

Finding new ways to improve household poultry production

In the community of Swayimane in KwaZulu-Natal Province, the Misereor-funded ELI-FaNS (“Expanding the Promotion of Local Innovation for Food Security and Healthy Nutrition to Strengthen Resilience with a Focus on Women”) project coordinated by the Institute of Natural Resources (INR) has identified several innovative ideas applied by local people in eMambedwini and Mbhava villages. The team selected two innovations in indigenous chicken production for participatory innovation development because of their potential to enhance local food security and diversify household income, especially through creating livelihood options for women and youth.

The first innovation, developed by Ms Jali in eMambedwini village, involves separating chicks from the mother hen. After losing several chicks to predators (dogs, snakes and hawks),

she came up with the idea of separating the chicks from their mother while they were still young and raising them in a secure chicken coop rather than letting them run free in order to boost their survival rate and ensure their wellbeing. She usually releases the chicks after three months, when they are fully grown. Through this simple but effective innovation, she could improve chicken productivity and generate income by selling her indigenous chickens in the informal market, where local people value them for meat and for religious or traditional purposes. Because few indigenous chickens are available in the mainstream retail sector, Ms Jali can sell her chickens for US\$10 (ZAR180) each.

The Prolinnova team visited Mrs Jali to get to know her and to learn more about her innovation. One of her challenges was to create enough space to accommodate the growing number of

chicks. The team helped her build an additional structure with shade net and mesh wire to house the chicks and assisted her with drinkers and feeders to support the chick-rearing process. This was a contribution from the ELIFaNS project towards establishing a relationship that could lead to PID.

Ms Jali is now eager to explore other specific local breeds that have black feathers, white feathers and a combination of red and black feathers, because these colours are in high demand on the local market. Determined to further increase chicken productivity and income, she continues to try out new poultry-farming practices, supported by the Prolinnova team and her family members.

The second innovation, developed by the high-school student Manelisi Vidima in Mbhava village, involves building laying boxes on top of a chicken coop. Because he was losing chicken eggs to dogs and other predators living in the shrubby area near his family’s homestead, he used locally available resources such as black wattle



Ms Jali’s newly constructed chick house.

Credit: M Myende



Manelisi Vidima monitoring the hens in his old nesting boxes.

Credit: M Myende



Manelisi Vidima's new improved nesting boxes.

Credit: M Myende

wood and old metal-roofing sheets to craft nesting boxes and placed them on top of the coop in the yard. This has the potential to increase both egg and chicken production and to provide a source of income for him and his family but since the nesting boxes were roughly constructed, more than one chicken frequently laid eggs in one and the same compartment, which led to significant losses of eggs during the brooding period.

In initiating the PID process, the Prolinnova team assisted Manelisi in constructing a new chicken-nesting box using metal sheets, pallet wood and shade cloth. This box has seven compartments and can house one laying hen per compartment and approximately 20 eggs. The team will work closely with this young innovator to monitor the

effectiveness of this intervention in terms of improving production.

When asked how he came up with the innovation, Manelisi responded, "The idea came through my head. I had never seen it done anywhere before. I was faced with a challenge and thought of dealing with it the way I did, luckily it has been working for me". Behind his innovation is a strong support system, with his mother, a subsistence maize farmer, playing a crucial role in looking after the chickens while he attends school. Her determination to assist her son in this way highlights the strength of "Imbokodo" (strong women) like her in the rural communities.

What is striking about these two innovations is how they arose. They were born out of necessity, driven by the challenges the innovators face in their

everyday lives. The Prolinnova team is actively engaging with such innovators, encouraging them to take the lead in refining their ideas and addressing their day-to-day challenges. These local innovations reveal ways in which rural communities can use existing and low-cost resources to improve their food security and generate income. The team is also encouraging an exchange of ideas between Manelisi and Ms Jali, as they may be able to solve each other's challenges more effectively than working in isolation. In time, the information will be shared more widely within the local communities.

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