

Caring for the caregivers in Mozambique

In an HIV-stricken district in Mozambique the number of orphans is growing. Committed women want to take care of them, but they are very poor themselves.

A relief organisation supports caregivers and orphans to rear chickens for the local market. "Now we can provide children with school uniforms and some food."

Simon Mukwaya

Irene Tivane lives in Ndonga, in the Guijá District in Mozambique. In recent years, she has seen the number of orphans in her community increase. She has been doing her best to provide care for some of them, but with little means of support herself, is finding it increasingly difficult. This is only one of the many communities in Africa which have been witnessing a growing number of orphans since the advent of HIV and AIDS. Local women identified more than 1200 orphans for whom they want to care.

Once either parent falls ill due to HIV and AIDS or related illnesses, the children's lives begin to change. In fact they start a long journey of deprivation. Access to education, shelter, clothes and health, among other things, becomes difficult for them. In view of this situation, Samaritan's Purse (SP), an international relief organisation working in the district, initiated training for local caregivers like Irene. Commonly known as *educadores*, or educators, they visit the children and provide for their short term needs. After a year of working in the community, the educators' efforts were well recognised. Their influence was growing. So was the demand for their services. This soon became overwhelming for them as they started to face many requests to assist the orphans, but they too are poor, with no means of support. They needed some extra income to help them continue to assist orphans in their community. To meet this need, in May 2007, SP started a broiler chicken business with 25 women in the district, divided into groups of five.

Learning to raise chickens

The educators had eight-weeks training in chicken rearing. This covered all the topics needed when starting such activities, including how to construct a shelter, the need for ventilation, diseases and their control, and record keeping and basic finance. In addition to this, participants also went to visit other chicken rearing projects in the neighbouring district of Chokwe. This helped them to appreciate the practical issues involved in running the business. After the visit, SP assisted the participants to construct the shelters, providing materials and a trained builder. Labour and other non-financial costs were met by the participants. Site selection for the shelter took various factors into consideration, including proximity to clean water, feeds, beneficiaries and market.

Prior to receiving the chicks, some conditions had to be in place, such as bedding, a lantern for light, a charcoal stove to raise the room temperature when needed, and feeders and drinkers. Upon receiving the chicks, the participants conducted a bird count with SP staff, and recorded the number of birds received and their condition. A total of 1300 one-day old chicks were distributed. This marks the beginning of a cycle which spans thirty-five days. During the growth phase, the

project veterinarian assisted the educators to conduct regular monitoring to check on the management of the chicks. Feeding, quantities consumed, sanitation, vaccines, sicknesses and deaths are followed up.

The chickens are ready for sale after the thirty-five days. The chickens are sold within the community through word of mouth, and through scouting trips in nearby markets. After selling, the project staff hold a meeting with the participants to review the previous cycle's income, to put aside funds for the next cycle and also to share profits amongst the participants. To date, the results have been encouraging. The 25 women have managed to raise US\$ 4940 per cycle. Sixty percent of this is reinvested into the business whilst the remaining 40 percent is shared as profit. The short term impact on the lives of more than 114 orphans they care for has been significant, and lives have been changing. The caregivers can now meet the children's financial needs without difficulty. Things like uniforms for school, exercise books, pens, food and health care are now being provided to the once deprived families.



Photo: Simon Mukwaya

Angelica Mundlovo, one of the community educators who has become proficient in raising chickens to assist with the costs involved in caring for orphans.

As good as a husband

After three cycles, the experience so far shows that small livestock are a viable source of livelihood for the resource poor, such as families with orphans. A key lesson learnt is that the community groups can run the broiler chicken projects with minimum support from SP. Caregivers can earn an income in a short space of time and can meet the immediate needs of the children under their care. The proceeds are not only useful for the orphans but also their caregivers, all of whom were already struggling to make ends meet prior to starting this micro-enterprise. According to Irene, "I no longer have a husband to provide for me and my needs. He died a long time ago. But thanks to this business it's like having a husband again. We are excited with this opportunity. We are now making some savings so that we can expand the business."

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