

Abstract

The indigenous chicken (IC) population in Kenya is estimated at 25.8 million birds and constitutes 81% of the total poultry population. The IC sub-sector contributes to food and nutrition security, income and social-cultural roles in majority of resource-poor rural households. These dual-purpose birds are raised under free-range management systems with minimum production inputs. The average productivity for the national flock remains low at about 60 eggs per hen per year. With increasing preference for white meat and quality range chicken, new concerns on biosafety of IC products have emerged. The scavenging system allows IC to access feed from different environments including those polluted with various contaminants. This paper reports on early findings of a project undertaken to evaluate and subsequently enhance the IC value chain (ICVC) in Makueni. In Makueni county a region with 65% poverty level, the ICVC has been identified as a major vehicle for poverty alleviation.

Indigenous chicken are the main livelihood enterprise and household bank, and ranked amongst the most desired technologies for drought mitigation in the region. The binding constraints in the ICVC are low productivity, lack of organized market and small flock sizes that curtail the enterprise viability. These challenges limit the opportunities for competitive market participation in a scenario where emerging niche urban markets are experiencing gaps in supply of quality IC. Besides low genetic potential, the major primary factor adversely affecting IC performance is poor feeding where birds scavenge with minimal supplementation. The growth rate of birds is therefore slow, leading to delayed sexual and body size maturity. Products of IC are of low quality with sub-standard carcass and small eggs. The above factors together with poor disease control, limit the expansion of flock sizes. Enhanced value in terms of quantity and quality of IC requires suitable interventions at various levels of the value chain. Data from Makueni indicates that adoption of producer level interventions would enhance flock sizes from the current household average of 15 birds to a range considered viable at 35-50 birds. Establishment of local hatcheries needs to be encouraged for supply of quality chicks. Availability of cost effective, IC specific feed supplements and suitable bio-security measures would significantly enhance productivity and bio-safety aspects. Proper flock planning and linking producer groups to terminal markets can significantly improve market participation and increase gross margins.