

Owning My Income: “It Makes Me Feel Safer”

Economic Empowerment of Women in Mozambique:
Through an Integrated Development Partnership with the
Private Sector (iDPP) for Chicken (Out-) Growers and Producers



Project stats

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Gender and Inclusive Business in Mozambique

Workforce participation in Mozambique is equally high among women and men. However, vulnerable jobs are mostly held by women. Eighty per cent of the working women in Mozambique earn their living in the agricultural sector. As a rule, especially in rural and semi-urban areas, they look after the “Machambas”, small gardens attached to their dwellings, where they grow vegetables and sometimes chicken. The family sells surplus to neighbours or on markets.

ProEcon, the anchor project of German Development Cooperation in Mozambique in the Sector of Sustainable Economic Development, has been supporting Inclusive Business Models since 2017. They are mainly implemented in the agricultural sector as an integrated development partnership with the private sector (iDPP), by way of a cost-sharing cooperation project between a private company and ProEcon. Demonstrating interest is a key criterion, as is the private company’s potential to integrate smallholders, especially women, into their supply chains. The aim is to increase and improve production and processing, as well as the company’s competitiveness to ensure sustainability.

One such win-win situation for women in particular, both in terms of development and business, has been achieved in the chicken sector, leading to better income and support for the **empowerment of the micro-level producers**.

Development Partnership on National Chicken Production

Higest, a long-established company in Maputo, sells chicks, feed, medicines and equipment to chicken producers. There are two kinds of producers: individual producers that raise several hundred up to several thousand chickens, and “out-growers, who produce more than 10,000 chickens per cycle, which are sold between 28 to 35 days of age to the Higest Slaughterhouse in Maputo. “The market for chicken in Mozambique is very unstable and seasonal, varying in quantity and quality across the year”, says Raúl, Higest's retail manager. “In periods of peak demand, some amounts of chicken parts are still imported, chiefly from the United States and Brazil, comprising mainly chicken parts that cannot be sold in these countries and are there considered surplus production ”, adds Raúl. Higest created a brand of “national chicken” that are raised, produced and sold in Mozambique. Having started with one shop on the outskirts of Maputo shortly after the civil war in the 90s, Higest now owns 27 shops nationwide, all run by women. They provide support and training to new producers: first they assess the premises and brief

them on the risks associated with the business, then they provide training on how to care for the poultry. Together they estimate the number of chickens that can be raised, gradually increasing the number according to the time of the year. For example, fewer chickens are raised in February/March, due to higher temperatures, poor ventilation conditions and lower seasonal demand. New producers purchase a starter kit, which includes a number of chicks, food and medicines. Most producers gradually grow more chicks within a few years. Some only raise chicks during the Christmas season when demand is highest, but do not produce chickens throughout the rest of the year. Tailor made services such as training sessions, inputs, advisory, ICT-Tools and financial innovations are developed and provided to outgrowers, individual chicken producers and Higest personnel through the established partnership. From 2017 to date, a total of **340 individual producers**, of which 204 are women, such as Sandra and Amália, have received support from Higest.



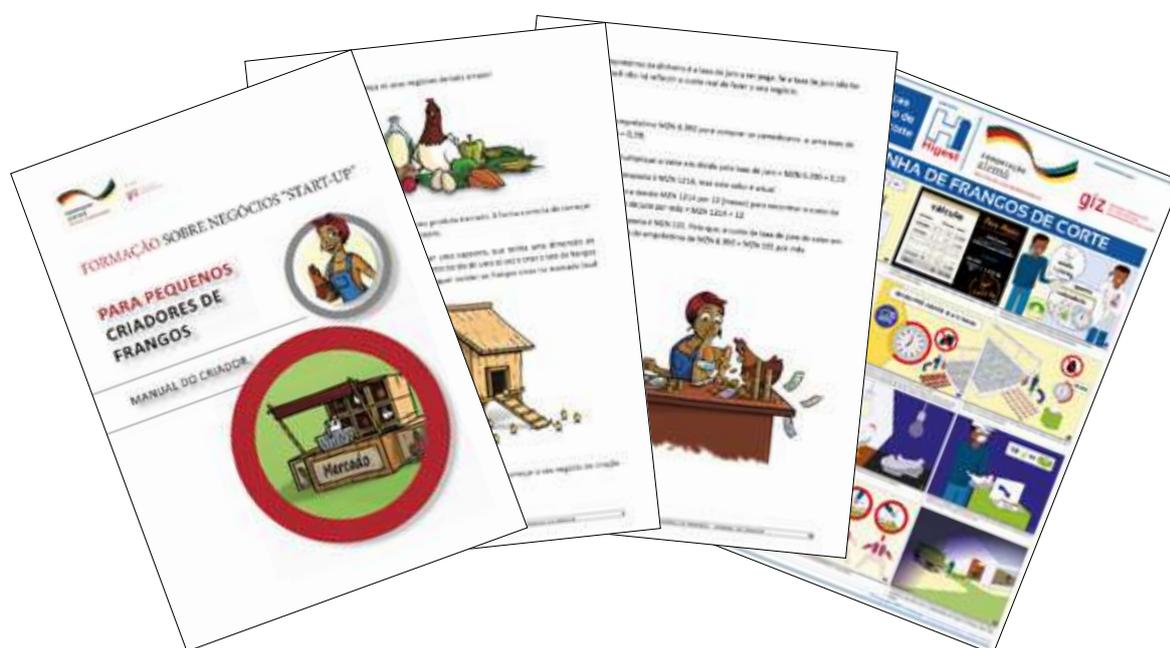
L. to r.: Shop managers, Jaqueline and Domingas, and Higest retail manager, Raúl, reviewing the content of the training sessions.

Mozambique imports chicken mainly from Brazil and the US. These frozen chickens or chicken parts are often cheaper than the ones produced locally. A Higest manager says the imported chicken parts are often those that are not marketable in the country of origin and are sold mainly to low income countries. In contrast, all parts of the chicken are eaten in Mozambique and chickens are usually sold whole, either alive or frozen.

Higest repurchases the chickens from the large outgrowers, slaughters them according to ISO standards for food safety, as well as Halal standards, and sells them under the “National” brand. Those who produce less than 10,000 chickens sell them directly to their clients, mainly still alive. “During the first years, most of our store managers were men,” says Raúl, Higest's retail manager. However, many of them were not reliable – they either disappeared or changed their conduct. “Many did not put aside ambitions for rapid growth and then had to start from scratch,” Raúl adds. “Working with women managers makes a positive difference which we can feel.”

Training Material

Training material is simple and tailored to local conditions. It consists mainly of pictures depicting women and men raising chickens. It explains step by step the basic rules of poultry farming, including vaccination, hygiene and other care responsibilities. The material was developed by a ProEcon consultant in 2017 and has been continuously improved since then. Currently, the material is available to the trainees as flyers and posters in all Higest stores.





The Chicken Growers



Domingas (r.), the shop manager, explains to chicken growers Amália (l.) and Sandra (m.) how to keep track of their investment and income

Sandra: “If I can work for others, I can also work for myself”

“Soon I’ll earn more than my husband”, Sandra says. About every 40 days she sells hundreds of chickens, raised on her small plot of land in the suburbs of Maputo. Less than a year ago she quit her job at the bank: “I thought, if I can work for others, I can also work for myself.” She first started with 500 chicks. She raised and sold them, then she bought new ones. She invested in an aviary and gradually increased the number of chicks. Now, four months later, she sells about 1,000 chickens. Sandra employed a young man and a young woman to help her feed the chickens. “When I quit my job at the bank, my husband didn’t believe that raising and selling chickens was a good idea. But he always supported me.” Her next goal is to raise 3,500 chicks per generation.

Sandra, Amália and Óscar buy the chicks for around 50 MZN (± 0.71 euros) each. When they weigh a minimum of 1.5 kg, they are sold alive for around 270 MZN (± 4 euros). Their most important sales channels are chat groups and being known in their local environment.

At the beginning of her adventure not everything progressed smoothly. She first bought a hundred chickens a month, but many died before reaching their minimum weight, due to mycotic infection or other parasites. When she started working with Higest, the situation changed. Higest is a company comprising 27 shops that sell feed, medication and other equipment for chicken growers

across the country and has benefited from cooperation with GIZ under an iDPP since 2017. “We provide advice and training to our clients”, says Domingas, manager of a Higest shop in Maputo-Albasine. “Chicks are a bit more expensive than in other stores”, Sandra says. But ever since she started buying chicks and material at the Higest store, her chicken production has improved.

“We provide training to our clients, including information on basic chicken care”, says Domingas. Guidance is also provided to new clients on size of aviary, how to build the chicken facilities to ensure the right temperatures, the amount of feed and water and how to prevent disease and loss.

Nowadays, Sandra can recognize at an early stage the signs of disease. If she needs help, she knows which veterinarian to contact. She sometimes takes pictures of her chicks’ symptoms and sends them to Domingas, who then provides advice or coordinates with the vet. Currently, Higest plans to launch a **mobile device app for virtual advice**.

In the beginning, Sandra sold live chickens to clients in her vicinity. Finding enough customers was never a real challenge. Word of mouth marketing and a chat group are her most relevant sales promotion tools. Now, an increasing number of customers want the chicken already prepared.



“I had no idea how this worked”, Sandra says. She went to the local markets and asked young women who sold broilers how to prepare a chicken and for what price it was sold.

Some time later, Sandra imported a machine from China for 47,000 MZN (±650 Euros) to clean and prepare the chickens. It cleans about 10 chickens per minute. “Preparing the chicken, instead of selling it alive, is not really worth it”, says Sandra. The price difference amounts to only a few Euro cents.



Health check: Chicken producers are trained to identify signs of disease at an early stage. During the coronavirus pandemic, they exchanged pictures with the shop managers and the vet for simple diagnoses.

Oscar: “She didn’t earn enough as a kindergarten teacher”

“We also provide training on micro business management: how to reinvest income, chicken record keeping, investment in chicks, feed, energy”, Domingas, the Higest shop manager in Maputo, explains. While Sandra uses her computer to do the calculations, Oscar has drawn tables in a notebook. Handy and simple: one table for investments and the purchase of chicks, another for orders, and a third one for the income. Considering that Oscar is also a freelance graphic designer, the notebook cover has its own design. In addition to selling chickens, he also sells homemade fertilizer to neighbours.

“My wife didn’t earn enough money when she worked as a kindergarten teacher”, Oscar states. According to him, her monthly salary of 3,000 MZN (± 40 Euros) barely covered the costs of a housekeeper. That is why Oscar convinced his wife to quit her job at the kindergarten and dedicate her time to tending the poultry at home, while also doing the housework and taking care of their three children aged four to ten. Currently, he is upgrading the aviaries to be able to increase the number of chicks. As a graphic designer, Oscar planned to design their own sticker for the chickens, but “my own brand would be too high-profile, and the business would become too big”, he believes.

However, as long as salaries are this low, he doesn't think it's a good idea for his wife to go back to her former job at the kindergarten. So far, only Oscar participates in Higest's training sessions, although his wife is responsible for feeding the chicks.

For some people, growing chicken is a side business that can be conducted from home. In the long run, it may be more sustainable to start the chicken business as an additional activity. While it may be a step towards greater self-sufficiency, there is no guarantee of success and as such it should be decided upon equally by all parties involved.



Chicken growers are in contact with Higest shops and know each other from training sessions

Amália: “We are no longer always short of money now”

“The training sessions were of great help”, Amália says. She is another client who receives support from the shop run by Domingas. Training helped her learn to calculate how much money she should set aside from her sales revenues to reinvest in new chicks. When she first started raising chickens in her backyard, the financial return of the business had never achieved the desired results. “I started

this business when my husband lost his job”, explains Amália, who continues to teach Portuguese in a public school. Her pupils' parents have already questioned why so many of her examples are related to chicken. At present, her job as a teacher helps her chicken business: some of her pupils' parents have now become her customers and Amália delivers chickens and eggs on the way to school, there-



Higest shop managers, Jaqueline and Domingas (r.), receive support from the company's management

by saving fuel. Her daughters, who have almost reached an age when they will soon leave their parents' home, help her look after the chickens. One of them goes to a private school, the other will complete 12th grade in a public school. "The chickens help us not to be short of money all the time and now we can pay for the little extras of everyday life", Amália says. **That makes her feel safer.** Currently, Amália owns about 120 chickens and makes around 15,000 MZN (± 200 Euros) per chicken generation. Soon she wants to build a battery cage because she realized that selling eggs can also be a profitable business. Initially, her husband helped her convert the home's garage into a battery cage, but in the meantime, he found a new job.

Many of the chicken producers know each other from the training sessions. Sometimes they help each other, but most of the time they seek advice from the Higest shops, such as the ones run by Domingas and Jaqueline. Their chat groups with the customers is a major player. Most clients place their orders a month in advance. This way, when buying new chicks from Higest, the chicken growers already have a fairly realistic idea of how many they are going to sell.

Customers order by text message, often one month in advance. Teacher Amália additionally sells eggs and chickens to her schoolchildren's parents.





Domingas and Jaqueline: “This shows how much they trust us”

“During the Covid-19 pandemic we created a chat group to support the producers”, Domingas explains. When the producers’ or bigger outgrowers’ chickens got ill, they sent pictures to Domingas, who in turn forwarded them to the vet, and together they found solutions via the chat group. Now, in October 2021, store hours are still reduced, but are almost the same as before the pandemic. **Domingas is the manager of one of the Highest shops** in Maputo. She started working for Higest almost eight years ago. “After concluding high school, I worked for a few years for a company that provided services for the public sector”, she continued. “Then I was unemployed for two years.” She struggles to communicate with people and knew nothing about chickens. Nevertheless, she got a job at Higest. In the beginning,

she helped out in one of the shops to learn the ins and outs of the business.

“If I can work without being under too much pressure, then things work out well”, she sums up the way she works at the shop. At present, she provides guidance to clients, manages the store, conducts training – and feels comfortable with it all. Clients appreciate the fact that they can talk about their chickens and their business and get advice. Domingas feels respected and recognised; she never experienced any serious issues with men not taking her seriously over her expertise. In 2016, she was awarded best employee of the company. Nowadays, she shares a house with her sister. Both their children live with them and Domingas invests part of her income in private school lessons for the children.

Women often leave their children with their grandparents and only see them on weekends. During the week there are no other childcare options.

Jaqueline's story is similar. At the time she started working for Higest she had little work experience and didn't know how to use a computer. When she applied for the job, she had just split up from her husband and thereby lost her house. She now runs one of the shops and was even assigned to launch other stores in the Provinces of Sofala (Beira) and Niassa (Lichinga) provinces.

"This shows how much they trust me", she says happily. She is slowly building a new house and her children live with their grandparents, as is often the case with working women in Mozambique. "I don't see them every weekend", Jaqueline says. She may be saddened by this situation but accepts it as something normal. Having a job and building a house leaves little time to raise her children. But at least "I can provide for myself and make my own decisions", she draws comfort from this.



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