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The State of Poultry Production and Breeding Systems in Malawi

TIMOTHY N.P. GONDWE, CLEMENS WOLLNY

Georg-August University Göttingen, Institute of Agronomy and Animal Production in the Tropics and Subtropics, Germany

Abstract

Poultry production in Malawi is categorised into rural, smallholder subsistence oriented and urban, commercial oriented sectors. The rural poultry sector constitutes close to 80 % of the population, mainly found in rural areas. Poultry species consist of chickens (83 %), pigeons (14 %), ducks (2 %) and few turkeys and guinea fowls. Birds are raised in small flocks of one to 20 animals with mixed age-groups of local populations. Uses are multipurpose, ranging from food for human beings, sale for income and food shortage buffer, socio-cultural to asset and gender status functions. Despite their dominance in rural areas, local poultry are available in urban households. It is speculated that local poultry have a commanding proportion of the market in major cities. This observation is yet to be documented. Uncontrolled random mating is practised, which is often modulated by indigenous breeding practices. Major constraints include Newcastle disease that wipes out flocks during dry periods of the year, poor and extended growth and low reproductive potential with high chick mortality.

Commercial poultry production dominates in urban and peri-urban areas primarily for commercial broiler and layer production. Over 80 % of production is on small-scale backyard system in households of working class people. Batches of 100 to 500 broiler strains are common, with at most three batches per annum. The main employment is the capital source for such production, supplemented by short-term loans. Major constraints of layer production are poor management in terms of feeding and disease control, input and output market uncertainties that result in high chick (up to 37 %) and feed (over 80 %) costs and poor quality feeds. There is growing demand for poultry products due to urbanisation (human population grows by 4.5 % p.a.). Policies that will promote rural poultry production will also increase income contribution to the rural human population (76 % of the national population).

Keywords: Breeding, commercial poultry production, Malawi, rural poultry production