



# Improving traditional poultry farming to increase income and promote the empowerment of women in Burundi



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In Burundi, poultry farming is not generally considered to be a profitable activity for generating income, either by political decision-makers or the farmers themselves. That is why the activity tends to be the preserve of women and children, and chickens are not given any particular care. Consequently, they have very low yields and hardly bring in any income at all.

Nevertheless, poultry farming is a significant lever for improving food security and economic security in rural areas. Local chickens are hardy and undemanding. If they are well farmed, the sale of live chickens and eggs yields a consistent profit. Moreover, these products are excellent sources of protein.

Furthermore, the central role played by women in poultry farming makes it an effective means of promoting their empowerment and strengthens their social status. This is a considerable advantage in a context where women rarely have access to economic and social development.

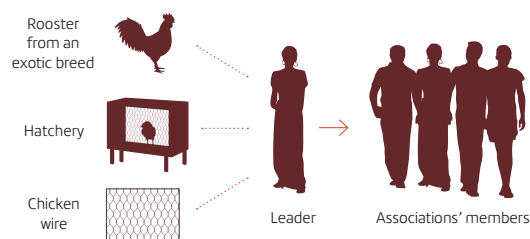
## What Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium does

Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium and its local partner UCODE-AMR coach poultry farmers in four villages in Ngozi province. Our objective is to **promote an improved form of traditional poultry farming** to respond better to the farmers' needs and to the constraints of the local context.

In consultation with the poultry farmers, we opted for **broiler chicken production**. In contrast to laying hens, such chickens require little investment and generate more income<sup>1</sup>.

### Associations and cascade training

Poultry farmers are organised into associations and elect "**leaders**" on each hill from among the most experienced and motivated volunteers. Then these people are **trained** in diet, habitat and management of poultry reproduction and health. They also receive a **rooster** from an exotic breed known for its productivity, a **hatchery** where the chicks can be protected from predators and **chicken wire** to build coops. We also advise them to grow certain plants to make sure their chickens have a varied and balanced diet whilst protecting their soil from erosion. These leaders have the responsibility to pass on good practices to the other poultry farmers in their association by means of a **cascade training** process.



Grouping the poultry farmers into **associations** makes it easier for them to market their (live) poultry and eggs. Acting collectively gives them more weight with regard to buyers, sellers of farming inputs and political decision-makers. The associations control the purchase price of nutritional supplements and the sale price of poultry, eggs and chicks. They also support the poultry farmers in a savings and loan process to finance chicken feed and care.

<sup>1</sup> However broiler chicken eggs can still be sold, constituting a secondary source of income.

## Animal health

In parallel, we train and equip **poultry health workers** whose job it is to diagnose, treat and prevent the occurrence of the most common diseases (Newcastle or Gumboro disease, infectious bronchitis etc.). We have also set up four **agro-veterinary stores** where vets and animal health workers can stock up on vaccines and medicines. The poultry farmers can buy food for their birds there as well.

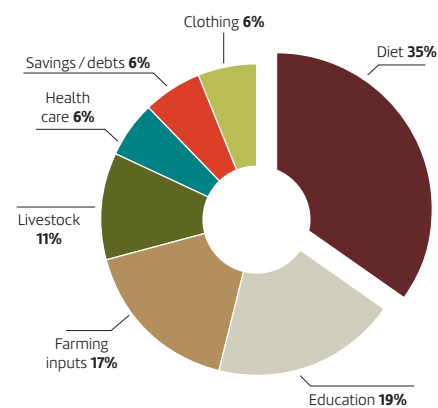
Along with the local vets, our poultry health workers ensure poultry health cover by means of quarterly vaccination campaigns. Awareness campaigns run by the leaders of the poultry farmers' associations ensure that many farmers participate.

## Results

Since August 2018, almost **200 leaders**, 91 of whom were women, have taken our training courses and received our material support. They run 52 associations with a total of more than **1,000 members**, representing **one in eight poultry keepers in the area**.

Thanks to our support, the leaders' core breeding flocks have grown from an average of 3 to 5 hens. Since the local breed hens have been crossed with exotic breed roosters, the farmers have been raising chicks that are more productive but still well-adapted to the local context. Collectively, they have raised and **sold more than 3,800 birds in two years**, representing an amount of roughly **€25,000**. Their **average annual income has risen by a third** to approximately €1,350, 11% of which comes from poultry farming.

Allocation of income from poultry farming



This increase in income is reflected mainly in the households' **diet**, since poultry farmers can grow more crops and buy more varied food. Furthermore, the families consume more eggs from their chickens (almost 40% of their production, or 10% more than in 2018). We have also observed a net improvement in the families' diets: the nutritional diversity score among women and young children has increased from 4 to 5.5.

Our **49 poultry health workers** (14 of whom are women) contribute greatly to strengthening the poultry health network in the area. Since they started work, the **mortality rate in chickens has dropped from an average of 46% (or as much as 100% during epidemics) to less than 20%**.



### Key figures

**200**  
leaders trained  
of which  
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**52**  
associations  
with a total  
of more than  
**1,000**  
members  
**3,800**  
chickens sold  
**+33%**  
increase in  
average annual  
income  
less than  
**20%**  
mortality rate  
in chickens  
**4**  
annual vaccination  
campaigns  
more than  
**52,000**  
chickens  
vaccinated  
per year

Our four annual vaccination campaigns (whether paying or free) attract around 3,000 poultry farmers. They make it possible to **vaccinate more than 52,000 chickens** every year against recurrent diseases.

The same benefits have been observed in all the poultry farmers in the area, albeit to a lesser extent. Thanks to the training and coaching provided to the leaders and to better health cover, **higher quantities of poultry and eggs are available at local markets** and the income of poultry farmers is increasing.



## Lessons learnt

Our experience with poultry farming in Burundi has proved that considerable improvements are possible with limited investment. Our approach has made it possible for the **socio-economic conditions of households to improve rapidly**. In fact, the high demand for poultry products is constantly increasing, which allows poultry farmers to recover their investments quickly. Moreover, poultry farming does not require much space, which makes it a particularly attractive option in a country where land taxes are a constantly increasing burden.

Raising awareness among poultry farmers by the leaders helps to spread good practices quickly with the intention of **empowering** the populations. However, these efforts would have little effect without the development and reinforcement of a **well-functioning animal health network**. The health checks provided by our poultry health workers within the community have already greatly reduced the mortality rate and epidemics.

The improvements resulting from our approach have especially benefited women. Poultry farming enables them to earn money that they can invest in the purchase of larger livestock or use for their family. **Enhancing the value of poultry farming also helps to increase appreciation for the work and position of women in rural societies**. Their role as leaders gives them better representation in decision-making bodies, whether this means the poultry-farming associations or organisations in their community.

[vsf-belgium.org](http://vsf-belgium.org)



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