

# Training of Community Animal First Aid Workers

John Young

Every year, during the rains, a disease kills most of the chickens around the Kamujine Farmer's Centre. The local people call it *Rukora* which means 'coughing'. They avoid the problem by selling, or eating most of their chickens at the start of the rains. The disease is Newcastle Disease. It is caused by a virus. There is no treatment for the chickens once they have contracted the disease. This is just one of the diseases identified by farmers when Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG) started to investigate the problems faced by livestock farmers in this area.

Kamujine Farmer's Centre is an agricultural training and extension project serving the needs of 6000 or more households, run by the Catholic Diocese of Meru. It is situated in Meru District, Kenya, on the lower slopes of Mount Kenya. It is a transitional zone between high potential land where coffee and tea are grown as cash crops, and a semi-arid area where agro-pastoralism is the only sustainable form of food production. The Centre has been in operation for over 10 years and has developed a close relationship with the surrounding farmers.

Most of the activities have concentrated on crop production. Ox ploughs have been distributed through a revolving loan scheme, and farmers and oxen have been trained. Dry land seed crops such as Katumani maize and cowpeas have been multiplied up on the farm and have been distributed, and farmers have been trained in simple methods to increase production. In this transitional zone, however, livestock also play a major role in food production. It was to strengthen this side of the Centre's work that ITDG was asked for help.

ITDG is a small development organization started by the late Dr. Fritz Schumacher, author of the seminal work 'Small is Beautiful'. ITDG concentrates on assisting groups of poor people with the development and uptake of productive technologies and it believes that people are able to organise their own 'development' if they are able to gain access to appropriate resources. Thus, as Fritz himself said about the role of ITDG:

*'Find out what people do and help them to do it a bit better.'*

It is with this philosophy in mind that ITDG approached the problem of livestock development in discussions with the staff of the Kamujine Farmer's Centre.

## The Survey

After an initial period of a month or two in the project area, which was spent

talking to farmers, project staff and government extension workers, it became clear that the project area covered a range of widely differing agro-ecological zones, and the project was working with farmers with considerable differences in access to resources or wealth. The problems faced by different people in different places were very different.

In order to clarify these and formulate a project strategy, and also to collect base-line data, a detailed socio-economic survey of 128 households in 10 communities in the project area was undertaken. Survey sites were chosen from each agro-ecological zone in the project area and, within each site, households were chosen for interview by a process called 'wealth ranking' to ensure that affluent, average and poor households were included. The survey comprised a formal questionnaire and informal interviews focusing on the problems of keeping livestock and current veterinary knowledge.

The formal survey confirmed initial impressions that the reasons for keeping livestock and the problems faced by livestock owners were very strongly related to both agro-ecological zone and wealth:

- In general, relatively wealthy farmers owned larger number of all species of livestock (cattle and smallstock) whereas poor farmers only kept smallstock (goats and chickens).

- In the higher potential zones, livestock were kept more intensively, in smaller number and, especially in the case of cattle, largely as a source of cash income.

- In these higher potential zones, relatively wealthy farmers kept improved

cattle under intensive management, whereas poorer farmers could only afford to keep goats and chickens under more extensive management.

- In the lower potential zones, where livestock contribute more to food production, larger numbers of all species of livestock were kept by each household, with the relatively wealthy households owning the most.

- Nearly everybody keeps chickens but in the poorest households chickens may be the only species of livestock which is owned.

## The Focus of Activity

The demands for help with livestock were similarly dependant on the wealth and location (agro-ecological zone) of farmers. Relatively wealthy farmers in the high potential areas wanted help with their improved, intensively kept cattle. They wanted Artificial Insemination services, help with pasture improvement, and access to improved cattle. Poorer farmers wanted help with goats and chickens. They wanted to know how to look after their animals better in order to achieve an improvement in production. All farmers everywhere wanted improved access to veterinary services and drugs.

The role of ITDG in helping the Kamujine Farmer's Centre to provide these services is largely through training and infra-structural development. Early initiatives have included providing the start-up capital, and training for the Centre's staff, to set up a small shop selling animal health products and simple drugs. The Kamujine Farmer's Centre staff have also been trained in simple training methods so that their knowledge



*Training of women as poultry vaccinators.  
Photo's: John Young.*

can be passed on more effectively to the farmers. To improve access to veterinary services, farmers selected by their communities, are being trained as animal first aid workers - people who can assist with disease prevention, treat simple conditions and diseases and who can refer more serious cases to the government's veterinary department. ITDG, however, has a commitment to the poorest farmers in the community and since many of them only own chickens, a clear, first priority is to help these farmers, most of whom are women, to overcome the problem of Rukora.

### Training Poultry Vaccinators

Although there is no treatment for Newcastle Disease, it can be prevented very easily by vaccination. The vaccine is made in Kenya and is available free of charge from the government veterinary department. It is very easy to administer the vaccine. After reconstituting the freeze-dried vaccine, with distilled water, one drop of vaccine is put in the bird's eye, and one drop in its nostril. The problem is that, once reconstituted, the vaccine must be used within a few hours, and with chickens scattered in individual households, it is difficult for a single person to vaccinate many birds in that time.

The solution, identified in women's groups' meetings, was the training of several women from each group as poultry vaccinators. They could then vaccinate the birds belonging to themselves and other members of their group. Four women's groups selected 2 or 3 women for training. The groups paid KSh 30/= per woman trained, to cover the cost of the equipment and the training.

Eleven women came to the Centre for a day and participated in a workshop designed to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills to vaccinate the chickens effectively. The training made use of pictures and role-plays, in order to encourage discussion of the issues involved, and practical training in how to prepare and use the vaccine. People learn best by doing, so nearby farmers were asked to bring their

chickens to the Centre to be vaccinated, and each woman actually vaccinated at least 10 chickens during the last session of the day.

The next day the women returned to their villages equipped with the vaccine and a simple vaccination kit and vaccinated a total of around 1500 chickens.

### Follow-up

Since the training, farmers from other communities have been asking the Centre to train vaccinators. Some farmers, from the communities from which the trained women came, complained that their chickens had not been vaccinated. The vaccinators had simply not been able to get round all the chickens in time. These farmers have now asked the Centre to provide equipment and train more women as vaccinators. One women's group, having vaccinated all the chickens belonging to group members, went on to vaccinate birds belonging to non-group members for 20 cents per bird.

Enormous interest has been generated by this training programme. Unconfirmed oral reports that 'no vaccinated chicken died' during a recent outbreak of the disease, are gratifying but this will need to be checked during routine monitoring. One test of the efficacy of the introduction of this technique will be the level of demand from the poor farmers who own chickens: if they continue to clamour for vaccinations, and for further training, it will be a clear indication that they perceive a benefit from this treatment.

From this positive start, the Kamujine Farmers' Centre is increasing its training and extension capacity in order to respond to a wider range of needs of livestock owners for improved livestock husbandry techniques and the provision of an animal first aid service. Training courses for community animal first aid workers are in progress and some 'Wasaidizi ma mifugo' (in Kiswahili literally the 'Helpers of Livestock') have been selected and have started training.

### Conclusion

This project illustrates very clearly why ITDG believes that appropriate solutions

to real problems can be adopted and used to advantage by groups of poor farmers. However there are several important steps in the process which are worth underscoring:

1. The implementing organization, in this case the Kamujine Farmer's Centre, has very good rapport with livestock farmers in the community.
2. It is recognised that it is essential to have clear, unbiased knowledge of the existing situation of households which own livestock before any new initiatives could be taken.
3. New initiatives are being carefully researched and planned so that the work can be organised in order that the intended beneficiaries, poor livestock owners, actually do benefit. A project to improve, for example, cattle production around the Kamujine Farmer's Centre would obviously be of no benefit to poor owners of smallstock.
4. We believe that most sustainable initiatives involve the development of people's own knowledge and skills. Thus, all training sessions include dialogue and the sharing of experiences among all the participants (including the trainers), as well as the development of the trainees' skills through practical training. Each training course covers the introduction of some new practical skill, or the transfer of a skill from one group of farmers to another and we believe it is vital that the trainees leave the training course able and prepared to use that skill.
5. Wherever possible, the technical content of any new project initiatives are of a type which will enable the ideas to be easily incorporated into normal farm practice: the technology should be appropriate to the particular skills, level of knowledge and resources of those it is intended to benefit. In this way it should be rapidly adopted in the locality by the farmers themselves. We believe that if it is a genuine solution to a genuine problem then the community at large will rapidly adopt the new practices. Certainly, the owners of chickens in the Kamujine Farmers' Centre area are demonstrating the validity of this approach.

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