

# Improving the livelihoods of Malawian vaccinators and poultry farmers

A community vaccinators association in Malawi is increasing the capacities and incomes of local vaccinators, whilst helping poultry farmers maintain the health of their chickens and boost their income from poultry keeping. At the Nthenje Community Vaccinators Association (NCVA), vaccinators are receiving training in improved poultry production practices, the control of Newcastle Disease (ND) and increasing the uptake of the ND I-2 vaccine in rural communities. ND is a fatal and contagious disease of poultry, with outbreaks killing up to 80-90% of affected flocks. However, through the work of NCVA vaccinators to increase awareness and availability of the vaccine, farmers are reporting fewer poultry deaths as a result of ND. At the same time, through their work, vaccinators are enhancing their earnings and the wellbeing of their families.

NCVA was formed in 2010 by Inter Aide – a French organisation devoted to the implementation of programmes aimed at promoting access to resources for the most vulnerable communities in developing countries. Inter Aide's ND vaccination programme is intended to provide a solution to ND, whilst creating employment opportunities for youths in rural areas. Since 2010, more than 500 youths in the region have been trained as community vaccinators and are now contributing to the rural vaccination activities carried out by three separate associations in Lilongwe, Phalombe and Zomba.

## A productive partnership

Due to high demand for the I-2 ND vaccine in the region, in 2015 Inter Aide partnered with the Global Alliance for Livestock Veterinary Medicines (GALVmed) – a not-for-profit company dedicated to making livestock health products accessible and affordable to smallholder farmers in Africa and South Asia – to increase access to the vaccine. “The GALVmed/Inter Aide collaboration works to improve the nutrition and livelihoods of smallholder livestock producers, and enhance family farm productivity and resilience in an increasingly changing climate,” says Samuel Adediran, GALVmed's Assistant Director for Market Development and Access. “Death from preventable diseases such as ND have limited the benefits of chicken rearing to families. It is against this background that GALVmed sought to intervene in this sector,” Adediran continues.



ND vaccines have been available in large dose packs to commercial chicken farmers – catering for between 500-1,000 chickens and more – but such large dose packages are ill-suited to backyard poultry keepers with five to ten chickens. Other factors which have contributed to poor access of the ND vaccine include: a lack of awareness of the value of vaccination among farmers, limited access to suitable agrovet shops, and lack of electricity in rural areas to power refrigerators that are necessary to keep vaccines viable. Awareness of the thermotolerant I-2 vaccine, produced in smaller doses by the Central Veterinary Laboratory (CVL) in Lilongwe, has increased through campaigns supported by the GALVmed/Inter Aide partnership. The financial support from GALVmed has also made it possible to extend ND vaccination services to many rural communities.

Graça Archer, Programme Officer for Inter Aide's ND Control Programme, says each campaign is methodical and runs for four months. "During the first month, community vaccinators go door to door to carry out poultry registration. This includes recording the number of chickens for vaccination and how many vials are needed per house. The second and third months are for the actual vaccination of the chickens, and the fourth month is for review of the successes and challenges," Archer explains. She adds that the peak of the campaign takes place in July, shortly after the harvest season, when farmers have more money to buy and sell chickens. The exchange of chickens during this time increases the risk of transmitting the ND infection, and is also the time when ND outbreak is at its highest. "Acceptance of the vaccine in July is high. For instance, last year we vaccinated 590,800 chickens during this month," says Archer.

## ND vaccine boosts business incomes

Eveless Makalani from Lumbwe village in Kalumbu, Lilongwe district, is a poultry farmer with 51 chickens and has worked with the community vaccinators for almost a year. She became aware of NCVA's work through farmer-to-farmer extension meetings held during chicken vaccinations. Prior to vaccinating her flock, Makalani says she sold her chickens at a maximum price of 2,000 Malawian Kwacha (MK) (US \$2.70). Now, one of her vaccinated chickens sells for MK 3,500 (US \$4.80), which covers the cost of the I-2 ND vaccination for over 50 birds. She adds that the affordability of the vaccine helps to make chicken rearing a viable business in the region. Through the sale of her chickens, Makalani is able to afford farm inputs such as fertilisers and farm implements such as hoes.

Lydia Katengeza is an NCVA member from Chizinga village in Lilongwe district. Katengeza administers the vaccine at a cost of MK 70 (US \$0.01) per chicken. "We were first trained as field facilitators in 2014 under a CARE Malawi programme. Then CARE linked us with Inter Aide who trained us on the procedures of how to become community vaccinators," says Katengeza. She added that the knowledge and procedures she has learnt from the Inter Aide training, such as rural business management, have also been of great benefit to her as a poultry farmer. Her chickens no longer die of ND and she has also managed to help her neighbours overcome the disease. "I have been able to afford 10 goats and to build a good house through my earnings as a vaccinator. I am also able to pay school fees for my children. As a family, we have increased our protein intake due to the improved health of our chickens," says Katengeza.

Another vaccinator, Yolomosi Tifere from Lumwe village in Mazengera area, has managed to build three houses from the proceeds of his vaccination work. "From every vaccine vial of 300 doses I administer, I make a profit of MK 5,100 (US \$7). In one month when there is a good response from farmers to have their chickens vaccinated, I am able to finish close to 15 bottles of the I-2 vaccine. This translates to a revenue amounting MK 76,500 (US \$105)," says Tifere.

Through the project, GALVmed hopes to improve the long-term benefits of chicken production such as household incomes, child nutrition and education, and employment generation in rural areas. However, there are also challenges. Demand for the ND vaccine is growing and the production capacity of CVL to meet local demand is limited. Options to mitigate this supply gap include investment in the equipment and capacity of CVL to increase production, and/or strategically open up the market and allow ND vaccine importation.



Written by Charles Mkoka