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Characterisation of Small-Scale Commercial Poultry Sector in Western Kenya

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Poultry production can enhance the livelihoods of rural people. Poultry production in low and middle-income countries is dominated by small-scale backyard systems with low inputs and low outputs. Poultry production, productivity and generated income can be enhanced through intensification; the provision of inputs such as improved breeds, feed, housing and health-care. In Kenya, poultry production systems encompass free-range, semi-intensive and intensive systems. Despite a growing intensive sector, mostly located in and around Nairobi and other cities, indigenous chickens still dominate poultry production. However, their productivity could be improved in semi-intensive and intensive systems. Intensification is a relatively recent process in low- and middle-income countries compared to high-income countries. The complex reality of smallholders trying to improve their production is poorly understood and described. We explored the commercial chicken sector in a rural area distant from major production centres, and developed a fine-scale typology of commercial farms in western Kenya. We surveyed 111 chicken commercial farms in 2016. We targeted farms who sell the majority of their production, with 50 chickens or more, and in which animals were at least partly confined and were provided feeds. Farms were found mainly to raise dual-purpose indigenous chickens in association with crop production and were not specialised towards any particular product or market. Although the farmers interviewed shared many features of free-range system, they expressed the wish to make a commercial activity of their chicken production, with large flocks and management similar to semi-intensive farms. Four types of farms were identified based on two groups of variables, related to intensification and accessibility; (i) remote, small-scale old farms, with small flocks, using a lot of their own crops as feed, (ii) medium-scale, old farms with a larger flock and well located (iii) large-scale young farms, with large flocks, (iii-a) well located and who buy their chicks and (iii-b) remotely located and who hatch their chicks. These groups sit along a gradient of intensification. Location, which affects access to markets and inputs, determines the opportunities available to farmers and thus gives rise to further diversity in farm management types. We found that commercial chicken farms in western Kenya varied greatly in terms of management, opportunities and challenges.

Keywords: Farm typology, livestock intensification, poultry production

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