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Capitalisation note

Improving the productivity of small ruminants in
Togo: when local support transforms family farms



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Project : Economic development of actors in the small ruminant meat sector (DEFI-Viande)

Country : Togo

Implementing institutions : Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Suisse (VSF-Suisse), Entreprises Territoires et Développement (ETD), the National Federation of Actors and Professionals in the Livestock and Meat Sector of Togo (FENAPFIBVTO) and the Higher School of Agronomy (ESA)

Executive summary

The DEFI-Viande project, implemented in the prefectures of Blitta, Ogou and Haho in Togo, supported 800 small-scale livestock farmers, 30% of whom were women, to improve the productivity of small ruminants.

Through training in good farming practices, the formation of cooperatives (SCOOPS), the introduction of improved breeding stock and health campaigns, the project has led to an increase in the kidding rate from 17% to 90%, a reduction in kid mortality from 50% to 8%, and herd growth of 17.38%. The Breeders' Exchange Circles (CEE) and support from ESOPs have encouraged rapid adoption of the practices. The inclusion of women, who represent 30% of beneficiaries and are active in marketing (street food vendors), has strengthened food security and local economic dynamics.

To sustain these gains, it is recommended to strengthen the CEE, develop revolving funds for inputs, and extend the model to other regions.

Key messages

- The low productivity of small ruminant family farms, due to traditional practices, high neonatal mortality and inadequate local veterinary services, severely limited the income of agro-livestock farmers and the commercial value of their animals.
- In response, the DEFI-Viande project supported 800 small-scale farmers (including 500 supervised by ETD and 300 newly identified, practising family farming of small ruminants, distributed) in the three prefectures targeted by the project (Blitta, Ogou and Haho) in Togo through training in good farming practices, the organisation of cooperatives, local technical support via service companies and producer organisations (ESOP), the establishment of Farmer Exchange Circles (CEE), and subsidies for improved breeding stock and health campaigns.
- The interventions have led to a significant improvement in zootechnical indicators: the calving rate has risen from 17% to 90%, young animal mortality has fallen from 50% to 8%, and herd size has increased by 17.38%.
- The change in practices was based on a combination of concrete demonstrations, individualised monitoring and collective measures, generating rapid uptake and spillover effects among farmers not directly targeted.
- The participatory and territorial approach adopted in the project, based on collective dynamics and local roots, has proven effective but requires a long-term commitment and sufficient resources to sustain the gains and meet the growing demand for quality inputs.

Challenge

A favourable but under-exploited context for the development of the small ruminant meat sector

In Togo, more than half of rural households raise small ruminants, mainly goats and sheep. This activity is an essential source of income for poor rural populations. Due to its strong socio-economic footprint, the small ruminant meat sector is an important lever for local development and food security. It also has strong potential for inclusion, particularly for women, who are very involved in processing and marketing activities, such as street food vendors.

From a cultural point of view, small ruminant meat is widely accepted: it is consumed without religious or ethnic restrictions in all regions of the country. However, local supply remains insufficient to meet demand. Average annual consumption of meat and offal is estimated at 7.5 kg per capita, well below the recommended standard of 12 kg. This low consumption is the result of a structural production deficit linked to low-yield extensive farming systems and health and hygiene standards that are still too unpredictable. Furthermore, small ruminant farming has the advantage of being well suited to all agro-ecological zones in the country, and its short reproductive cycle is an asset for rapid intensification.

Limited animal productivity and inadequate support services

One of the main challenges identified at the start of the project was the low productivity of family farms. Frequent animal diseases, early mortality of kids, poor nutrition and the lack of preventive health practices significantly limited the value of the animals on the markets. Small-scale producers lacked access to essential inputs (vaccines, antiparasitics, improved breeding stock), local veterinary services and advice tailored to their circumstances.

Although several service providers exist (notably the Institute for Technical Advice and Support (ICAT), local NGOs and private veterinarians), their coverage remains insufficient, particularly in remote areas. The ESOP (Service Enterprise and Producer Organisation) model, which aims to provide local technical and economic support, remained largely inoperative in the target area. The project therefore sought to strengthen the roots of this model, support the functioning of animal health systems and promote improved livestock farming practices, in particular through the establishment of Livestock Farmers' Exchange Circles (CEE).

Essential but poorly supported informal actors in the value chain

Downstream in the chain, the meat marketing and distribution sector relies heavily on informal actors: butchers, delicatessens, rotisseries and street food vendors. Although they play a central role in providing urban populations with access to meat, these professionals often operate in precarious conditions, without supervision or recognition. They are rarely trained in good hygiene practices, lack appropriate equipment, and are poorly integrated into health control mechanisms. These shortcomings pose serious risks to public health, compromise product quality, and limit economic opportunities for these actors.

The project therefore aimed to improve the health and hygiene quality of street food by targeting these professionals through training, certifications and access to credit. This approach aimed to professionalise these trades, protect consumers and create a virtuous cycle of transformation within

the sector.

Clear needs for sustainable transformation of the sector

In light of these findings, several priority needs have emerged. On a technical level, livestock farmers require greater support in order to improve animal health, reproduction, feeding and overall herd management. From an economic perspective, it is essential to structure marketing chains and facilitate access to more lucrative markets. Institutionally, the recognition and professionalisation of informal distribution actors appear to be essential levers for strengthening the sector. Finally, in terms of health, strengthening control mechanisms and promoting good hygiene practices among food handlers are major priorities for ensuring product quality and consumer safety.

The DEFI-Viande project is therefore part of an integrated approach to developing the sector, with an inclusive, territorial and multi-stakeholder approach focused on the issues of productivity, food safety and the income of small producers and informal operators.



In practice

Activities carried out

The DEFI-Viande project took an integrated approach to boosting the productivity of small ruminants on family farms. The strategy was based on the active involvement of consortium members, including Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Suisse (VSF-Suisse), Entreprises Territoires et Développement (ETD), the National Federation of Actors and Professionals in the Livestock and Meat Sector of Togo (FENAP-FIBVTO) and the Higher School of Agronomy (ESA), as well as service providers such as the Institute for Technical Advice and Support (ICAT) and private veterinarians in the intervention areas. The main beneficiaries were 800 small-scale farmers and livestock breeders (30% of whom were women), including 500 supported by ETD and 300 newly identified, practising family farming of small ruminants in the prefectures of Blitta, Ogou and Haho.

The intervention began with contacts with local authorities and stakeholders, followed by a rigorous process of identifying and selecting farmers based on data from the West Africa Agricultural Productivity Programme (WAAPP), supplemented by field surveys to include new beneficiaries. A baseline study confirmed the priority needs, guiding the awareness-raising of farmers on the project's objectives.

The beneficiaries were organised into Cooperative Societies (SCOOPS) in accordance with OHADA provisions¹, and then supported in the implementation of good livestock farming practices. Technical activities included training on technical production itineraries, cooperative management, and the adoption of innovations such as CEE, the FAMACHA method for diagnosing anaemia, and the use of zootechnical monitoring sheets (BTA). Support for strengthening the animal health system was provided through training and retraining of village livestock assistants (AVE), the organisation of PPR vaccination campaigns, and group deworming.

The project also set up a material and financial support mechanism with the subsidised distribution of breeding kits and enclosures, as well as co-financing of health campaigns. All actions were regularly monitored and evaluated by ESOP technicians, who were responsible for supporting livestock farmers in the field.

Results achieved

The interventions led to a significant improvement in livestock farming practices and zootechnical performance. The mortality rate of kids fell from 50% to 8%, while the kidding rate reached 90%, compared to 17% at the outset. The use of improved breeding stock has improved the conformation of the animals and reduced abortions, while the formation of cooperatives has encouraged the collective adoption of group vaccinations and biannual deworming.

Farmers also adopted new herd management techniques thanks to the BTA, and showed a marked interest in high-performance breeding stock, well beyond the initially anticipated demand. The participatory approach of the CEE has strengthened the dissemination of knowledge and the sharing of experiences among farmers. The use of FAMACHA diagnosis has facilitated the early detection of anaemia, improving responsiveness to health risks.

1 Organisation for the Harmonisation of Business Law in Africa (abbreviated to OHADA)

Economically, improved production conditions contributed to an increase in herd size (+17.38%), better market value for animals, and a reduction in losses due to disease and theft. The adoption of weight estimation based on chest circumference allowed for a more objective assessment of animals intended for sale.

Challenges encountered

The implementation of the project faced several constraints. The available resources proved insufficient to meet the scale of needs, particularly to cover the financial contribution required for the purchase of breeding stock and the construction of enclosures. The supply of suitable breeding stock was also considered limited, restricting the ability to respond to growing demand from farmers.

Despite these difficulties, the project was able to maintain momentum in the adoption of good practices, thanks to the active involvement of local stakeholders and a gradual approach to awareness-raising, experimentation and support. These efforts have laid the foundations for the sustainable intensification of small ruminant production in the intervention areas, with positive effects observed on animal health, food security and the incomes of small producers.

Lessons learned and recommendations

- ⊙ **The direct involvement of livestock farmers through the CEE promotes the adoption of good farming practices.** The CEE have enabled peer learning and built producers' confidence in new practices. This participatory approach has facilitated the adoption of improved techniques, particularly in the areas of animal health, reproduction management and enclosure design. PEC members shared their experiences, observed concrete results, and gradually replicated effective behaviours. It is recommended that this peer learning dynamic be reinforced in any initiative to disseminate livestock farming practices, by dedicating time, trained facilitators and structured support to it.
- ⊙ **Local technical support from dedicated agents is crucial to changing practices.** The role of ESOP technicians in regularly monitoring farmers was central to the effective adoption of innovations. Their continuous presence made it possible to explain good practices, monitor their implementation, adjust interventions, and build a relationship of trust with beneficiaries. This close relationship helped to dispel doubts, motivate producers and ensure the effective application of the lessons learned. Any initiative to disseminate technical innovations must include a regular and personalised field monitoring system, mobilising competent agents who are well integrated into the areas of intervention.
- ⊙ **Targeting already motivated livestock farmers accelerates visible change but limits the mass effect.** The beneficiaries selected for the project showed a genuine interest in livestock farming and a certain capacity for organisation, which facilitated experimentation and the rapid success of several actions. However, this targeted approach can limit the scope at the territorial level if it is not accompanied by a mechanism for opening up or disseminating information to other livestock farmers. The knock-on effect observed (construction of enclosures or adoption of health campaigns by non-beneficiaries) remains

partial. It is recommended that this targeting be combined with an explicit replication mechanism, for example through local leaders, open demonstrations or sponsorship systems.

- ⊙ **Partial co-financing of certain inputs stimulates livestock farmers' commitment, but requires appropriate support.** The subsidised provision of breeding kits, enclosures and vaccination funds has helped to reduce the financial barrier for beneficiaries, while empowering them to mobilise a counterpart contribution. This mechanism has encouraged the adoption of equipment and practices. However, several farmers encountered difficulties in mobilising their share due to limited income or competing priorities. It is therefore advisable to calibrate co-financing requirements to the actual capacity of beneficiaries and to provide microcredit or group savings schemes to secure their contribution.
- ⊙ **Mastering breeding practices is a key lever for rapidly improving productivity.** The introduction of improved breeding stock and awareness-raising on reproduction management have led to a rapid increase in the farrowing rate (from 17% to 90%) and a significant decrease in neonatal mortality. These results illustrate the importance of improving genetic quality and mating practices to increase herd productivity. Future projects must systematically integrate this lever by combining the provision of breeding stock with a system for renewal, health monitoring and awareness-raising on rational reproduction.
- ⊙ **The establishment of a cooperative structure has facilitated the collective implementation of health measures.** The organisation of farmers into SCOOPS has made it possible to pool actions such as vaccination and group deworming, to contract services with veterinary practices, and to create a dynamic of solidarity. This structure has also contributed to greater visibility of the sector in the eyes of service providers. Any strategy to boost productivity must be accompanied by support for the structuring of livestock farmers, with specific training in cooperative governance and collective management of services.
- ⊙ **An extension to Sotouboua and Tchamba, where the density of livestock farmers is high according to PPAO data, would allow the model to be replicated.** A 12-month pilot phase, targeting a larger number of livestock farmers, could test its feasibility.

About this capitalisation note

This note is the result of a participatory capitalisation process conducted as part of the Programme to Support Livestock Marketing in West Africa (PACBAO). The aim of capitalisation is to document and promote experiences in the field in order to encourage learning, accountability and the scaling up of promising approaches. The information was gathered through interviews, field visits, document analysis and stakeholder consultations.

About the PACBAO programme

The Regional Programme to Support Livestock Marketing in West Africa (PACBAO) is an ECOWAS initiative with financial support from Swiss Cooperation (SDC). It is part of the implementation of the ECOWAS Regional Agricultural Policy (ECOWAP). It aims to create conditions conducive to increasing livestock farmers' incomes by leveraging the private sector in regional livestock trade and regional public institutions. During its first phase (2018–2023), the programme contributed to strengthening the institutional and operational capacities of ECOWAS and financed 16 pilot projects in 11 countries in West Africa and the Sahel, which generated around ten good practices and innovations. The pilot projects mainly aimed to increase livestock productivity, improve the competitiveness of meat produced in the region in the face of competition from extra-community imports, facilitate and modernise intra-regional livestock trade, and improve relations between value chain actors, facilities and means for the processing and transport of red meat.

The second phase of the programme (2024–2028) is in line with this approach and will focus on scaling up existing innovative practices while creating favourable conditions for the promotion of the livestock and meat sector. Its overall objective is to help meet the red meat and meat product needs of the populations of West Africa and the Sahel through the development of intraregional trade in livestock and meat and the control of extraregional imports of meat products. Specifically, the second phase of the programme aims to increase the supply of livestock and meat in terminal markets by at least 2.6% and reach approximately 500,000 direct beneficiaries, 40% of whom are young people and women.

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