



Current Status of Indigenous Chicken Production performance, Opportunity and Challenges in Ethiopia: A Review

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this article is to examine the current state of indigenous chicken production performance, as well as its opportunities and challenges. Indigenous chicken (78.8 %) out of 57 million in Ethiopia is found in huge numbers distributed across different agro-ecological zones. Indigenous chickens are kept in rural areas for a variety of reasons, including animal protein, extra revenue, replacement breeding, and religious/cultural reasons. Indigenous chickens have been reported to have inherent scavenging, foraging, and nesting behavior and are well adapted to harsh environmental conditions. They are characterized by low production and productivity. This is mainly attributed to the poor genetic makeup, huge disease burden, and poor veterinary services, lack of quality and affordable feeds. Studies conducted by several researchers showed that, despite their low overall productivity, indigenous chicken populations have wide ranges of morphological and phenotypic variation within and among them. The average annual egg production of Indigenous chicken in Ethiopia is 46 eggs. Most of the publications reviewed indicated that the age of the first egg ranges from six to seven months indicating late maturity. Generally, the poultry sector's economic contribution is still not commensurate to the vast number of chickens due to diverse production, reproductive, and infrastructure constraints in the country. Therefore, it must address the challenges facing the poultry sub-sector, a holistic approach to solving the bottlenecks along the poultry value chain is necessary under the current condition in Ethiopia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Livestock is an important component of agriculture, accounting for 35 to 49 percent of agricultural GDP, 37 to 87 percent of household income, and 15 to 17 percent of the country's foreign exchange revenues (Endalew and Ayalew, 2016). In Ethiopia, there are approximately 57 million chicken heads, with 78.85 percent, 12.02 percent, and 9.11 percent of the total chicken being indigenous, hybrid, and exotic, respectively (CSA, 2021). Indigenous chickens are found in practically every rural and peri-urban part of the country, and they serve a variety of purposes including religious/cultural considerations, money generating, and egg and meat provision (Moreki *et al.*, 2010; Bekerie, 2015). Local ecotypes or native chickens are the most common indigenous chicken types raised in Ethiopia, with a wide range of body size, plumage color, comb type, and production (Halima, 2007).

In the traditional village poultry production system, the rural sector accounts for nearly all of the overall chicken population (Halima, 2007). Due to low feed costs, area requirements, and animal prices, their production fits well with the circumstances of rural homes (Dessie *et al.*, 2013). Due to feed shortages, predators, disease, veterinary service and health management, marketing, genetic quality (breed), and extension service, they are known for their low production performance (Waktole *et al.*, 2018; Kejela *et al.*, 2019).

Indigenous chickens, on the other hand, are noted for their disease resistance, good egg and meat flavor, hard egg shells, high fertility, and hatchability (Melesse, 2000). As a result, most Ethiopian consumers prefer to buy indigenous chicken from village producers, as it is believed to be more flavorful and better suited for making traditional chicken sauce (Dana *et al.*, 2010). However, because to the presence of multiple productions, reproductive, and infrastructure constraints, the sector's economic contribution is still not proportional to the large number of chickens (Halima, 2007). As a result, the goal is to assess the current state of indigenous chicken production performance, opportunities, problems, and provide a summary of information for beneficiaries and readers.

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1. Ethiopian Indigenous chicken production

Chicken production is primarily based on conventional vast production systems with local chicken ecotypes and low purchased-inputs in many developing nations (Garcia *et al.*, 2007). In Sub-Saharan Africa, 85 percent of all families raise chickens on a free range system,

with women owning 70% of them, and their production serves as a valuable supply of animal protein in the form of meat and eggs, as well as a reliable source of monetary revenue in rural and urban areas (Abubakar *et al.*, 2007; Asgedom, 2007). They are disease resistant, have a low feed utilization rate, are non-selective to feeds, require little management, can be kept in simple shade, do more scavenging, are locally available, and are inexpensive to buy.

Indigenous chickens in Ethiopia are found in huge numbers distributed across different agro ecological zones under a traditional family-based scavenging management system. Indigenous chicken productivity is low as compared to exotic breeds with average annual egg production of 60 eggs. Low productivity is also due to low hatchability about (70%) and high mortality of indigenous chicken (Getachew, 2016). Farmers in the Amhara (Farta) and Oromia (Horro) regions give the highest emphasis for plumage color while in the southern region (Konso and Sheka) live weight is used as the most important selection criteria. The emphasis given to each trait category is largely similar across the sexes except that, unlike for males Getu and Birhan (2014). Ethiopian indigenous chickens have a variety of morphological appearances. They vary in color, comb type, body conformation and weight and may or may not possess shank feather. Eggs have thick shells and deep yellow colored yolk. The production performance of indigenous local scavenging chickens of Ethiopia is low because of their low egg production potential, high chick mortality, longer reproductive cycle, the low genetic potential (slow growth rate, late sexual maturity and broodiness for an extended period) (Besbes, 2009).

Indigenous chickens are generally dominated by flock size and have a high capacity for adapting to various agro-ecologies through routine management strategies (Dessie *et al.*, 2003). Rural populations keep indigenous chickens for a variety of reasons, including animal protein, additional financial income, replacement breeding, and religious/cultural considerations (Alders *et al.*, 2009; Moges *et al.*, 2010). Many characteristics distinguish their product, including good egg and meat flavor, hard shells, high dressing percentages, and especially inexpensive cost. The importance of indigenous chicken breeds for subsistence farmers in many developing nations, as well as the preference of many consumers for their eggs and meat, suggests that these genetic resources are not in immediate danger (Farrell, 2013). The majority of native birds are sold live, and buyers take great care to ensure that they are purchasing healthy birds (Moreda *et al.*, 2016).



Figure 1. Local chicken

2.2. Egg production and Age at first age lying of female chicken

The production performance of Ethiopian indigenous chicken reported by different authors. According to Melkamu, (2014) an average of 65 eggs is laid per hen per year. Indigenous chickens, have low productivity average annual egg production is estimated at 60 eggs (average 38 g). According to Kidane (1980) the average annual egg production potential of indigenous chicken at Wolita agricultural development unit was ranged between 30-60 eggs under village free range production systems. (FAO, 2004) report, the average egg production of native chicken was 34 eggs per year under village condition annually. Similarly At Asela, Brannang and Pearson (1990) discovered that the average egg production of local birds was 34 eggs/hen/year with average egg weight of 38g.

The study conducted in Bench Maji Zone, South Western Ethiopia, indicates the average age at first lay of village chicken ranges from 5.82 to 5.92 months for mean age months (Getachew, 2016). This is shorter than the report of Mekonnen (2007) age at first egg of 7.07 months from indigenous pullets of Dale woreda the value of which is longer than that of the Gomma Woreda of Jimma by 0.73 months (Meseret, 2010). In North West Ethiopia 31.92 % of the pullets reached maturity at 28 weeks late sexual maturity. In Mid-rift valley of Ethiopia, the age at first egg is 6-7 months indicating late maturity (Halima, 2007)..

According to (Alem, 2014) Average age at first egg was 27.2 weeks for local breeds ranged from 24 to 28 weeks. Clutch number also had highly significant effect on average egg production/hen/clutch. According to Bogale (2008) a hen lays about 36 eggs in three clutches and 12 to 13 eggs per each clutch per year. Report of CSA (2010/11), indicated the average length egg-laying period/hen estimated 23 days. Mean annual egg production/hen the average eggs laid/clutch/hens is 16.88, 14.23 and 11.9 eggs for Quara, Alefa and Tach Armachiho districts, respectively (Addisu *et al*

(2013). Numbers of eggs per clutch per hen per year for indigenous were 11(Habte *et al* (2013). According to (Alem , 2014) average number of eggs laid per hen per clutch was 13.6 for local hens and ranged from 9 to 18 eggs, in lowland and midland agro ecological zones of central Tigray, in northern Ethiopia. Fisseha *et al* (2010) reported that the average number of eggs/hen per clutch is 15.7, 13.2 and 14.9 in Bure, Fogera and Dale Woredas, respectively.

2.3. Major challenges of indigenous chicken production in Ethiopia

2.3.1. Diseases

Diseases are the most significant restrictions to the production of scavenging chickens in the chicken production system (Guteta and Ameha, 2020). According to Melesse and Negesse (2009), the major diseases of chicken production in the southern regional state were fowl cholera, newcastle disease, coccidiosis, fowl influenza (Infectious Bronchitis), fowl pox, and salmonella, with the most and least important chicken diseases. The greatest health constraint to chicken production in the country was Newcastle Disease (also known as "fengil") (Waktole *et al.*, 2018).

2.3.2. Feed Availability

The traditional and improved family poultry production systems target smallholder farmers who can utilize potential feed resources locally. Most poultry products (88.5%) are obtained from the conventional family poultry production system (CSA, 2019). Therefore, interventions that increase traditional and improved family poultry production and productivity through improved feed technologies are critically important. The strategy targets to implement potential plant and animal source feeds like insects and worms. In addition, establishing small-scale micro-enterprise feed processing associations to produce and deliver formulated feed for improved family poultry producers designed. The scavenging feed resource base (SFRB)

in the lowland, midland, and highlands was assessed to quantify and design an appropriate supplementary feeding scheme for traditional poultry production (DZARC, unpublished). The national-level non-conventional feed resources are also being evaluated indirectly from different universities and research outlets finding compilation to make the information/document in one desk for users (DZARC, unpublished).

2.3.3. *Predatory*

The most important constraint to chicken productivity is predators, which are caused by insufficient housing and a scavenging feeding system (Assefa *et al.*, 2015). Alemayehu *et al.* (2015) revealed that wild cat (locally called as "shelemetmat"), eagle, and foxes were the most common chicken predators recognized by the chicken owners in the research locations in Benishangul-Gumuz, Western Ethiopia. During the dry season, eagles are a severe concern, but during the rainy season, the rest of the birds are more likely to attack chicken. According to chicken owners, the scavenging grounds are hidden by vegetation during the rainy season, making it easier for wild cats and foxes to attack hens. During dry seasons, scavenging sites' foliage is sparser, making hens more exposed to eagles.

2.3.4. *Weak Agricultural Extension Services:*

The Ethiopian poultry production system is undeveloped and remains traditional. Of all reasons, the provision of inputs (improved breed, feed source, medicaments, equipment, etc.) is very limited and rudimentary. In addition to the shortage of information, its supply faces challenges from illegal brokers who make the supply complex and unreachable. Health services, credit, extension, and other similar services also face the same problem.

2.3.5. *Genetic quality*

Animal genetic resources are being eroded in developing countries in general as a result of rapid agricultural system transformations, with the main cause of the loss of indigenous animal genetic resources being the indiscriminate introduction of exotic genetic resources prior to proper characterization, utilization, and conservation of indigenous genetic resources (FAO, 1999). Most of the chickens used in Ethiopia are poor-performing indigenous and have contributed to most of the poultry products. According to many authors, there is a low productivity of local chicken breed and increment of demand of poultry, poultry product and by product in Ethiopia. To improve this problem, there are research activities on the breeding improvement in the poultry sub sector of the livestock development. Efforts have recently been made to boost the productivity of Ethiopian indigenous chickens through selective breeding (Dana *et al.*, 2010).

According to (Wondmeneh *et al.*, 2015) a breeding program to increase production level in indigenous chickens was initiated in 2008 at the Debre Zeit Agricultural Research Center in Ethiopia. The author further stated that the breeding program of Horro chickens at the Debre Zeit Research Centre in Addis has been very successful in increasing cumulative egg number in 24 weeks after onset of laying, as well as body weight at 16 weeks of age.

2.3.6. *Marketing*

The color of the plumage, the weight of the chicken, and the type of comb were some of the criteria that influenced the market price of chickens (Molla, 2010).

2.4. Opportunity of indigenous chicken production in Ethiopia

Disease resistance, thermo tolerance, good egg and meat flavor, hard eggshells, high fertility, and hatchability are all attributes of indigenous chickens (Melesse, 2000). The majority of Ethiopian consumers prefer to buy local chicken from village producers because it is considered to be more flavorful and better suited for making traditional chicken sauce. As a result, free-range local chicken is in higher demand in urban markets, fetching higher market prices (Dana *et al.*, 2010). Due to low feed costs, area requirements, and animal prices, their production fits well with the circumstances of rural homes (Dessie *et al.*, 2013). Local chickens are superior health status and survival rate, well adapted to the local environment (Solomon, 2003).

2.5. Forward direction of local poultry production in Ethiopia

Before beginning any local poultry production program, farmers must be encouraged to adjust their attitudes regarding poultry keeping, which involves regular watering and feeding, supplementation with high-quality foods, cleaning the birds' night housing, and caring for the young chicks. Changes in the management of the local chicken production system could inhibit brooding and result in large increases in local bird productivity. For resource-strapped farmers, identifying ways that reduce input, allow chickens to wander freely, and ensure the use of other improved approaches such as improved housing, health care, and management at cheap costs is critical.

Another way to boost output is to "upgrade" native birds, which is commonly done by introducing cocks, pullets, and/or viable eggs from high-egg-laying strains. In order to undertake these upgrading projects, a number of husbandry issues have arisen, most notably the need to ensure that all native male birds are culled, as well as the fact that the introduced high-grade birds are unable to deal with the village's tough climate. Efforts have

been made to improve the productivity of Ethiopian indigenous chickens through selective breeding (Dana *et al.*, 2010). Selection within and/or upgrading with exotic breeds have been used to boost the genetic potential of the local chicken (exchange of cockerels from selected strain or breed could improve the performance of local chickens).

Because the village hens' system is primarily based on scavenging, one of the most pressing issues to be addressed is feeding. Using up all of the available feed resources does not result in efficient local chicken production. There is an increase in production when complete diets are available, but rural farmers may not be able to invest, or local chicken production may not be high enough to recover such investments. The manufacture and usage of a hay-box brooder reduced chick mortality, and there was no significant difference in survival between the hay-box and the significantly more expensive and intricate (and unreliable) electric brooders (Demeke, 2000).

3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

3.1. Conclusion

Based on the comprehensive research finding obtained from different researchers, it is possible to come up with a concrete conclusion that Ethiopia is blessed with vast poultry resources. However, the country is unable to meet the ever-increasing demand for poultry and poultry products from domestic sources due to diverse productions, reproductive, and infrastructure constraints in Ethiopia. Local chicken are characterized by low production and productivity. This is mainly attributed to the poor genetic makeup, huge disease burden and poor veterinary services, lack of quality and affordable feeds. Therefore, the government must address the challenges facing the poultry sub-sector, a holistic approach to solving the bottlenecks along the poultry value chain is necessary.

4.2. Recommendation

The following recommendations are made based on the aforementioned conclusion:-

- ❖ There is a strong need for adequate intervention in disease and predator control actions. Disease control, particularly NCD, might be achieved by immunization and improved veterinary and advising services.
- ❖ Efforts to improve productivity through better health, nutrition, housing, and daily exercise should be supported because they will lead to higher economic returns.
- ❖ Breed improvement initiatives must be designed properly in order to maximize genetic potential through selective breeding and the preservation

of the vast genetic diversity of indigenous chicken populations.

- ❖ Disease control, improved housing, and feeding training for both farmers and extension employees could assist boost local chicken productivity.
- ❖ Design and implement a research program to gather, conserve, and develop native chickens in order to boost poultry production and productivity in the country.

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