

# Stories of CHANGE

## Hatching an End to Poverty and Malnutrition

HKI's CHANGE Project promoted a novel model for nutrition-sensitive urban poultry rearing, which has proved highly sustainable even after the project's end



Hen and chick

"A henhouse is a win-win investment: you produce much more than you put into it!" Explains Aissatou Ba with enthusiasm. "When the chickens lay eggs, I use them to make breakfast for my family. The money I save from not having to buy breakfast, I use to buy chicken feed or vaccines."

Just four years ago, Aissatou had never even considered raising chickens—she lives not on a farm but in Guédiawaye, a crowded urban neighborhood of Dakar, Senegal. Then came the CHANGE project, implemented by Helen Keller International in partnership with a local NGO, ADECOM, with funding from Global Affairs Canada. CHANGE sought to address problems of childhood malnutrition by promoting a novel urban approach to nutrition-sensitive agriculture, centered around gardening using compact 'table gardens' as well as raising

poultry. In particular, the project promoted laying hens, as chicken eggs are very rich in protein and micronutrients but are rarely consumed by most families, primarily due to the cost. CHANGE targeted women, who are mainly responsible for household nutrition but have few ways to earn money, intending to make it easier for them to produce and buy nutritious foods for their households.

About 1300 participating women thus received a henhouse, built from an innovative design that was adapted to raising chickens in urban areas, plus three laying hens and one rooster, personalized training, and veterinary support. This was combined with education and counselling on nutrition and hygiene, to ensure the production benefited the household diet. Simultaneously, an interactive women's empowerment curriculum worked with participating women and their

husbands to help improve communication, cooperation, and sharing of workloads within households. This helped ensure that women would be able to remain in control of their chickens—and any resulting revenues.

The approach proved widely popular. Before CHANGE, almost no women in the neighborhood owned chickens. Over the course of the project, flock size grew steadily: two years in, 20% of participants owned 10 or more chickens and the average household was producing about six dozen eggs a month. Households also gradually began to diversify, including raising broilers for home consumption and sale. For example, midway through the project, project participant Amy Fall was already using part of her henhouse to raise broilers. The money she earned from selling them was used to cover the family's daily needs, including better nutrition. "One day my husband, a day laborer at a slaughterhouse, came home empty handed, when I'd been expecting him to go to the market and buy us food for lunch. I thus took one of the chickens, sold it for 4000 FCFA (\$7.00), and used the money to buy food to cook."

Urban poultry rearing proved to be highly sustainable: 18 months after the end of CHANGE, about 75% of participants continued to raise chickens, and consumption and sale had increased since

the end of the project, with higher median revenues. One example of this is Aissatou Ba. From three hens and a rooster three years ago, her flock numbered seven chickens two years after the end of the project, and she increases it each year in advance of major holidays, such as Korité (Eid al-Fitr), when the period of fasting, spirituality, and sharing marked by Ramadan comes to an end with a feast of chicken. Indeed, Korité without chicken is like American Thanksgiving without turkey. Recognizing this, Aissatou added a third level to her henhouse to raise more chickens and sold 40 broilers, earning over 150 USD. This was used to cover household needs, like children's education and food. In addition, her family eats chicken regularly, and she continues to produce eggs, which she uses for her family's breakfast. Aissatou's ambitions continue to grow: she plans to invest in another 50 broilers to raise for the December holidays and eventually to get a second henhouse to increase production, fostering partnerships with fast food

joints and restaurants—she sees plenty of potential, within and beyond the neighborhood! "The project ended, but I have found a great passion for raising chickens. I dream of having a huge henhouse, when I have my own house, to produce more."

CHANGE consciously sought to promote a sustainable model, teaching participants how to grow a flock, make feed, and vaccinate their chickens. As Aissatou explains, "Chicken feed is expensive in the market, but we were trained on how to make it. All the ingredients are sold at the market... you can buy them all and make it yourself. It's much cheaper." HKI also aimed to make the henhouses sustainably available by working with local carpenters, providing the blueprints and hiring them to build henhouses for all the project participants. This provided not just a temporary boost to the local economy: the carpenters had learned to make a new product, and through project participants, their work got wide exposure throughout the neighborhood, leading to new orders from non-participants.



Eggs can make a very nutritious addition to a child's diet. (Credit: Alessandra Silver)





Aissatou Baw with her henhouse (Credit: K. Thiam)

"Several people who saw the CHANGE henhouses came and ordered their own," explained Abdoulaye Sene, a carpenter in Wakhinane-Nimzatt neighborhood. "I built 37 henhouses for individuals [not connected to the project], and I even delivered some outside of Dakar."

In addition, HKI trained a team of local women to be experts in urban poultry raising; during the project, they conducted regular outreach to other project participants, helping troubleshoot any problems. This included Aissatou, who, a year and a half after the end of the project, remained an important resource for her neighbors: "Many people still ask me if I can advise them on chicken raising—and some of them don't even live in my neighborhood!"

Sokhna Gningue was one of these participants. Thanks to the training provided by CHANGE, she began raising chickens in her courtyard, growing her flock many times over and also diversifying to raise broilers. Her family now eats chickens regularly, harvests eggs daily, and has many of its economic needs met through her entrepreneurship. This past

Korité, she invested in 150 chicks and earned about \$500, selling to individuals and restaurants alike; she is eager to expand her production even further. "Chicken raising is very important to me," she explains, "because I produce eggs to cook for my kids, and I also have sold a lot of chickens. I manage many of my family's needs using that money."

Aissatou Sy also had no experience with chickens before the project but has since become a true poultry entrepreneur. Over a year after CHANGE ended, she earned over \$400 selling 75 chickens for Korité and became even more ambitious in advance of Tamkharit (Muslim New Year), raising a full 100 broilers to sell. The growing revenues from her livestock operation were enough to not only support her family's daily needs but also allow her to expand her livelihood in other directions, investing in a small business selling cookware and opening money transfer platforms, from which she earns royalties by facilitating her neighbors' transfers. She's also made chicken rearing a family affair, giving her 13-year-old son a compartment of the henhouse to raise his own chickens. Last year, he earned enough money

from selling them to buy his own clothes. Her family regularly enjoys the fruits of the henhouses more directly, as she harvests about 16 eggs a week, all of them destined for the family table. And all this with little investment: chicken care takes her only about 20 minutes a day!

"The CHANGE project," Aissatou Sy avows, "created a positive change in the community: whether myself or the other beneficiaries, everyone found herself in this project. The project even allowed me to stop buying eggs and chicken, as I prefer to produce them myself. Now I raise my own chickens to eat and sell, or sometimes to give to others... but what struck me the most about the project is that it helped make malnutrition disappear in our neighborhood. Women here used to have many malnourished children, but that receded as the project advanced." Given how sustainable the urban poultry rearing approach has proven to be, we can be optimistic that this improvement in nutrition will continue long into the future, as the squawks of chickens become ever-more common music on the rooftops and in the courtyards of Guédiawaye and beyond.





## What is Urban Enhanced Homestead Food Production?

- Participants (mostly women) learn improved practices for growing vegetables in table gardens and intensive poultry raising for egg production.
- Participatory education improves their understanding of the causes of malnutrition, including low dietary diversity, and potential ways to avoid it.
- Trained neighborhood resource people provide follow-up training and support to raise poultry

and grow vegetables, as well as reinforcing best practices for nutrition and hygiene.

- Women's empowerment activities support more equitable intra-household decision-making and workload and resource sharing.
- With novel home food production, potentially greater earnings from selling surplus production, and new knowledge, participants are better able to feed their children and families diverse diets rich in micronutrients, combatting malnutrition and improving child health and growth.

## FIGHTING MALNUTRITION AT ITS ROOTS.

The CHANGE Project was supported by:



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