



Improving Maasai income and diet through poultry farming



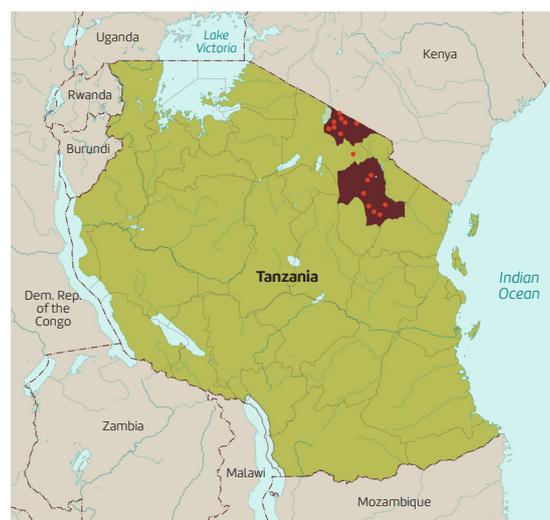
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Over the past few decades, the pressure on land and the effects of climate change are increasing in Tanzania. This has led to a reduction in the grazing and water resources available for the cattle, sheep, and goats kept by the pastoralist Maasai. The scarcity of resources, combined with recurrent droughts, has led to significant livestock mortality and reduced livestock productivity. Many Maasai depend entirely on their herds for their food and income. Accompanied by high population growth, this is making it more and more difficult for the Maasai to make a living from their herds. As a result, Maasai pastoralists need to adapt their livelihood strategies and diversify their income.

According to Maasai traditions, men make all the decisions about the sale of cattle, sheep and goats. Maasai women have very few sources of income and do not generally own livestock. Since it is not customary for the Maasai to raise chickens, men have no objection to leaving poultry farming in the hands of women. Indigenous chickens are known to be hardy and well adapted to rangeland conditions, as they are not dependent on rainfall or pasture production. They require minimal inputs and can serve as a source of protein, especially in the dry season when there are few cattle in the homesteads and milk is scarce.

What Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium does

Through the Maisha Bora¹ programme and in partnership with Heifer International Tanzania, we promoted chicken farming among pastoral women's groups in 15 villages in the districts of Longido and Simanjiro in the Northern Tanzanian rangelands from 2016 to 2020.



"Passing on the gift"

We selected about a hundred groups of 10 to 35 women who expressed an interest in the activity. Each group chose one household to host the model chicken shed for the group flock provided by the project, and one member to take an initial, one-week training course on poultry rearing, followed by regular refresher courses.

The group meets on a weekly basis to discuss husbandry techniques, disease recognition and treatment, and the costs and benefits of poultry rearing. They are supervised by an extension officer.

¹ The Maisha Bora programme (2015–2020), financed by the Belgian Fund for Food Security (BFFS), aimed to improve food security in the Longido and Simanjiro districts in Northern Tanzania. The programme involved multiple stakeholders and sectors, and was implemented by five international organisations: Iles de Paix, Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium, Trias, the World Food Program and ENABEL, and their local implementing partners.

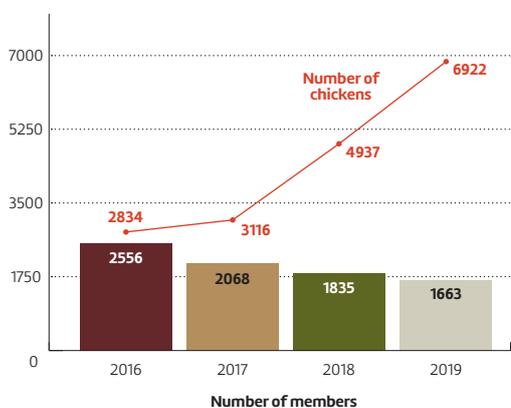
As the flock grew, each interested group member received a number of chickens from the group flock for further individual reproduction. The philosophy of “passing on the gift”, which is much appreciated locally, creates a cycle of giving that transforms recipients into donors, thus allowing indirect beneficiaries to gain from the project as well.

Results

In March 2016, we started with 102 groups (2556 members, 98% women) who each received about 20 pullets and 4 cockerels for collective breeding. In October 2019, 83 groups (1663 members) were still raising chickens in the group shed, with a total population of 6,922 chickens. 80% of the members (1343 women) had started rearing chickens at household level.

The first year was very challenging, we had to overcome initial difficulties related to disease, predation, incubation and high chick mortality. In 2017 and 2018, as experience in poultry rearing improved and better brooders and incubators were introduced, chick mortality decreased significantly and the hatching rate increased. This resulted in many groups taking on the activity, with excellent results and impressive impact. However some groups, notably those in the remotest areas, have abandoned poultry rearing because it was difficult to reconcile with their search for pastures for their livestock. The very high level of predation also played a role, as well as the lack of markets for eggs and poor availability of maize bran.

Evolution in number of group members and chickens within the groups ↓



Better income and improved food security

Before starting the project in 2015, only **6% of the Maasai households** in the 15 intervention villages **owned a few chickens**. These households were mainly located in larger village centres, close to non-Maasai households and a ready market for poultry products. By early 2020, an estimated **26% of the targeted households were practicing poultry farming**. The number of chickens per household is now estimated at 8 or more. The group poultry shed generates on average €100 per month, with the best-performing group selling up to 1000 eggs and 20 live chickens every month, generating up to €250 in a month.

In 2019, an average of 7 live chickens per household were sold over the year in the targeted villages in Longido and



Key figures

102
groups supported since 2016

with a total of **2,556** members

of which **98%** are women

80% of members started rearing their own chickens

+20% increase in households rearing chickens

+25% increase in households consuming poultry or eggs more than twice a week

€100 monthly revenues generated by group poultry sheds

more than **150,000** eggs sold in 2019

for an average income of **€25,400**

i.e. an average income of **€47** per family

Simanjiro Districts. More than 150,000 eggs were taken to market, with an economic value of approximately €25,400. This translates to an average annual income of about €47 per household having adopted poultry rearing.

Since the project started, supported households have **significantly improved and diversified their diets**. The number of households consuming meat products more than twice a week increased by 40%. Consumption of milk or dairy products increased by 30% and consumption of chicken/egg products more than twice a week increased by 25%. In five years, the number of families owning more than three types of livestock increased by 15%.



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Lessons learnt

A tool to empower women

By allocating improved breeds of chicken to women's groups and individual women, Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium, in partnership with Heifer International, has strengthened women's position in the community. The participation of women in local market activities is becoming increasingly accepted. It is even encouraged by some men, as it reduces the need for them to sell livestock and does not explicitly threaten their power. This makes women pivotal players in the diversification of pastoral livelihoods.

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