



Domestic Cavies

Action Contre la Faim distributing cavies as part of a food security program in DRC (Photo credit: NBC News)

KEY MESSAGES

NUTRITIONAL SECURITY

Domestic cavies provide a high-quality meat source with high levels of protein (19-20% protein) and low in cholesterol.

INCOME GENERATION

Cavies are important for income generation, especially for women.

STIMULATION OF MARKETS

Connecting people and organizing markets will help to advance cavy keeping as an economic activity.

IMPROVED PRODUCTIVITY

Improved flock productivity can be obtained by preventing inbreeding. This is possible through the exchange of male cavies among farmers from different *territoires* (districts).

A CRUCIAL RESOURCE FOR LIVELIHOOD RESILIENCE FOR DISPLACED AND POOR FAMILIES IN EASTERN DRC

Food insecurity and poverty are real challenges to the rural and peri-urban population living in conflict affected areas of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

DRC is highly dependent on humanitarian aid to provide minimum food intake and basic needs to her populations. According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) map¹, with more than half million of displaced persons, eastern DRC is considered largely to be in emergency.

Domestic cavies present an opportunity for livelihood resilience for this large population of displaced families across DRC. This mini

livestock is being promoted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) as part of its program to encourage smallholder farm diversification for improved livelihoods². For more than 20 years, the Bureau for Exchange and Distribution of Information on Mini Livestock (BEDIM)³ has also been promoting small animal husbandry as an alternative food and income source.

The general shortage of animal protein sources due to the looting of livestock during the years of conflict led to a widespread acceptance of cavies as a food item. Besides home consumption, small restaurants at



CAVIES CAN EASILY BE CONVERTED TO DISPOSABLE INCOME AND SERVE AS THE FIRST RUNG ON THE LADDER TO GREATER WEALTH



CASH FROM CAVY SALES IS USED FOR PAYING SCHOOL FEES, AND BUYING UNIFORMS AND SUPPLIES

NOTES

¹IPC: <http://www.ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo-countries/ipcinfo-eastern-middle-africa/en/> (27th July 2013)

²Cf. Wilson, R.T. 2012. Small animals for small farms. Diversification Booklet N.14, 92p. (www.fao.org/docrep/015/i2469e/i2469e00.pdf)

³BEDIM: Bureau pour l'Echange et la Distribution de l'Information sur le Mini Elevage (<http://bedim.org/>)

local markets such as Mugogo and Mudwanga in Walungu *territoire*, which serve cavy meat, are experiencing a very high demand for this delicacy.

THE POTENTIAL OF CAVY CULTURE

- Cavies are a nutritious and healthy alternative source of animal protein
- Cavy production, as a landless animal production system is suitable for urban/peri-urban situations
- Cavies do not compete with humans for food as they feed on forage plants and kitchen left-overs
- This mini livestock species is robust and has a fast reproduction rate – flocks can be rapidly built from a single pair of adults
- When people need to flee, cavies are very easy to carry (one pair in the pockets!)
- Cavies can easily be converted to disposable income, serving as the first rung on the livestock ladder and may help families to acquire greater wealth

WAY FORWARD

A number of NGOs already use cavies as part of their “rehabilitation kits” for displaced people to help them move out of abject poverty. Intensification of cavy culture will improve the livelihoods of more than 200,000 households in North and South Kivu who already keep the animals. Through previous research conducted under the BecA-ILRI Hub led “*Harnessing husbandry of domestic cavy for alternative and rapid access to food and income in Cameroon and the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo*” project, cavy culture has been identified as a women and youth driven livestock farming for both countries.

PROJECT PARTNERS

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