



# FEED THE FUTURE

The U.S. Government's Global Hunger & Food Security Initiative



Misaye Asmare, a poultry voucher recipient, in Wadla Woreda, Amhara Region.

## Livelihoods for Resilience Activity

The Feed the Future Ethiopia – [Livelihoods for Resilience Activity](#) is a five-year USAID-funded project running from December 5, 2016 through December 3, 2021. Building on lessons learned from the preceding project (Graduation with Resilience to Achieve Sustainable Development [GRAD]), the Livelihoods for Resilience Activity supports chronically food insecure rural households to build resilient livelihoods with improved food and nutrition security, even in the face of shocks and stresses. The project works closely with the livelihoods component of the Government of Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP), and targets nearly 100,000 PSNP households in 37<sup>1</sup> woredas of Amhara, Tigray, and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), with the aim of enabling these households to graduate from the PSNP with resilience. A consortium led by CARE and comprising the Relief Society of Tigray (REST), the Organization for Rehabilitation and Development in Amhara (ORDA), Agri-Service Ethiopia (ASE), and the Netherlands Development Organization (SNV) implements the project.

<sup>1</sup> The project started out in 27 woredas, but governmental administrative decisions led to the splitting of woredas, so that the project's coverage has grown from 27 to 37 woredas, but without expanding in geographic scope.

## Innovation brief # 1

# Poultry Voucher

This innovation brief explores the project's experience with piloting poultry vouchers, including why we initiated the intervention, what worked and what didn't work, unexpected challenges, and how we adapted our approach as we scaled up the poultry voucher the following year. Like learning briefs, innovation briefs provide a detailed account of the project's learning, but they also include more technical detail as they aim to guide other implementers who may wish to engage in a similar activity.



## WHY a poultry voucher? (Is it really that different from chicken distribution anyway?)

In Ethiopia, eggs are one of the cheapest forms of animal-source proteins. As a result, many programs targeting food insecure rural households provide young layer chickens (pullets) as a means of improving households' access to this important element of a healthy diet. These nutrition interventions are often targeted at households with pregnant and lactating women and children under two, and are accompanied with messages about the importance of eating eggs and feeding them to children.

The Feed the Future Ethiopia – Livelihoods for Resilience Activity shares the objective of improving rural households' nutrition. In Year 3 of the project, staff began brainstorming how to promote the same dietary diversity outcomes as standard chicken distribution interventions, but without undermining the project's market-based approach to promoting poultry production as a market-based income-generating activity. Finally, the project's value chain and nutrition staff agreed on a voucher approach that considered two key factors:

### Household incentives

#### Anyone would love to have free chickens.

How do we ensure that households buy into the idea of poultry production, and aren't just "in it" for the free chickens?

#### Households have their own priorities.

How do we make sure that having chickens will translate into improved nutrition?

#### An incentive for one household can easily turn into a disincentive for another.

How do we avoid discouraging households from investing in poultry production from their own funds?

### Market systems

**The project is not a value chain actor.** The project should not be involved in buying and distributing inputs—this makes us intervene in the value chain.

**In all actions, the project should be working towards value chain sustainability.** If we purchase inputs, it undermines our value chain activities and undermines sustainability. Chick/pullet growers get accustomed to dealing with large NGO orders, and households never get the experience of organizing themselves to place orders with chick growers themselves.

**When nutrition interventions involve livestock, they need to take into consideration all the same issues as our value chain interventions.** If chickens "for the poultry value chain" need vaccines, so do chickens "for nutrition".

These considerations of household incentives and market systems affected the project's targeting approach, the value and structure of the voucher, the requirements to obtain the voucher, and the implementation modality. Hence the poultry voucher had two objectives: to provide an incentive for households to engage in poultry for both livelihoods and nutrition purposes, and to jumpstart the poultry value chain by building the relationship between PSNP households and value chain actors.

## WHAT is a poultry voucher?

The poultry voucher is a paper entitlement that project clients receive when they meet certain requirements, and can redeem for poultry inputs. In the pilot year, each household actually received three vouchers, valued as follows:

- **One pullet voucher:** buy 3 pullets, get 3 free

The image shows two versions of a poultry voucher form. The left version is for a pullet voucher, and the right version is for a feed voucher. Both forms include fields for household name, address, and contact information, and are signed by a project staff member. The right version also includes a photo of a chicken.

- **Two feed vouchers:** 40kg of pullet feed divided into two 20-kg vouchers

The image shows two versions of a feed voucher form. The left version is for a 20kg feed voucher, and the right version is for a 40kg feed voucher. Both forms include fields for household name, address, and contact information, and are signed by a project staff member. The right version also includes a photo of a feed container.

The "buy 3, get 3 free" pullet voucher was designed to build in a requirement for households to make their own upfront investments, to understand the price of pullets, and to interact directly with chick growers.

The feed vouchers were designed to enable households to have sufficient feed for the improved variety chickens



(Sasso or Bovan brown) until they started laying eggs (a 3.5-month period after the initial 45 days). The project promotes the use of commercial feed for poultry, because the improved Sasso and Bovan breeds need this feed in order to produce eggs daily. However, this feed is expensive, and it is tempting for cash-strapped households to purchase cheaper inputs, or to provide lower-than-recommended quantities of commercial feed.

### WHO was eligible for the poultry voucher?

The question of poultry voucher eligibility was debated amongst project team members. As noted above, nutrition and nutrition-sensitive agriculture interventions typically target households with pregnant and lactating women and children under two. But the Livelihoods for Resilience Activity wanted to promote poultry production not only for nutrition but for income generation as well, and wanted to avoid sending the message that poultry production was only a small-scale activity, only for pregnant and lactating women. The project also wanted to avoid discouraging households that may live next door to households receiving the voucher, and may have resented having to make their own investments while their neighbors benefited from the voucher.

Therefore, the project targeted whole village economic and social associations (VESAs) for the poultry voucher, without distinguishing amongst households on the basis of pregnancy or age of children, nor on the basis of whether they were already engaged in poultry or not. For the pilot, each implementing partner chose 1-3 woredas near to towns with access to chick growers, feed suppliers, and vaccinators; and where poultry engagement is still low. Within those woredas, the partners selected households from a subset of VESAs for the intervention, provided that they:

- Completed poultry management training
- Built an adequate poultry coop
- Demonstrated knowledge of poultry management
- Saved ETB 200 (approximately \$10) for the purchase of three pullets

### HOW did it work?

The project followed a series of steps to make the voucher pilot implementation effective.

#### On the household side

1. Targeted 954 households from selected woredas (all households from the selected VESAs)
2. Provided orientation on the poultry vouchers and explained their requirements
3. Provided training on how to construct coop and manage poultry, as well as on household nutrition
4. Checked coop construction and poultry management knowledge, and provided the vouchers

#### On the vendor side

1. Ensured availability of key value chain actors i.e. pullet suppliers, feed suppliers, and vaccinators nearby
2. Following a procurement process, signed agreements with chick growers and agrodealers for the supply of pullets and feed, respectively
3. Where needed, facilitated new market linkages (particularly for poultry feed)
4. Reimbursed vendors for the redeemed vouchers

As noted above, the provision of the voucher was intended to bring households in direct contact with private vendors and suppliers. The advantage of this approach is that the household learns where the vendor is located, what else the vendor has in stock, what the prices are for the various items, etc. In several locations, this approach worked as intended, helping to create new customer relationships. In other locations, however, project implementing partners played a heavier role, facilitating transportation of pullets and feed to a common location where households were gathered. Households received their vouchers on site and redeemed them minutes later, so that the overall experience in these areas was not significantly different from a chicken distribution. Strict procurement policies around payments for vouchers, the delicate timing of pullet supply, the lengthy distances, and the history of heavy government and NGO support for agricultural input provision, all likely contributed to this approach. In the future, the project will place heavier emphasis on households organizing themselves to access their own inputs, either individually or in groups.

### What did we learn?

Six months after the intervention, the project conducted a survey of 60 randomly selected poultry voucher

recipient households. This survey explored questions around poultry management practices, household preferences, access to inputs and services, poultry mortality, and others. While the sample size was clearly too small to draw rigorous, definitive conclusions, this survey provided better data than anecdotal staff observations (which tend to focus on the more positive cases) and was instrumental in guiding the project team's learning and adaptations for the follow year's poultry vouchers. Our learning from this survey, and each associated adaptation, are summarized below.

## Learning

## Adaptation

**Coop construction:** Households were willing to construct chicken coops according to the training they had received. However, at a cost exceeding to 600-1,000 birr, households found coop construction to be somewhat expensive (and sometimes prohibitive). Mesh wire, in particular, was a major expense for households.



Introduce a voucher for mesh wire to help defray upfront costs.

**Uptake of poultry production:** Two-thirds of poultry voucher receiving households raised chickens for the first time as a result of the voucher, indicating success in promoting poultry production for new households. However, for the one-third of households that were already engaged in poultry production, the pullet voucher meant that they had to construct a separate coop, or sell all their chickens and purchase all new pullets, as they could not mix chickens of different ages in one coop.



Eliminate the pullet voucher in favor of other types of vouchers (for mesh wire and feed), with a choice of feed vouchers (pullet vs. layer feed) based on whether households already have chickens.

**Pullet supply:** The voucher provided 3 pullets free with the purchase of 3, but the intention was to allow households to purchase as many pullets as they would like—including significantly higher numbers that would enable them to start poultry as an income-generating activity. Many households wanted to purchase more than the initial 3 pullets, but in many locations, there were supply shortages. In areas where additional pullets were available, respondent households purchased an average of 11 pullets. In other areas, households were limited to purchasing three pullets only to make sure there would be enough for each household to redeem their vouchers within a short period of time. Because chickens of different ages cannot be put in the same coop, households were unable to add more pullets after obtaining the initial six, unless they sold all six pullets and started over.



- Eliminate pullet voucher and replace it with mesh wire voucher
- Promote the construction of larger coops (1.5m x 2.5m = 3.75 m2) that can hold nearly 37 chickens from the beginning, to enable larger-scale poultry production as well as future expansion

**Feed supply:** The initial vouchers provided concentrate pullet feed, and the intention was for households to purchase concentrate layer feed once the chickens had reached five months of age and begun laying eggs. However, in most woredas, households did not continue to use concentrate feed by purchasing more. It is unclear whether the primary reason for this is the lack of availability or the high cost.



- Introduce an additional 1-month layer feed voucher (so that households are able to access feed through the first month after the chicken begins laying eggs; households will then have income to purchase additional feed)

**Poultry health and protection:** Vaccination coverage in the targeted areas appears to have been fairly high, with 83% of respondent households indicating that they had vaccinated their chickens. Yet nearly half of respondent households indicated that at least one of their chickens had died, which may be due to mismanagement or to chickens not receiving their three-month Newcastle Disease boosters.

Many households in SNNPR reported bringing their chickens inside the family's house at night due to fear of theft and predators. This practice risks making household members sick and negating the intended positive nutrition outcomes.



- Follow up on poultry feed availability at agrodealer level

• The project is planning a poultry health intervention to address this challenge.

- Require a lock on the door of the coop prior to providing a voucher.

**Nutrition and marketing**

**Egg consumption.** Respondents indicated that 35% of eggs were consumed by family members, and the rest were being sold.

**Egg sales.** Households reported that eggs were easy to sell, with a sales price averaging between 3 to 5 birr (the highest prices were reported in Tigray).

**Chicken sales.** By the time of the household survey, one in three households had sold one or more chickens, including all households in Tigray. Many of the sales were targeted at the Ethiopian New Year holiday

Continue to conduct nutrition messaging on benefits of egg consumption for children and whole family, poultry husbandry practices messages and benefits of concentrated feed for egg production.

Check in frequently with households regarding egg sales to identify any potential needs for collective marketing (not yet present as households can easily sell eggs in local markets.)



## Conclusions and future questions

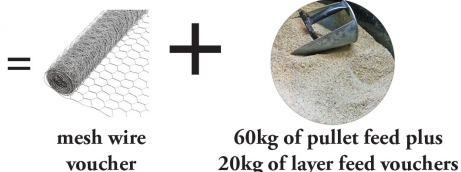
### A promising approach

The household survey and other staff observations found that the poultry voucher was effective in jump-starting poultry production, though less effective in promoting the use of commercial feeds for poultry. Participation in the poultry voucher program gave participants long-term skills in poultry management, feeding, health and biosecurity, and adequate housing. Over the coming months, the project will continue to track poultry production, as well as improvements in household income and nutritional status, following this intervention.

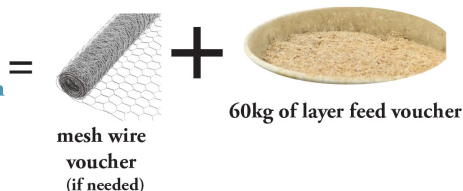
### Adaptations and future questions

Based on the learning from the pilot, the project changed the voucher types for the following year. In Year 4, instead of the “buy 3 pullets get 3 free” and pullet feed vouchers, households received mesh wire vouchers and different types of feed vouchers depending on their needs, as shown in the box below.

For households just starting poultry production



For households already engaged in poultry production



Targeting approaches and eligibility requirements remained largely the same, although the eligibility checklist included a lock for the coop, to minimize the risk of households bringing chickens inside at night.

These adaptations mean that the Year 4 “poultry voucher” does not actually include a voucher for chickens. As a result, the project has no control over how many pullets households purchase, but it is hoped that this will lead households to purchase larger numbers of pullets at their own timing. The addition of the one-month layer feed voucher has

increased the cost of the poultry voucher intervention, but is intended to demonstrate the benefit of using concentrate feed in terms of eggs laid per chicken, so that households will be more willing to make their own investments.

Hence these adaptations are expected to lead households to quickly expand their poultry production and to maximize productivity. The project will track whether this is effective and, if necessary, may make more adaptations in the future.

#### Disclaimer:

The contents of this brief are the responsibility of CARE and its Feed the Future Ethiopia – Livelihoods for Resilience Activity partners and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.