Value addition in dairy goat for women’s economic empowerment in Malawi

The project assisted communities by teaching them goat management and how to process milk for chambiko (sour milk). The villagers used to keep goats for household consumption but through this project, farmers have realised that they can do business and make some income.
- Louis Madeya (project beneficiary)

Patricia Mayuni studied a Masters of Animal Science at the University of Queensland in 2006. She received a small grant of $15,000 to empower women on value addition in dairy goats in the Thyolo district, Malawi.

Goats are the most common small ruminants in African homesteads mostly raised for meat, milk, leather, and manure. Goats are predominantly raised under forage system characterised by low level live-stock production due to poor nutrition, seasonal lack of feeds and poor breeding practices. Goat breeds with low productive potential, limit livestock programs for vulnerable communities hence the need for high productive breeding goats.

Dairy goats are much easier to raise and can adapt to a wider variety of environments, compare to dairy cows. Goat milk has also been found to be less allergenic, naturally homogenised, easier to digest, rarely causing lactose intolerance and better matched to the human body than cow’s milk (Foodbeast 2012). The government of Malawi has a goal to increase numbers and improve the productivity of indigenous breeds of goats and sheep. In addition, the government seeks to improve the standards of goat management through the proper selection of breeding stock, housing, feed formulation, supplementation, and disease and parasite control.

In Thyolo District, coffee and tea farming activities are dominant. Livestock production is not common except for household consumption. As a result the majority of women in the district often spend their time inactive, while men typically work in the coffee or tea fields. When Patricia received the scholarship, her objective was to gain skills and knowledge that would allow her to contribute to policy guidelines in the livestock extension services of the Depart-ment of Animal Health and Livestock, especially among the rural populations of Malawi. It is against this background that Patricia applied for a small grant to train women in rural Malawi on value addition dairy goat and support women’s socio-economic empowerment.
Achievement of overall project objectives

The project achieved its intended objective of capacitating women and Agricultural Extension Officers on dairy goat management benefiting 180 households in Malawi’s Thyolo District (three villages: Bwaila, Mbeluko 1, Mbeluko 2).

Concrete results achieved

The project taught to capacitated women on goats management, processing goats milk to produce chambiko (sour milk).

Outputs: Achieved deliverables

Concrete results achieved

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Outcomes

The project, saw farmers gaining knowledge in the production, management, and marketing of dairy goat related products. There was a notable improvement among farmers involved, who received income from the dairy goat business. All the farmers (9 females) started dairy goat farming with the help of extension officers, and put to practice the knowledge they had gained. There is a noted change in perception among farmers; before the project, farmers were of the view that goats were just for household meat consumption, as a result of the project, they have realised the additional benefits from goats.

Through the training, farmers were made aware of the value of goat milk and the higher nutrient levels of vitamin A, B (niacin), choline, inositol, protein, phosphate, calcium. Farmers have produced value-added products namely yoghurt, chambiko, pasteurised milk to the market. On average a family in Thyolo district, with family members employed in the coffee or tea fields, makes MWK24,000 (AUD42) per month. However, the women farmers who benefited from the project made MWK60,000 (AUD105) through selling goat milk and other value added goat milk products. Also, there is an additional 10 (all female) farmers from a neighbouring village who were not part of the original project beneficiaries, but started constructing new dairy goat housing after witnessing the trained beneficiaries implementing what they had learned. The trained farmers are also selling milk to businesses such as Lilongwe Dairy and Satemwa Tea Estate.

Contribution to country development

The Malawi government plans to reach out and empower communities especially women in self-help projects, this project complemented these efforts. Farmers were trained on how to market their farm produce to institutions and supporting people living with HIV and AIDS.

The project aligned with government efforts to address the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) particularly, SDG1 (ending poverty), SDG3 (attaining healthy life for all), SDG5 (attaining gender equality and empowering women and girls). In addition, it was supported by the Malawi Business Coalition Against HIV and AIDS who bought goat milk for their clients.

Challenges faced

The project’s budget did not allow for additional training on cheese making. In addition, it was difficult to infuse new breeds in the new stock due to breeding depression. Despite being trained on how to monitor their goats, farmers had limited access to veterinary services which posed a risk to the flock.

The farmers required specialised industrial equipment to produce at a large scale. The project used kitchen equipment which made it difficult to reach a broader market. The illiteracy level was high among beneficiaries; trainers had to engage literate farmers to act as lead farmers who then served as trainers of trainers. As the demand increased, farmers struggled to supply enough milk to the market due to limited herds. In addition, transporting the value-added products restricted farmers to selling to customers in the villages.

Partnerships created

The project worked in collaboration with private Farmers Association (Shire Highlands Association) which donated 70 Saanen breeding goats to the project. Further, the project engaged the district leaders on the project. The Agribusiness Department in the Ministry of Agriculture also offered the farmers training in Agribusiness, Extension Methodology and farming dynamics.

Sustainability and recognition

The project complemented projects by the Ministry of Agriculture which were implemented through the Agribusiness and Research department. One of these was a four-year project targeting both male and female farmers. The small grant project, linked farmers to the local farming Extension Structure Service Centre (trainer of trainers) which will continuously offer refresher courses and support in the dairy goat farming. All proposals sent to local government and supporting institutions acknowledged Australia’s role as the source of funding.