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Chicken handbook helps kick goals

Many of us are now running a few chooks in the backyard. It's a great way of using food scraps, having fresh eggs, and giving kids a first-hand experience of food production.

But for families living in rural areas of southern Africa, in countries like Mozambique and Malawi, keeping chickens can be a means of survival. In these areas 70 to 80 per cent of families keep chickens to boost their income, for high quality protein and micronutrients, fertiliser, and importantly as assets for women and children.

Australia's Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance, Bob McMullan, has launched a new manual to help smallholder poultry producers boost chicken production and control and prevent the disease outbreaks that can devastate flocks in developing countries.

"Village chicken improvement programs have the potential to contribute to each of the Millennium Development Goals," Mr McMullan said. "They can increase household incomes, improve family nutrition, and empower women – and this helps alleviate poverty for the most vulnerable families in the world."

In Southern Africa, Newcastle disease is a particular problem in village chickens, with outbreaks killing 50 to 80 percent of birds. In developing countries the disease is controlled with commercial vaccines, but a specially developed vaccine which does not require cold storage and transport, is proving to be a valuable tool to prevent Newcastle disease.

The I-2 vaccine was developed at the University of Queensland with funding from ACIAR. The seed vaccine is made available free to developing countries who are setting up their own facilities to produce vaccines for poor communities.

Sra Luisa Arnaldo, then a 36 year old widow with three children, living in Chirodzi-Ponte, Mozambique, is one of the many people who have benefited through the new vaccine, which is given three times a year as an eye drop vaccine.

Luisa had been unable to rear any more than three chickens at a time, barely enough for her family. After using the ACIAR-developed vaccine against Newcastle disease at a cost of US\$0.25 per bird, soon she had 25 chickens, including five roosters, which she sold for US\$2.25 each.

Some of the money Luisa used to invest in buying a goat, which subsequently produced offspring. Much of the rest was used to allow her three children to attend primary school.

ACIAR has now produced ***Improving village chicken production: a manual for field workers and trainers***, a practical toolkit on chicken production and disease control to further the gains made in village chicken production in communities most in need.

One of the main authors, Dr Robyn Alders, drew on her work on an AusAID-funded project with smallholders in Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania to develop the manuals and help fill a gap in the training literature on village chicken production.

“Improving village chicken production can have a profound effect on the wellbeing of rural families,” she said. “They can be especially beneficial to families affected by HIV where there is a lack of able bodied people in the family. Even wildlife can benefit, because a well-fed family is far less likely to kill wildlife for food,” Dr Alders said.

Robyn Alders is a village poultry specialist with the International Rural Poultry Centre of the KYEEMA Foundation, a non-profit organisation based in Brisbane.

Newcastle disease remains a major constraint to poultry production worldwide, even now killing more birds than avian influenza.

Improving village chicken production: a manual for field workers and trainers is available online at www.aciar.gov.au/publication/MN139.

Statistics

Mozambique		Australia	
Life expectancy at birth	approx 42.8 years	Life expectancy at birth	approx 80.9 years
Adult Literacy rate	38.7%	Adult Literacy rate	99%
Under 5 mortality rate / 1000 births	145	Under 5 mortality rate / 1000 births	6
GDP per person (\$US)	1,242	GDP per person (\$US)	31,794

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What is ACIAR?

ACIAR is a statutory authority that operates as part of the Australian Government's development assistance program. The Centre encourages Australia's agricultural scientists to use their skills for the benefit of developing countries and Australia.

ACIAR commissions research groups and institutions to carry out research and development projects with their counterparts in developing countries. Key Australian partners include universities, CSIRO, State departments of primary industries, and non-government organisations.

ACIAR has a substantial capacity building and training program, supporting overseas post-graduate students in Australia associated with ACIAR projects, and targeted research management training programs for overseas delegates.

ACIAR is based in Canberra with regional offices in Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, China, Philippines and India. For more information on the ACIAR program visit www.aciar.gov.au.