

Village poultry, food security and HIV/AIDS mitigation

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In farming households affected by HIV/AIDS, the illness or death of family members leads to the loss of valuable labour resources. Consequently the focus of household activity turns to maintaining family food security. Following an HIV/AIDS-related sickness or death, food security is maintained through revising the complex division of labour at the household level in accordance with the possibilities presented by the local farming system.

Village chickens can be found in all developing countries and play a vital role in many poor rural households. They provide a scarce resource - animal protein- in the form of meat and eggs, and can be sold or bartered to meet essential family needs. Village chickens are active in pest control, provide manure, are required for special festivals and are essential for many traditional ceremonies. The output of village chickens is lower than that of intensively raised birds but it is obtained with a minimum input in terms of housing, disease control, management and supplementary feeding. They are generally owned and managed by women and children and are often essential elements of female-headed households. As women are the main carers of sick people, chickens can play an important role as they provide women with additional resources to carry out their task of supporting people living with HIV/AIDS.

The components of village poultry production include: indigenous poultry breeds; feed; shelter; disease control; and community collaboration and group formation. Examples of how these components can be incorporated into HIV/AIDS mitigation programmes are presented here in two case studies. These case studies were implemented in collaboration with the International Rural Poultry Centre (IRPC) of the KYEEMA Foundation. The IRPC aims to improve the livelihood and standard of living of rural families by promoting cost-efficient, sustainable improvements to village poultry production through working with and providing training for government staff, community livestock workers and farmers and their families.

Junior Farmer Field Schools in Zimbabwe

The International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) and the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) identified the Junior Farmer Field School (JFFS) concept as a useful way to assist rural youth in HIV/AIDS programmes. The JFFS programme provided technical, business and life skills, while at the same time providing some constructive activities to get junior farmers started in income generating enterprises to help support their families and themselves into the future.

ICRISAT proposed using poultry as a model to develop farming/entrepreneurial skills. Poultry offer several benefits; their high turnover rate allows rapid exposure of JFFS members to the production and marketing process which provides valuable experience in financial management and learning processes. JFFS members learn about extensive and semi-intensive poultry production systems to enable them to choose the production system(s) best suited to their individual situations. As young farmers develop their skills, they can graduate to other forms of agriculture including bee-keeping, pig production and milk production.

The IRPC was invited to assist ICRISAT and partners to develop and test curriculum and training modules on extensive and semi-intensive poultry production for use in both Farmer Field Schools and JFFSs in Chowonekano, Mhototi and Vukuso wards, southern Zimbabwe. Participatory curriculum development activities revealed that JFFS members were generally interested in poultry production. PRA tools were used to gain information on poultry production and poultry farmers' aspirations. JFFS members indicated that they wished to know more about general poultry husbandry (e.g. housing, feeding, watering and disease control) and reproductive cycles (e.g. "I have a four week old chicken, when will it start laying eggs?"). The comparative production trials (looking at different options for housing, health and nutrition) that were developed for the JFFS members to implement during workshops have been modified over time to better suit local conditions. The IRPC worked with workshop participants to develop a manual on village chicken production for use by JFFS facilitators.

The JFFS programme had a significant impact on the lives of the nine JFFS groups during the project (2004-2005), with their chickens contributing both to household food security and generating income. With the lessons learnt through this pilot programme, it is expected that the JFFS programme can be improved and expanded to enable young farmers to not only survive but also actively contribute to their communities.

"We raise chickens for their eggs and so that they increase in number, so that we can sell and get money. If a child fails to get school fees, the chicken can be sold to get money. Money to buy sadza (maize meal) comes from chickens. Chickens give manure that we use in our gardens for green vegetables and tomatoes. When celebrating a birth I can also use a chicken as a gift. When I want someone to work in my fields, I can slaughter a chicken."

Ms. Nomsa Nkomo, JFFS member, Vukuso village, Zimbabwe

Improved village chicken production by people living with HIV/AIDS in Mozambique

Mozambique is among the ten countries in the world most affected by HIV/AIDS. Here, village chickens are generally owned and managed by women and the rural poor, and are usually run under a free-range, low input management system. These village chickens are a very important part of women's livelihoods. Small-scale farmers own over 90 percent of the national flock, which is estimated to be around 25 million birds. In the poorest households, the contribution of chickens is significant, contributing around one quarter of income. These families rarely raise chickens for home consumption – eggs are rarely consumed, as they are more highly valued for reproductive purposes. In contrast, families who are better off will raise chickens for home consumption. Thus if chicken numbers were to increase, the consumption of eggs would become an option and a very good use of resources.

FAO is supporting activities that can mitigate the effects of HIV/AIDS on food security and nutrition in Mozambique in Manica and Tete Provinces. Within a project framework, FAO is currently supporting the IRPC to work with local NGOs and



Celestina Zimbabwe, a widow, received one rooster and three hens in June 2005. At the end of the year, she had 21 birds. Celestina and her children were delighted. Celestina also helped with the training sessions for child-headed households and continues to provide advice to four households in her local area.

the Provincial Livestock Services to improve the management of village chickens and the vaccination of village flocks against Newcastle Disease (ND). ND is one of the major constraints to the production of village chickens in Mozambique. Other constraints include shortage of feed protein especially for chicks and laying hens; and high chick mortality due to cold, heavy rains, and predators. With the introduction of the control of ND in the project area, the secondary constraints are being addressed by focusing on training in and farmer experimentation with low-cost improvements to village poultry husbandry. To ensure that the activities are sustainable in the long term, the project is also working with local health posts and primary schools to promote village poultry production and the consumption of poultry meat and eggs. Activities to improve farmer knowledge about avian nutrition are used to discuss the components of a balanced diet for the farmers' families.

The main activities of this programme are: conducting baseline and annual PRAs; training NGO volunteers as community vaccinators against ND; training NGO technical staff and local government agricultural staff in ND control; implementing ND vaccination campaigns; training farmers to experiment with low-cost improvements to village poultry husbandry; and working with volunteers and staff of the local NGOs, local health posts and primary schools, to promote village poultry production and consumption of poultry meat and eggs.

To promote the sustainability of ND control activities, community vaccinators charge farmers a fee to vaccinate each bird. Recovering the costs of the vaccine and compensating the community vaccinators for their labour are key sustainability issues. However, when HIV/AIDS mitigation is involved, access to chickens and the ND vaccine by vulnerable families must be secured. To ensure that vulnerable families within the community receive assistance, the vaccinators decided that families affected by HIV/AIDS that have five or fewer birds would have their birds vaccinated free of charge during the first two campaigns. The IRPC secured funding from charity groups in Australia to support the distribution of one rooster and four hens and ND vaccination vouchers to child-headed households and families affected by HIV/AIDS in the project area. Following vaccination, the

vaccinators present the vouchers to the NGO to receive payment for their services corresponding to the number of birds vaccinated. A preliminary assessment of chicken numbers in all families that have benefited from the distribution was done in 2006. Despite the severe drought suffered by Mozambique in 2005, the majority of families have managed to continue to raise some poultry.

The pilot project received a positive review as it demonstrated the potential to deliver triple benefits: direct support to the people affected or infected by HIV/AIDS; income generation for the carers and the community based organisations; and an increase in the carrying capacity of the communities in terms of supporting welfare activities. The project has been expanded to more districts in five provinces and is ongoing. One major difficulty has been ensuring the supply and distribution of in-date ND vaccine. This is done via the Provincial Livestock Services to community vaccinators. It is needed to enable vaccination to occur at regular intervals so that flock immunity is maintained.

The value of village chickens in HIV/AIDS mitigation

Improving the management of village chickens by junior farmers and people living with HIV/AIDS contributes to HIV/AIDS mitigation principally through improved household food security and income generation. Village poultry production also provides junior farmers with experience in small-scale business management and improved knowledge about human nutrition.

Village poultry provide a source of high quality nutrition and income without requiring much in the way of labour or financial inputs. Eggs, in particular, offer an important source of nutrition and are one of the best sources of quality protein. Eggs also supply various vitamins and can be stored for several days under village conditions. They require very little energy or time to cook. Once ND is controlled, producers will no longer need to hatch all their eggs to produce replacement stock and so the consumption of eggs becomes a viable option.

Families affected by HIV/AIDS are more likely to make use of the above benefits when veterinary services work in collaboration with the Ministries of Education and Health to improve general knowledge about human nutrition and disease prevention and control.

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