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On-farm characterization of indigenous chickens in Uganda

Ssewannyana E., Ssali A., Kasadha T., Dhikusooka M., Kasoma P., Kalema J., Kwatotyo B.A. and Aziku L.

National Livestock Resources Research Institute, P. O. Box 96 Tororo, Uganda.

Corresponding e-mail: edssewannyana@yahoo.com; lirirdir@yahoo.co.uk; Tel: 256-754-221110; 256-703173043

Abstract

Scientific reports or investigations on indigenous chickens in Uganda are scarce. A study was undertaken to characterize indigenous chickens in terms of the environment they live in, the way they are managed, their flock structures, uses, performance and phenotypic characteristics. Data on the above parameters were captured through the use of a structural questionnaire administered to 240 respondents and involving 960 indigenous chickens. Data were analyzed by descriptive statistical methods, having been collated as absolute figures or percentages. The study revealed that chicken flocks ranged from 2 to 113 and most people kept 1-4 cocks and 2-19 hens. The growers (3-7 months) formed the biggest (38%) part of the flocks followed closely by the chicks (37%). Indigenous eggs are mainly used for hatching chicks (45%), some are eaten at home (33%), and others are sold for cash (20%) while a few are used for other purposes (2%). The chickens are kept mainly for home consumption (36%), cash

(33%), ceremonies (16%) and gifts (13%). A few are used for other purposes. The chickens are valued mainly for their ability to scavenge (32%), followed by disease tolerance (29%), meat quality (22%) and general hardiness (17%). Adult cocks weigh more than adult hens (2.1kg vs. 1.4kg), most pullets reach sexual maturity at 7 months and most hens lay 14 eggs per hen per clutch, have a hatchability of 87% and wean 6.3 chicks on average after 2.8 months. On average, the chickens have two clutches of eggs per year and the interval between the two clutches is 2.8 months. Throughout the country, the chickens exhibited a wide phenotypic variability in all the characters studied except egg yolk colour, which was exclusively 100% yellow in all districts. The wide variation may help to create improved strains of chickens selected from the indigenous populations or crosses generated for specific purposes.