



Why Village Poultry is a necessary route for Cameroon

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Summary: This article explores the possibilities of village poultry as a viable sector to boost protein deficiencies in Cameroon. It outlines the fallouts of climate change such as prolonged droughts, unpredictable rainfalls etc plus shrinking Fisheries as indicators for the need to diversify incomes and improve rural well being via sustainable village poultry. It also supports the embedding of Village Poultry Field Schools as necessary in sustaining the sector in Cameroon.

Cameroon in 2004 registered a population of 16.1 million. This increase meant that the country more than ever had to ensure food security in urban and rural areas like many other poor African countries (Hall and Midgley, 2004) not to witness popular discontent and strife. Food security became a necessary route for Cameroon not only by the mediations of population increase but by many other reasons that include climate change.

The harsh fallouts of climate change generally include:

- Unpredictable rainfalls (Winarto et al., 2008) leading to strange and irregular climatic patterns opposed to farmers' traditional methods and perceptions hence affecting negatively, farmers' work style, output and income from farm products.
- Prolonged droughts which have lead to increase hours of work in farms. Drought forsaken lands need more labour to be hired seasonally for ploughing or tilling and have driven farmers to using sometimes unsustainable expensive concentrates in many poor communities. These communities also complain of low yields and limited fodder availability for their goats, sheep or cattle. This calls for better farmer policies for harvesting water, forecasting rainfalls and pre-empting floods, using farm ridges as water traps etc (Winarto et al., 2008)
- More so, the low productivity in farms is extremely harsh on families with members suffering from HIV/AIDS etc as their incomes shrink even further from under utilisation of households' man power. In some cases shrinking incomes

from farms have led to sale of family animals or even land to supplement needs. This trend is noticeable in drought-hit areas of North Cameroon and in extreme cases has led to migration to other areas for want of fertile lands and watering holes.

Recent other fallouts linked to the state of wellbeing and livelihoods in Cameroon stem primarily from consumption patterns imposed by strategic limitations in livelihoods methods as well as national socio-economic constraints including poverty. The other fallouts linked to the general state of livelihoods in Cameroon include:

- High red meat prices (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-CkTq_7TN1E) imposed by growing scarcity of cattle from traditional pastoralisms which have shrunk protein intake among poor households and affected the resilience of household members suffering from diseases like tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. A kilogram of red meat soared to 2500 Francs CFA in 2008 in most urban areas in Cameroon.
- Decline in fisheries ([An Arrey Mbongaya Ivo film on threatened coastal livelihoods in the West Coast of Limbe](#)) in the past ten years from 10 to 5 tonnes shrunk fishing livelihoods and caused occupational mobility from these options to hunting and sometimes unsustainable forest farming.
- More so, with growing dependence on forest resources, unsustainable harvesting of non-timber forest products of both plant and animal origins has soared. With growing scarcity of wild animals enhanced by habitat loss imposed by climate change, urbanisation, farming and over-harvest, conservation interventions

become ineffective (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYKxG-WFSHE>) or compromised while the need for village poultry is even more reiterated.

- High prices for concentrates and medical care for intensive farming and poultry respectively which are incidences from growing food scarcity, have also not favoured broad entries into these livelihoods options (Arrey, 2008) making it inevitable for Cameroon to strategise for village poultry in order to supplement protein deficiencies and boost domestic food production and its Gross Domestic Product in general.
- Besides, the scarcity of other protein sources like goat meat without a corresponding massive production scale of fast breeders like cane rats, quails and snails have incidentally favoured the need to establish Village Poultry as a viable sector in the country.
- Also, lack of effective synergies between hunting and farming communities, conservators and policy makers have prevented the upsurge of holistic, bottom-top policies to boost protein consumption based on informed data from related communities or livelihoods like fishing and hunting or trends like decline in fisheries and increase in unsustainable forest farming or hunting etc. Fragmented policies have made monitoring of protein markets difficult and the true value of protein, farming or fishing livelihoods unknown to policy makers and communities. This has thus prevented strategic interventions to boost failing sectors or to encourage dynamic and sustainable livelihoods tools.

Thus, it is clear that Cameroon with a nexus of over 200 tribes which have practiced village poultry for centuries now, can benefit from the expanding the sector as a viable

way of empowering communities and poverty reduction. The advantages of village poultry include the following:

- Firstly, there are available and tested poultry breeds in most Sub-Saharan African Countries. Recently the sector accounted for over 25 million birds which are 90% of national flock in Mozambique (Lough et al., 2001; ICRISAT, 2004, Alders et al., 2007). In Cameroon the local breeds have been raised over time in various regions hence there is little need for adaptation policies as these breeds are acquainted to the natural resources and climatic factors of the regions which they have been exposed to over time. Policy makers do not therefore need to import birds or eggs to jump start the sector in Cameroon.
- More so, the fowls can be raised with already tested methods hence policies to boost village poultry can readily benefit from farmers experiences over time. Most of village poultry in Cameroon has been done on an extensive or semi-extensive way which is friendly to many rural communities that still have extensive rangelands for local poultry and even neighbouring forests that act as food sources and offer ecology for natural incubation of some fowls.
- Also, village poultry is not affected by many diseases. The most common disease in many sub-Saharan African countries is Newcastle Disease which has a vaccine. Using vaccines for village poultry can arguably increase their resilience to diseases, better their productivity and add farmers' incomes from eggs and chicken sales if many fowls are successfully raised.
- Besides, more than 70% of Cameroon's population lives in rural villages. Village poultry will boost protein dependencies in rural areas, step up profitability and

encourage supplies to urban centres usually submerged in high food prices and scarcity characteristic of Sub-Saharan Africa (Hall and Midgley, 2004)

- Village poultry in Cameroon can also benefit from other tested interventions in Africa and the expertise of institutions engaged in it. An important initiative for village poultry was launched in Mozambique by FAO and IRPC of the Kyeema Foundation targeting households with HIV/AIDS in Manica and Tete Provinces (Alders et al, 2007). Other interventions have a proven curriculum on village poultry as they were implemented as Junior Farmer Field Schools and Farmer Field Schools to train farmers on extensive and semi-extensive ways of keeping fowls and selling poultry products and to encourage users to using village poultry as a livelihoods tool or to fight poverty.

Therefore, for Village Poultry to become viable in Cameroon, the following policies must be put in place:

- The creation of Junior Village Poultry Field Schools and Village Poultry Field Schools which will train new users and communities into the profession and also share and learn from farmers' practices and experiences. This will lead to farmers' participation, spreading of knowledge and communal ownership of policies aimed at boosting village poultry as well as creates partnerships between government and various village poultry stakeholders. These institutions will also lead to the establishment of village poultry curriculum accessible to farmers, policy makers etc thereby facilitating the embedding of the industry in Cameroon.
- More so, there must be an inventory of local poultry breeds to identify threatened species, more adaptable and sustainable species and to establish which species can

be introduced in areas where village poultry is minimal. This will better domestic food security and enhance availability of fowls and eggs in remote areas hence increasing access to proteins by poor Cameroonian sub-populations.

- There is also the need to identify common diseases affecting village poultry locally and to step up campaigns over community channels like community radios, village meetings and poultry synergies in order to design best methods for curbing or eradicating threatening diseases.
- Besides, interventions to monitor the markets for village poultry are useful in establishing the value of poultry products to the economy and in encouraging vulnerable and other sub-populations in using village poultry as a profitable and sustainable livelihoods tool.
- More so, funding both domestic and foreign is needed to boost the sector and add competitive advantage over other sectors like intensive poultry with concentrates, “Bush Meat” hunting which arguably counter conservation practices in Cameroon. In terms of foreign funding and domestic funding, more accountable institutions to monitor finances are necessary to prevent diversion and elite capture of resources.

With this, it is clear that village Poultry in Cameroon is valuable in stepping up protein bases and in creating employment and diversification of incomes in village communities.

It is instrumental in curbing potential movements into unsustainable hunting for bush meat or poultry farming with concentrates which is unaffordable to many rural communities. Village Poultry must however strive on historical, cultural, tested and scientific practices and use local breeds, natural and available food systems which are

vital for replicability and sustainability. These tallies well with the fact that village poultry is not submerged in many diseases and high medical costs. Common diseases have vaccines and low mortality rates mean more proteins for disadvantaged segments like the poor, people with HIV/AIDS etc. The sector can also be subsidized to encourage more users while Junior Village Poultry Field Schools and Village Poultry Field Schools are important in embedding the sector in Cameroon. All these aspects are mediated by the need for funding and accountable institutions to monitor and construct the sector into a viable sustainable contributor to Cameroon's Gross Domestic Product. Another vital mediation is participatory partnerships between stakeholders for collaborative advantage, learning and documentation. Through these options Village Poultry will not only be a necessary route for Cameroon but a necessary pillar for socio-economic wellbeing and the balancing of national life.

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Some relevant pictures by Arrey Mbongaya Ivo below:



Local hen hatches in an old pot in Isokolo village Cameroon. Picture is courtesy of Arrey Mbongaya Ivo.



Cock being raised extensively in rural Cameroon. Village Poultry Field Schools can effectively establish viable curriculum for raising poultry extensively or semi-extensively in Cameroon in order to attract new users into the sector and sustain it too. Picture is courtesy of Arrey Mbongaya Ivo.

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