

Vaccines boost backyard poultry rearing in western Kenya (part 1)



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The graduate poultry keeper

In Homa Bay County, located in western Kenya, poultry vaccinations provide a new lease of life for the indigenous village poultry sector. Spearheaded by the Global Alliance for Livestock Veterinary Medicines (GALVmed), vaccines have transformed traditional indigenous poultry keeping into a thriving enterprise attracting people of all ages due to the improved income it now offers.

James Guma Ojwang is a 26 year old communications and media graduate, and a full-time indigenous poultry farmer. He began rearing indigenous chickens in 2014 at his father's home in the Wangcheng Location of Homa Bay County. Previously, Guma had worked on short-term contracts as a researcher for Population Services International, Kenya. To earn extra income, Guma decided to rear chickens, which take up little space compared to goats or cows. "The land here is not mine so rearing other animals can be challenging," he said.

Guma began with five chickens, which increased to 94 by hatching the conventional way using a hen and fertile eggs. But his early success was cut short in 2015 after losing 60 chickens to poultry diseases.

Since then, Guma now diligently vaccinates the chickens against Newcastle, Gumboro, and Marek's diseases. He spends approximately KSh 5,000 (US \$49.40) on vaccines over the course of four months' worth of protection.

Today, Guma has 70 indigenous chickens of the improved Rainbow breed – 15 cocks and 55 hens with 135 six-week-old chicks. He rears his chickens in a metal house built of iron sheets where the chickens stay at night. Chicken mesh fencing extends around a small compound with pawpaw trees where the chickens can roam freely during the day.

According to Guma, regular vaccinations have increased his chickens' survival and productivity. He vaccinates the chicks at one-day-old, two weeks and up to a month. And Guma enjoys the earnings – in a good month he makes KSh 12,000-15,000 (US \$119-148) selling eggs when laying is at its peak. During the 2015 Christmas period and into early January 2016, Guma made KSh 80,000 (US \$792) selling 140 chickens at the market. "Chickens, unlike electronics, aren't liabilities. I earn from them and that's why I value rearing them," said Guma. He explains that unlike most youths who spend their money on buying the latest technological gadgets like phones, he would rather have a long-term outlook and invest his money on poultry with guaranteed income returns.

The positive economic impact of rearing chickens means Guma has chosen not to look for other jobs. Instead he sees his poultry enterprise as a viable source of income to provide start-up funding to enable him to expand. In the long-term, Guma plans to supply organic markets with indigenous chickens. "I aim to rear chickens in an organic way to target consumers in that niche market," said Guma.

The motorcycle-taxi driver turned poultry keeper

Within the same county in Kubuya East Sub-Location, 25 year old Kelvin Odhiambo, a motorcycle-taxi operator (*boda boda*), also agrees his future has been improved by indigenous chicken rearing. He began rearing chickens in February 2016 after transporting chicken feed to a client's home and admiring the flock. Odhiambo bought 100 day-old chicks from Kukuchic Breeding Farm in Rakwaro, his hometown, and credits timely vaccinations to all of them surviving to five months old. "I have vaccinated the chicks about five times so far since February," he said.

Odhiambo consistently vaccinates his chickens against Gumboro, Newcastle Disease and Fowl Typhoid. He also understands how important hygiene is. Before anyone enters the chicken shed, they must wipe their feet in a disinfectant to avoid spreading possible infections. Since he started rearing chickens four months ago, vaccinations and medicines have cost him about KSh 4,000 (US \$39). Once the chickens are five to six months old, he will start collecting eggs and sell them locally. Odhiambo aspires to rear 1,000 chickens and quit working as a *boda boda* operator, which he hopes will happen soon.

Odhiambo rears his chickens in a metallic shed with an adjacent chicken-mesh area. The shed, which cost him KSh 70,000 (US \$693) to build including feeders/drinkers, surrounds a small compound with a tree where chickens freely roam during the day. Drinkers with water and feed hang from the tree. Odhiambo feeds the chicken at 8am and 1pm each day. "I value rearing chickens more than cows because in a few months I will get the eggs, but cows take about three years before getting anything from them," he said.



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