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Protecting Livestock – Improving Human Lives

Vaccines boost backyard poultry rearing in western Kenya (part 2)



The pastor turned poultry keeper

For 40 year old Newton Onyango Atela, pastor and father of five, improved indigenous chicken rearing economically sustains a home he runs for 187 disadvantaged children. Survival (and vaccination) of his 1,500-2,000 chickens matters, especially after he lost three-quarters of his 700 chickens to diseases preventable by vaccination in 2014. The chickens are reared free range and roam in a chicken mesh-enclosed compound. There are also iron sheet sheds where chickens stay at night, and the mud huts are used for brooding.

To ensure the chickens don't succumb to Newcastle, Gumboro or Fowl Typhoid diseases, Onyango vaccinates them every two to three weeks up to eight weeks old. Medication and vaccines cost him up to KSh 15,000 (US \$149) every four to six weeks. Hygiene practices are also maintained in the sheds, which have reduced disease outbreaks. "We are very serious on vaccines but we give medicine only when there is a disease," said Onyango. That has reduced deaths to 2%, which mostly occur in the brooder.

Revenue at Onyango's 12 hectare farm is generated by bulk sales of chickens to individual buyers or institutions such as colleges. During good months – such as festive periods – chicken sales are worth up to KSh 200,000 (US \$1,980) and in bad months are worth about KSh 100,000 (US \$990). Buyers also purchase chicks from the farm aged from one day old to over three weeks old. But eggs from the 350-360 layers are for the children in the home. Onyango has treasured chickens since he began rearing them two years ago; at times they have gotten him out of financial difficulties. "I have satisfaction having them. It's something golden to me," he says.



The tailor turned poultry keeper

Onyango's view is shared by 54 year old Hellen Atieno Rudolph who values her flock of 28 improved indigenous chickens above any other possession. She has been a tailor in her hometown of Kakwaro for 20 years and as a tradition, kept local indigenous chicken. Still she never imagined the chickens would out-earn her tailoring business.

That changed in 2014 when, after training by the NGO, Technoserve, in her village, Atieno switched to rearing improved indigenous Rainbow breed chickens. She learned the importance of vaccinating her chickens against diseases like Gumboro, Newcastle Disease and Fowl Pox. Today, with 0.4 hectares, the widowed mother of three earns about KSh 1,200-1,500 (US \$12-15) per month from selling a single chicken.

Atieno currently collects five eggs a day and locally sells one egg for KSh 10 (US \$0.10). "In a week I can alter and repair one or two dresses but the chickens bring in a lot more than tailoring," she says. Atieno vaccinates her chickens every three weeks until they are eight weeks old. On her piece of land she also grows groundnuts, maize, millet and vegetables on a subsistence basis. "Most of the food I eat I get from my farm. I don't rely on buying from the local markets," says Atieno.

According to a report by the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis, Kenya has about 31.4 million indigenous chickens being reared by farmers in rural areas. Indigenous chickens account for 84.1% of all poultry reared in the country.