

CONTRIBUTION OF INDIGENOUS CHICKENS TO IMPROVEMENT OF LIVELIHOODS OF THE FARMERS IN VHEMBE DISTRICT

By

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ABSTRACT

There is a growing concern in the world over the worsening poverty, hunger and malnutrition. This is particularly so in developing countries, including South Africa. Indigenous chickens could be used to alleviate poverty, especially in rural areas. However, there is dearth of research that clarifies the contribution of indigenous chickens to rural-based households in Vhembe District of South Africa. Thus, this study aimed to determine the contribution of indigenous chickens towards improving rural livelihoods in Tshikota community within Makhado Local Municipality. The Municipality is one out of the four that constitute Vhembe District in Limpopo Province.

Qualitative and quantitative data were collected using focus group discussions and a survey questionnaire, respectively. Four extension officers and 20 community members were randomly selected to participate as key informants. Semi-structured interview guides were used to collect the data. A combination of snowball and random sampling techniques were used to select 95 farmers involved in indigenous chickens. A formal survey questionnaire was administered to them. Thematic Content analysis was adopted for qualitative data analysis. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences was used to compute descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations and Chi-square and correlations for the quantitative data.

About 58 % of the farmers were involved in indigenous chicken production, followed by broilers (12.1 %) and layers (1.1 %). Most of the people involved in indigenous chicken farming (48.8 %) inherited the business from their family members, while 41.9 % started their business after purchasing the chickens from others. About 8.1 % of the farmers started their projects with chickens they received as birthday presents from relatives and friends. It was also found that indigenous chicken farmers in Tshikota were predominantly female (67 %). Most families involved in indigenous chicken farming relied mostly on chickens for petty cash. From now and then they would sell the chickens to raise children's school fees and also income to meet households' expenditures. Moreover, jobs created through indigenous farming were regarded as indicators of improved livelihoods for the farmers residing in Tshikota. It was also revealed that better living conditions in terms of money indigenous farmers' families made improved their livelihoods. Predation and mortalities due to diseases were the two major challenges facing the farmers. In order to enhance the role of indigenous chickens as a poverty alleviation tool, it is recommended that veterinary services should be made available to the farmers through

education and training workshops. These services would equip the farmers with the necessary skills aimed at improving management of diseases, proper feeding, programming and marketing.

Key words: Chickens, household income, indigenous, farmers, poverty alleviation, rural livelihoods