



3 POULTRY PRODUCTION

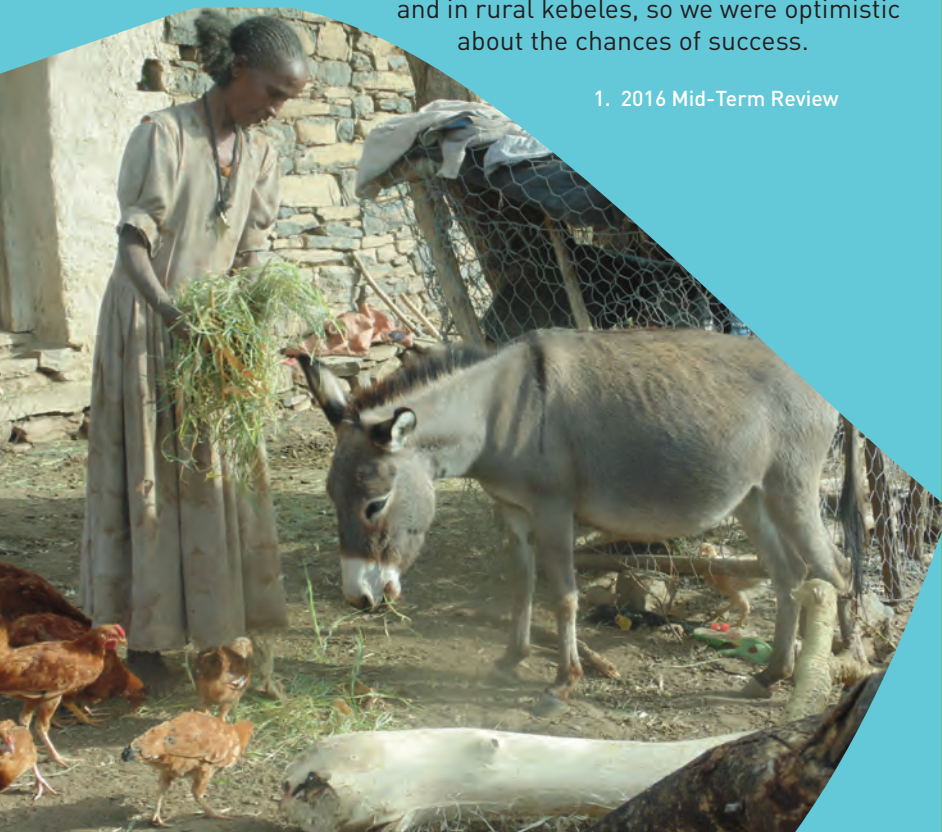
POULTRY REARING CAN BE A USEFUL WAY TO GENERATE REGULAR REVENUE FOR POOR HOUSEHOLDS WITH LIMITED ACCESS TO LAND AND LABOUR.

Farm Africa's Sustainable Agriculture for Improved Food Security Programme helped 1,312 households categorised as the 'poorest of the poor' rear poultry. The beneficiaries, all of whom were female-headed households, each received 15 pullets (45-day-old chicks). In addition, over 360 of them received 25kg of supplementary feed for the chickens.

The poultry support packages were designed to open up income generation opportunities and improve families' diets. Many of the beneficiaries were elderly women, and the average annual income earned from poultry was ETB 2,010 (or £68).¹

There was a buoyant market for chickens and eggs, both in Enticho town and in rural kebeles, so we were optimistic about the chances of success.

1. 2016 Mid-Term Review



SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE FOR IMPROVED FOOD SECURITY IN TIGRAY, ETHIOPIA

Land in Tigray's rugged mountains is scarce, and many farm sizes are very small. Many women, especially widows, and young people who have little access to land struggle to produce enough to feed their families. With funding from Irish Aid and the UK Department for International Development, Farm Africa worked directly with nearly 6,400 women and landless young people in Tigray's Ahferom woreda, providing them with the knowledge and skills to successfully bolster their food security and incomes through farming and rearing livestock.

This booklet is one of a series of six focusing on each of the project's key components:

1. Integrated watershed management
2. Fruit and vegetable production
3. Poultry production
4. Goat and sheep rearing
5. Honey production and marketing
6. Small-scale irrigation



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CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

The poultry package was the least successful of the packages of support provided by the project. Here we try to draw some critical lessons for any future endeavours to scale up poultry rearing in the region.

Some households managed to make a success out of poultry rearing, generating a healthy revenue stream from the sale of eggs. However, a significant number failed at poultry rearing, and the vast majority lost a number of their chicks before they started to earn any meaningful income. The Mid-Term Review estimated that there had been an average loss rate of 43%.

The story of 73-year-old W/ro Tseyatu Nere is instructive. She received 15 chicks from Farm Africa on the basis that she was a poor widow and had no children. "My life has become more miserable after I partially lost my sight. Fourteen of my chickens were stolen, and one was killed by a car on the main

asphalt road. Even if they had not been stolen, I wondered where I was going to get the feed for all the chickens. I would never again take chickens because they are too difficult to manage. I don't understand how I could have protected them anyway: even if Farm Africa had bought me a house for them, how can they possibly stay inside all day?"

Here we have identified a number of reasons for the limited success of the poultry package:

SIZE OF PACKAGE

Because we were targeting the 'poorest of the poor' we focused on distributing a flock of pullets that was manageable for the households, taking into consideration their labour availability, land and disposable income to pay for inputs. For this reason we decided on 15 pullets. The Government package size, however, was (and still is) 50 birds per household, although once a

package has reached that size, it no longer makes sense to target the poorest, as the farmer is then semi-commercialised.

Farm Africa's support did not include housing for the chicks. The lack of housing, which would have cost a household some ETB 3,000 (more than £100) for a flock of 50 birds made the flocks vulnerable to predators, exposure to weather, and disease. The feed allocation of 25kg per household was also insufficient to meet the needs of the 15-bird flock. This allocation only covered feed needs for one month. Six months of feed (after which the chickens can survive from foraging or cheaper feed) for 20 chickens costs ETB 1,400 (£47), which would have been a large outlay for a poor household. During the early growth stage, chickens do not produce eggs, so to start with there was no income coming in from the poultry to cover the cost of feed.

ANIMAL HEALTH

Chickens died due to poor feed and lack of appropriate housing. Their weakened state was also exacerbated by limited vaccination. When the project started there was poor provision by the woreda agriculture office of vaccine and treatment services. Recently, this has been improved, with the training of 10 voluntary women per kebele on poultry care. They are able to vaccinate for ETB 0.60 per chicken, and they themselves get the first round of vaccines for free from the woreda agriculture office. There still remains an issue with reliability of supply of vaccines from the region, and the risk of batches of vaccines expiring. This has been partially addressed with the reduction of numbers of vaccines in a given batch (from 500 to 250) and this creates further incentives for community poultry officers to buy batches of vaccine.

Another issue for many years was limitations to demand by community members, as well as limited feedback on instances of disease. To a large extent this was a by-product of the 'poorest of the poor' targeting, where the households in question did not take the care of the chickens too seriously, or see it as a business. Community outreach, more training, and targeting of slightly wealthier community members can all mitigate this challenge, although culturally in Tigray there remains a concern that farmers are more likely to see crop farming or livestock rearing as a business.

APPROACH TO TARGETING

The experience of the SAIFS programme in Tigray demonstrated a flaw in the initial design assumption about low input/regular income from poultry being ideal for the 'poorest of the poor'. There is a critical minimum

investment (especially in feed and housing) required to make poultry viable as an income generation endeavour. As such, there is a critical minimum size of flock that will make that investment worthwhile, which is around 50 birds per household. With an endeavour of that size, it is important that the household is able to devote time, money and land to the poultry rearing and care, and that they see it as a business. For this reason it is not suitable as an intervention for the 'poorest of the poor', compared to, say, goat rearing.

Another key lesson from the project is that sometimes spreading resources thinly to attain greater reach is a false economy because smaller investments at household level do not always secure the commitment. In some cases, we heard anecdotal evidence of households selling the poultry from the packages to meet basic household needs.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Our experience with poultry rearing was very mixed. One poultry beneficiary, 50-year-old Gerges Wolde Gebriel, saw great success in her enterprise, and her experience is instructive:

“Three years ago Farm Africa gave me 15 chickens, but no feed. I still have 15 chickens, and have sold a number of chickens and eggs. With the money from the sale of chickens, I settled fertiliser debt from government that amounted to ETB 1,410. I bought a donkey for ETB 2,200 and also bought a goat. I buy clothes and shoes for my children with the money from the sale of eggs.”

Asked why she succeeded while many others failed, Gerges said:

“I first built housing with mesh wire, which I was given by agriculture extension workers. The mesh wire had been left unused at a check dam construction site. The housing protected my chickens from predators as I kept them there most of the time. My chickens were never sick as I gave them medicine, which I prepare from different herbs and vegetables, using traditional methods. I think others failed because they lacked the awareness and the commitment to work hard. My family supports me, but I worked hard myself because I had experienced extreme poverty before and this made me strong.”

We recommend that poultry rearing (the investment in it, the arrangement of support services, the training) is approached as a serious business, much like beekeeping. It is important the level of support, and the targeting, matches that.

The government’s introduction of community poultry health agents is a positive step. NGOs and development partners could help strengthen that initiative, and help the local government reach more people.

There is growing momentum around the poultry value chain, particularly for meat (less so for eggs). Here there are a number of development partners planning to invest, but many gaps still to fill. For example, work still remains on genetic material, a system for reliable vaccine funding and dissemination, and feed, as well as the aggregation/supply chain function itself.

Any intervention at field level on poultry also requires engagement with the research community and private sector. There are interesting initiatives, run by Ethiochickens among others, to engage community members in the rearing of early stage chicks for aggregation. However, there is still confusion at local level between the breeds

appropriate for meat, and those appropriate for eggs. Meat varieties selected are typically less hardy, and require different feeding regimes, than those for egg production.

The regional and woreda governments need to tailor their support to specific value chains, and work closely with chicken aggregators (where relevant) to ensure the right package of breeds and inputs are readily available. Accessing more regularised markets for their chicks will reduce the overall cost of feed and vaccinations, and will generate the right incentives for households.

Parallel support to poultry for egg production should also continue, but with less emphasis on aggregation for market.



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