Distribution of Agri-Startups based on personal and entrepreneurial characteristics (n=56)**

| Sr. No.             | Category                                  | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------|---|-----------|------------|
| <b>1</b>            | <b>Year of establishment</b>              |           |            |
|                     | 2004-2013                                 | 05        | 8.92       |
|                     | 2014-2016                                 | 07        | 12.50      |
|                     | 2017-2021                                 | 44        | 78.57      |
| <b>2</b>            | <b>Age</b>                                |           |            |
|                     | Young (Up to 35 years)                    | 30        | 53.57      |
|                     | Middle (36-50)                            | 22        | 39.29      |
|                     | Old (Above 50)                            | 04        | 07.14      |
| <b>3</b>            | <b>Gender</b>                             |           |            |
|                     | Male                                      | 51        | 91.07      |
|                     | Female                                    | 05        | 08.93      |
| <b>4</b>            | <b>Education</b>                          |           |            |
|                     | Up to PUC                                 | 02        | 03.57      |
|                     | Graduate                                  | 20        | 35.71      |
|                     | Post graduate and above                   | 34        | 60.72      |
| <b>5</b>            | <b>Startup Occupation</b>                 |           |            |
|                     | Primary                                   | 48        | 85.71      |
|                     | Subsidiary                                | 08        | 14.29      |
| <b>6</b>            | <b>Domicile</b>                           |           |            |
|                     | Urban                                     | 39        | 69.65      |
|                     | Semi-Urban                                | 13        | 23.21      |
|                     | Rural                                     | 04        | 07.14      |
| <b>7</b>            | <b>Startup work experience (in years)</b> |           |            |
|                     | 1-2 years                                 | 08        | 14.29      |
|                     | 3-5 years                                 | 28        | 50.00      |
|                     | 6-8 years                                 | 14        | 25.00      |
|                     | > 8 years                                 | 06        | 10.71      |
| <b>8</b>            | <b>Participation in Training</b>          |           |            |
|                     | No Training                               | 07        | 12.50      |
|                     | 1-2 Trainings                             | 27        | 48.22      |
|                     | 3-4 Trainings                             | 14        | 25.00      |
|                     | > 5 Trainings                             | 08        | 14.28      |
| <b>9</b>            | <b>Employment generation</b>              |           |            |
|                     | Up to 10 employees                        | 28        | 50.00      |
|                     | 11-20 employees                           | 21        | 37.50      |
|                     | More than 21 employees                    | 07        | 12.50      |
| <b>10</b>           | <b>Customer segmentation</b>              |           |            |
|                     | Farmers                                   | 26        | 46.43      |
|                     | Consumers                                 | 34        | 60.71      |
|                     | Wholesalers                               | 18        | 32.14      |
| <b>11</b>           | <b>Source of finance</b>                  |           |            |
|                     | Bootstrapping (Personal savings)          | 51        | 91.07      |
|                     | Friends and family                        | 47        | 83.93      |
|                     | Government grants                         | 16        | 28.57      |
|                     | Nationalized banks                        | 08        | 14.29      |
|                     | Private banks                             | 05        | 08.93      |
|                     | Angel investors                           | 10        | 17.86      |
|                     | Incubators                                | 19        | 33.93      |
|                     | Accelerator                               | 06        | 10.71      |
| Venture Capitalists | 09  | 16.07     |            |

and responsible, positioning themselves as job creators rather than job seekers. The findings are in accordance with the study conducted by Abdolhamid *et al.* (2008).

### (3) Gender

Table 03 revealed that majority (91.00 %) of the entrepreneurs was found to be male and remaining 08.93 per cent entrepreneurs only belongs to female category among all the Agri-Startups selected for the study. The aforementioned results inferred that a greater number of males ended up becoming Agri-Startup entrepreneurs compared to their counterparts. This could be due to the fact that male having asset in their name had more freedom, independence and room to grow as business entrepreneurs than female groups. Additionally, the majority of women in the society were traditional, making it challenging for them to work long hours and interact with various stakeholders. The results were similarly analogous with the findings of Srinivas and Anubhab (2020) and Ohlan and Raj (2020).

### (4) Education

Table 03 shows that the majority (60.72 %) of entrepreneurs are postgraduates, while 35.71 per cent are graduates, and only 03.57 per cent have completed pre-university education. None of the respondents had education levels below pre-university. Startups demand strong communication networks and a higher cognitive understanding of business complexities, indicating that more educated individuals, particularly those with postgraduate degrees, are more likely to pursue entrepreneurship over traditional employment. These findings align with research by Shailesh (2022) and Ohlan and Raj (2020), suggesting a positive and significant relationship between entrepreneurial ability and education (Chaudhary *et al.*, 2017; Gulkari & Dohat, 2022).

### (5) Startup occupation

The data in Table 03 shows that a significant majority (85.71 %) of Agri-Startup entrepreneurs consider their ventures as their primary occupation, while over one-tenth (14.29 %) treat them as subsidiary occupations. This trend may be attributed to factors such as entrepreneurial education, expectations of high returns, and confidence in their innovative ideas. These findings align with Bhaskar's (2018) study, which indicated that 55.00 per cent of Agripreneurs viewed business as their main occupation, and Aneesha *et al.* (2024), reported that 84.09 per cent of Agri-Startup entrepreneurs identified their startups as their primary occupation.

### **(6) Domicile**

The results of the table 03 represented more than two-third (69.65 %) of the Agri-Startup entrepreneurs belonged to Bengaluru urban followed by nearly one-fourth (23.21 %) of them from semi-urban and the rest 07.14 per cent were residing in Bengaluru rural. This concentration in Bengaluru Urban can be attributed to its favourable financial climate and entrepreneurial ecosystem, which support the launch and growth of Agri-Startups. Additionally, the metropolitan area offers numerous networking opportunities that facilitate startup establishment, reinforcing its reputation as the Startup capital of India.

### **(7) Startup work experience**

Table 03 indicates that half (50.00 %) of Agri-Startup entrepreneurs have 3-5 years of work experience, followed by 25.00 per cent with 6-8 years, 14.29 per cent with 1-2 years, and 10.71 per cent with over 8 years. This trend is likely influenced by the significant number of young respondents (26-35 years) with an entrepreneurial mindset. Agri-Startups, as a recent concept in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, offer great opportunities for unemployed youth, prompting the government to introduce various schemes to promote entrepreneurship. Consequently, many individuals opt to start their own businesses after gaining industry experience. These findings partially supported by Khandave *et al.* (2017), who noted that many entrepreneurs have medium experience ranging from 8 to 24 years.

### **(8) Participation in trainings**

Table 03 shows that nearly half (48.22 %) of entrepreneurs received 1-2 trainings, while 25.00 per cent attended 3-4 trainings, and 14.28 per cent participated in more than five. Additionally, 12.50 per cent of respondents reported no training. Training is crucial for both experienced and inexperienced individuals, providing essential updates for starting new businesses. However, the predominance of young agribusiness startups has hindered sponsoring organizations from conducting adequate entrepreneurship development programs. This may also be due to Agri-Startup entrepreneurs lacking access to the right guidance and training. These findings align with Shailesh (2022), and the training received shows a positive and significant relationship with entrepreneurs' makeup (Sipai *et al.*, 2023; Patel *et al.*, 2022; Patel *et al.*, 2023; Singh *et al.*, 2024; Patel *et al.* 2024).

### **(9) Employment generation**

Table 03 revealed that one-half (50.00 %) of the enterprises had up to ten employees followed by those with 11-20 employees (37.50 %) and 12.50 per cent with more than 21 employees. This is owing to the evident fact that majority of the Agri-Startups were micro businesses, were

young and had low volume of business. They find difficulties in getting early-stage investment and always have inadequate working capital which makes them difficult to hire regular employees in the early phases of Agri-Startup development. Additionally, the majority of businesses were managed by the founder in conjunction with staff members. Because of this, the bulk of companies were always understaffed. The findings are in partial agreement with findings of Shubham (2020).

### **(10) Customer segmentation**

It is evident from the table 03 that three-fifth (60.71 %) of the Agri-Startups were catering the services to the direct consumers followed by, (46.43 %) farmers and wholesalers (32.14 %). It can be inferred from the results that the majority of Agri-Startups aim higher profit margins through direct sales to local consumers, as they were the end users of the majority of their products. The results were in line with Aneesha *et al.* (2024).

### **(11) Source of finance**

The results in Table 03 show that a significant majority of entrepreneurs (91.07%) primarily relied on bootstrapping or self-financing to establish their startups. Other funding sources included support from friends and family (83.93%), incubators (33.93%), government grants (28.57%), angel investors (17.86%), venture capitalists (16.07%), nationalized banks (14.29%), accelerators (10.71%), and private banks (8.93%). This trend indicates that while personal funds are the main source of finance, entrepreneurs face challenges in securing additional financing from banks due to cumbersome application processes, a preference for collateral security, and the high risks associated with Startups. The findings are in agreement with the findings of Reddy, G. S. *et al.* (2023).

### **Incubator support**

The results reveal that only one-third of Agri-Startups (33.93 %) received incubation support at various stages, indicating limited access to incubators and their services for many entrepreneurs (Table 04). According to Table 05, the majority received support during the 'ideation stage' (47.37 %), followed by 'validation' (31.58 %) and 'early traction' (21.05 %), while none received support in the 'scaling stage.' This lack of support for scaling Agri-Startups may stem from the increased need for mentoring, networking, and infrastructure during the earlier stages. Furthermore, figure 01 highlights that most Agri-Startups benefited from 'mentorship and advisory services' (28.57 %), followed by 'networking support' (26.79 %), 'access to capital sources' (25.00 %), 'marketing and accounting strategies' (23.21 %), 'training' (21.43 %), and 'technology commercialization support' (14.29 %).

**Table 4: Distribution of Agri-Startups based on support**

(n=56)

| Stakeholders support | Acquainted with support |            | Acquainted without support |            |
|----------------------|-------------------------|------------|----------------------------|------------|
|                      | Frequency               | Percentage | Frequency                  | Percentage |
| <b>Incubator</b>     | 19                      | 33.93      | 37                         | 66.07      |
| <b>Accelerator</b>   | 06                      | 10.71      | 50                         | 89.29      |
| <b>Mentor</b>        | 24                      | 42.86      | 32                         | 57.14      |

**Accelerator support**

Table 04 illustrates the limited acceleration support available to Agri-Startup entrepreneurs, with only 10.71 per cent receiving assistance at various stages, primarily due to the majority being in the ideation to validation stages (89.29%). Notably from table 05, a significant proportion (83.33%) of respondents received acceleration support at the scaling stage, while 16.00 per cent benefited during the early traction stage. This trend is likely because accelerators offer mentor-based programs that provide guidance, support,

and limited funding in exchange for equity. Since most Agri-Startups operate with less working capital in their early stages, those in the scaling phase tend to receive more support. Figure 02 further details the nature of accelerator support, revealing that all Agri-Startups received ‘access to capital sources,’ ‘marketing and accounting strategies,’ and ‘networking support.’ Additionally, ‘mentorship and advisory services’ were provided to 83.33 per cent, ‘training support’ to 57.14 per cent and ‘technology commercialization support’ to 28.57 per cent.

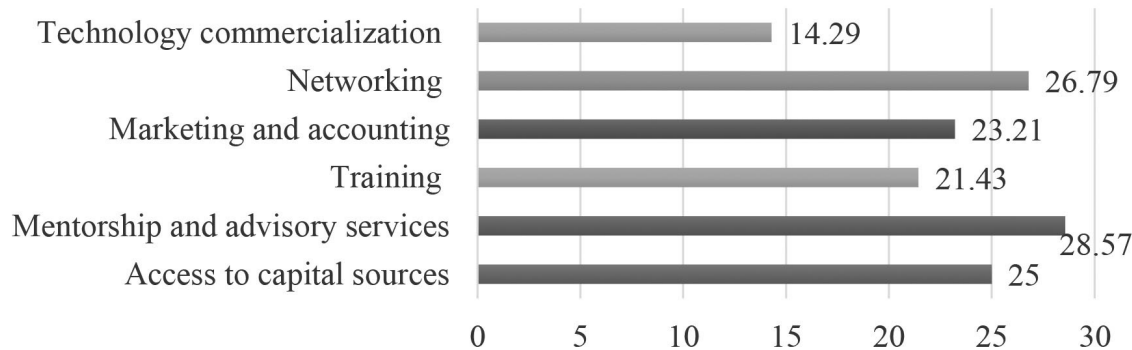
**Table 5: Distribution of Agri-Startups based on support in stages of development**

| Sr. No. | Stakeholders involved in Startup stage of development | Incubator (n=19) |       | Accelerator (n=06) |       | Mentor (n=24) |       |
|---------|---|------------------|-------|--------------------|-------|---------------|-------|
|         |   | F                | %     | F                  | %     | F             | %     |
| 1       | <b>Ideation</b>                                       | 9                | 47.37 | 0                  | 0     | 11            | 45.83 |
| 2       | <b>Validation</b>                                     | 6                | 31.58 | 0                  | 0     | 08            | 33.33 |
| 3       | <b>Early-Traction</b>                                 | 4                | 21.05 | 01                 | 16.67 | 04            | 16.66 |
| 4       | <b>Scaling</b>  | 0                | 0     | 05                 | 83.33 | 01            | 04.16 |

**Mentor support**

Table 04 highlights that over two-fifths (42.86%) of Agri-Startup entrepreneurs received mentorship support at various stages of their ventures, while 57.14 per cent have yet to access such guidance. Most mentoring occurred in the initial phases of development, with 45.83 per cent receiving support during the ideation stage, followed by 33.33 per cent in the validation stage, 16.66 per cent in early traction, and only 4.16 per cent in the scaling-up stage (Table 05). This trend underscores the critical role that mentors play in the growth of Agri-Startups, as their experience significantly influences success. In an environment characterized by

intense competition, acquiring essential skills through mentors, trainers, and business planning institutions is crucial. As noted by Khan (2016), mentoring programs led by experienced professionals can be pivotal in driving startup success. Furthermore, Figure 03 reveals the nature of mentorship support, indicating that the majority of Agri-Startups benefited from ‘resource identification and networking’ (35.71%), followed closely by ‘advice in strategic planning’ and ‘motivation’ (30.36%), with additional support in problem resolution (28.57%), psychological support (25.00%), and a smaller receiving coaching and sponsorship (08.93%).



**Fig 1: Nature of Incubator support received**

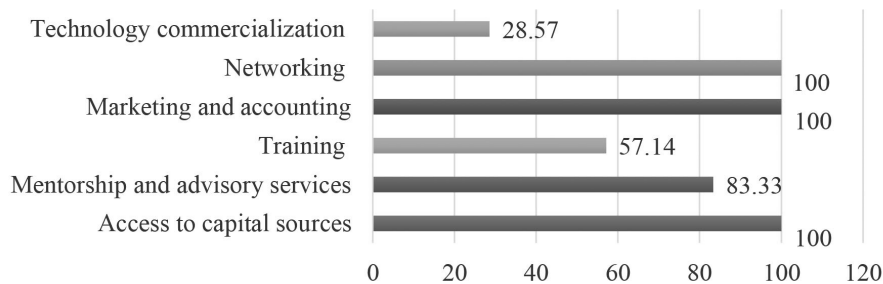


Fig 2: Nature of Accelerator support received

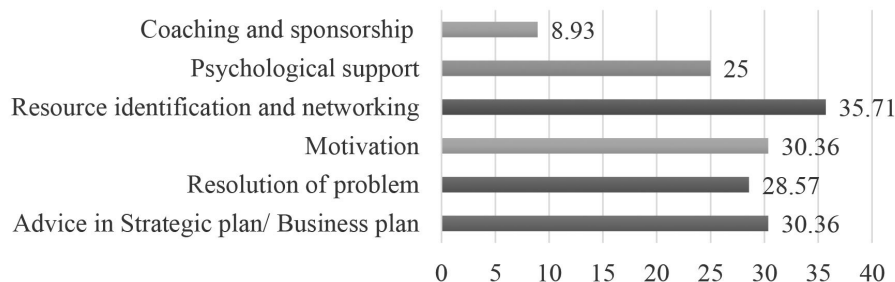


Fig 3: Nature of Mentor support received

**Relationship between entrepreneurial profiles and stakeholder support**

With a view to find out the relationship between the

independent variables and support received by the stakeholders (dependent variable), the correlation coefficients ('r' values) were calculated. The result on correlation co-efficient is given in Table 06.

**Table 6: Correlation co-efficient of selected independent variables with support received by the stakeholders**

(n=56)

| Sr. No.        | Characteristics   | 'r' value |             |          |
|----------------|-------------------|-----------|-------------|----------|
|                |                   | Incubator | Accelerator | Mentor   |
| X <sub>1</sub> | Age               | 0.170 NS  | 0.020 NS    | 0.124 NS |
| X <sub>2</sub> | Education         | 0.770*    | 0.445*      | 0.018 NS |
| X <sub>3</sub> | Occupation        | 0.139 NS  | 0.024 NS    | 0.059 NS |
| X <sub>4</sub> | Domicile          | 0.115 NS  | 0.118 NS    | 0.189 NS |
| X <sub>5</sub> | Experience        | 0.243*    | 0.005 NS    | 0.312 NS |
| X <sub>6</sub> | Training received | 0.254*    | 0.205 NS    | 0.213*   |

\* = Significant at 0.05 level of significance

NS= Non significant

The correlation analysis revealed that education, experience, and training received were the key factors influencing stakeholder support. Education showed a strong positive correlation with support from incubators (0.770) and accelerators (0.445) indicating that higher educational qualifications enhance access to these stakeholders. Experience significantly correlates with incubator support (0.243), while training received is positively associated with support from incubators (0.254) and mentors (0.213). Other characteristics like age, occupation, and domicile showed

no significant correlation with stakeholder's support. These findings suggest that fostering education and targeted training programs can improve entrepreneurs' access to essential resources from incubators and mentors, while accelerators may require alternative support strategies.

**CONCLUSION**

The profile of Agri-Startup entrepreneurs reveals a dynamic and evolving landscape characterized by a strong predominance of young, educated males primarily

engaged in the Agri-Tech sector, which capitalizes on technological innovations to address agricultural challenges. The majority of these startups are in the early stages of development, particularly in validation and early traction, highlighting a significant potential for growth and scalability. Furthermore, the reliance on personal savings and familial support underscores the financial challenges faced by these entrepreneurs, alongside limited access to formal incubation and accelerator programs. The findings emphasize the need for enhanced support systems, including increased training opportunities, mentoring, and access to funding, to foster a more robust Agri-Startup ecosystem that can ultimately contribute to sustainable agricultural development and economic resilience. The correlation co-efficient analysis reveals that education, experience, and training significantly influence stakeholder support, with higher education correlating strongly with incubators and accelerators. Other characteristics like age, occupation, and domicile show no significant impact, highlighting the need for targeted education and training initiatives.

## IMPLICATIONS

- (1) The study highlights that Agri-Startups create employment and boost local economies. Policymakers should implement measures for early grants, investor incentives, tax benefits, and supportive infrastructure.
- (2) Focus on education and skill-based training to improve access to incubators, accelerators, and funding.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this study.

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