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Case study: Poulet du Faso

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From *Poulet bicyclette* to *Poulet mobylette*: in Burkina Faso, an improved breed of backyard chicken is changing the game for backyard chicken production.

Africa's current population of around 1.4 billion is set to increase by another 1 billion people by 2050, according to the UN. If we are to meet the needs of this extra billion, animal agriculture as a source of food and income generation will play a vital role. In a Sahelian country where livestock are almost exclusively raised extensively, producing enough nutritious food for a population of 18

million people is a challenge.

In Burkina Faso, the local breed of backyard chicken, called ‘Poulet bicyclette’ due to the bicycle being their most common mode of transportation, are preferred by farmers and consumers alike due to their beauty, their eating qualities and ease of rearing.

However, low hatching rates (a maximum of 20 chicks per year), long maturation times (6 months to reach market weight) and high rates of loss due to disease limits their potential to contribute to local nutrition needs.

Enter ‘Poulet du Faso’: A project, a new chicken breed – a solution.



A small scale commercial poultry farm in Burkina Faso. Photo: Ceva.

Funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Ceva Santé Animale set out with a mission to find a solution to these problems. Between 2016 and 2021, Ceva partnered with Sasso to explore the best genetic and healthcare options to enable small-scale farmers to produce more from their scavenging chickens. Sasso chickens were considered ideal as they are dual purpose (less selected than broiler or layer genetic lines), and are better adapted to free ranging or less intensive systems of poultry production. To ensure the chickens were locally acceptable, the project aimed to create a new crossbreed that retained the favourable characteristics of the local Poulet bicyclette, while incorporating the enhanced reproductive potential of Sasso breeders. And so, the Poulet du Faso was created.

Poulet du Faso (PdF) are produced by crossing a breeder male of local ‘Poulet bicyclette’ genetics with a traditional Sasso breeder female. The male Poulet bicyclette genetic lines were carefully selected in a newly constructed, state-of-the-art grandparent farm, the Avian Selection Centre, located in a remote corner of Burkina Faso. This one-of-kind centre in Africa commercializes the breeder males under the name ‘Coq du Faso’. The Sasso females, which are breeders of ‘traditional’ genetics, come from grandparent farms in Europe and are shipped to Burkina Faso as day-old chicks (DoC). The Coq du Faso and Sasso breeders are reared and bred by independent hatcheries to produce PdF DoC in much larger numbers than local farmers are able to produce through backyard ‘auto-reproduction’: compare 20 chicks max per year from local females in

backyard systems to 150 chicks per year from Sasso females in breeder farms.

Poulet du Faso look and taste like local Burkina chickens, but they grow much faster.

For physical characteristics, Sasso genes are recessive compared to Poulet bicyclette, so PdF take on the physical phenotype of their father. Benefitting from the genetics of their mothers, though, PdF take only two to three months to reach market weight, even under rural local conditions. This is why they are affectionately dubbed ‘Poulet mobylette’ - motorbike chicken since they are so speedy. But the genetic improvement and production of PdF DoC was only the first step.

Creating a market for PdF through extensive communication and capacity building activities with farmers.

Ceva partnered with a local Burkinabé hatchery, Fadima, and developed a distribution model and marketing strategy to introduce PdF to small-scale farmers. Prior to this, the practice of purchasing DoC was largely inexistant because farmers produced their own chicks with their backyard flocks. Making this shift required behaviour change through sensitisation at the level of farmers, and ultimately transformation of the poultry value chain.

To strengthen the capacity of farmers to shift to more intensive batch rearing, a limited liability company was created, ‘Anipole Faso’. This company created a distribution network, and provided farmers with an extension and health service. Ownership of the company was transferred to the project manager at the end of the project.

An overview of the entire PdF project is represented in Figure 1.

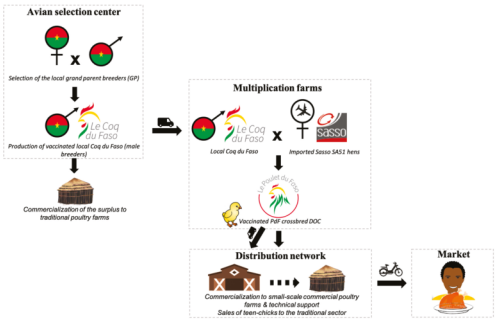


Figure 1: Diagram showing the components of the Poulet du Faso (PdF) project: The Avian selection center for selection and production of male grandparent lines with sale of surplus to traditional poultry farms; importation of Sasso females to the hatchery where breeding and production of PdF day-old-chicks (DoC) occurs; distribution to Anipole Faso, which markets and provides technical support to small-scale commercial farms and sells teen chicks to traditional poultry farmers.

By the end of the project, the distribution network and Avian selection centre were financially and legally independent from Ceva.

The demonstrated sustainable business models and notoriety of the PdF brand enabled the new business owners to perpetuate the production of PdF for the continued benefit of the farmers.

At the end of the project, Fadima hatchery was still producing PdF and other hatcheries were interested in starting, the Coq du Faso were still being produced and selected at the Avian selection center, and Anipole Faso was still distributing the PdF chicks and other inputs to small farmers throughout Burkina. Farmers have been able to grow their business because of the higher margins which the PdF breed afforded them.



Local Poulet Bicyclette reared under traditional backyard conditions. Photo: Ceva.

The project is over but activities continue.

The PdF project ended in 2021. Despite two coup d'états, PdF production activities have not only continued, but expanded, and the impact has been amplified through much of Burkina Faso.

As of March 2024:

The Coq du Faso Selection Centre, set up during the project, is still producing and commercializing the male breeders at a profit.
Fadima hatchery continues to produce PdF, and production has expanded to the other six hatcheries in Burkina Faso (Figure 2). PdF now represents the majority of production in Burkina Faso, compared to standard broilers or layers.
Anipole Faso is still commercializing and distributing the PdF chickens produced by the seven hatcheries, and providing an extension service to the farmers through their 10 technical-commercial agents located in all regions of Burkina Faso. They continue to track the improvement in the production parameters of PdF (mortality rate, feed conversion ratio (FCR).
Farmers are still buying the PdF, which is now a trusted household name in Burkina Faso.
PdF is now also being produced in Togo, Mali, and Senegal, with Côte d'Ivoire also expressing interest.

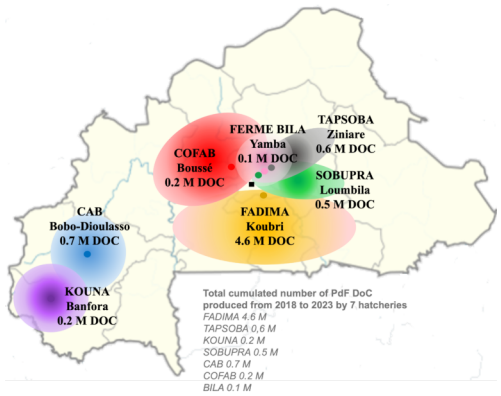


Figure 2: Poulet du Faso day-old-chick production per hatchery and their areas of operation.

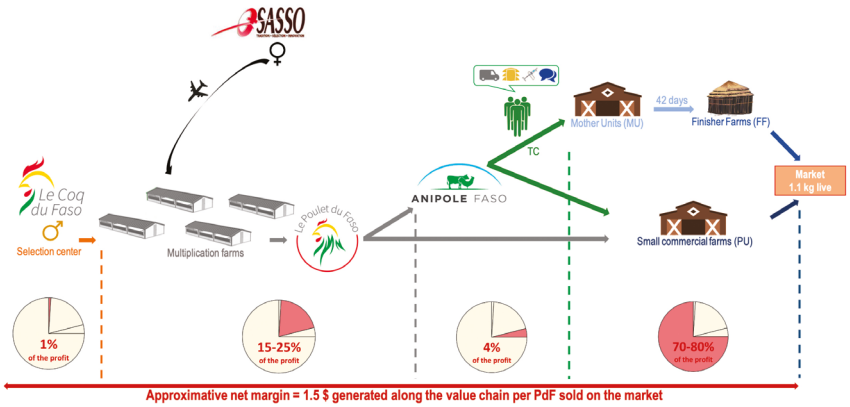
Data from Anipole Faso shows that farmers are now buying in larger batches, shifting from an average batch of 500 DoC to 1,000. Average mortality and days needed to reach market weight have also reduced, while feed conversation ratio has improved (Table 1). In its 2023 report Pathways to lower emissions, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations suggests that the three main 'levers' for increasing the sustainability of livestock are productivity increases, and improved animal health and breeding. These interventions are all observed in the PdF project, and support the first three United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of no poverty, zero hunger, and good health and well-being.

	PdF during project (2021)	PdF after project (2023)	Local (2021-2023)
Days needed to reach market weight (1.1kg)	75	60	180
Mortality (%)	10	6	+++ (no data)
FCR	3.2	2.9	NA (scavenge)

Table 1. Poulet du Faso production performance parameters. FCR = feed conversion ratio.

What about economic sustainability?

The Coq du Faso Selection Centre and distribution partner Anipole Faso were created for the project. There was profit generated throughout the whole value chain (Figure 3). They were initially subsidised with project funds, but both companies had reached breakeven point by the end of the project and are now subsisting entirely on their own profits.



The people recruited and trained by the project (and whose cost was originally subsidised) are still fulfilling the same roles. Dr Raoul Atikpakpe, a young veterinarian from Benin who was recruited to manage the Selection Centre, is now the Managing Director of the Coq du Faso SARL. The PdF local project manager, Yaya BA, is now the Managing Director of Anipole which has made a viable business out of distributing PdF produced by the different hatcheries to small holder farmers and providing a technical service. The Selection Centre and Anipole employ a number of staff, now entirely funded through the successful business activity of the entities.

Since the project, there have also been other innovations, such as the marketing manager of Anipole opening her restaurant selling exclusively PdF meat and heavily branded with PdF.

This sounds amazing - was it always smooth sailing

Of course not! What project ever is?

Ceva reflected on lessons learned during this project, and there is much that others looking to embark on a similar venture could learn from.

Read the learnings brief from Poulet du Faso

Learnings from Poulet du Faso (PDF)

What made it so successful?

As a project, PdF always placed the evolving needs of the local entrepreneurs, farmers and customers first. This required commitment to this goal, flexibility, and the willingness to adapt. From the outset, they were also intentional about building local capacities around a business plan that would enable operations to continue long after the pump priming from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Read more about how the project partners worked towards making Poulet du Faso production sustainable

Sustainability of Poulet du Faso (PDF)

Read the full PdF report

Le Poulet du Faso: A Success Story Improving Traditional Poultry Genetics and Health in Burkina Faso (2022).

Acknowledgments

The Poulet du Faso project was implemented by Ceva Santé Animale in partnership with Sasso-Hendrix Genetics, Fadima (a local Burkinabé hatchery), and NTD France (who contributed to building the selection center and their provided technical support).

Are there lessons that are transferable to other species?

In parallel with the PdF project, Ceva also piloted a program called Vache du Faso, aimed at improving dairy production through cross-breeding indigenous cows with exotic genetics. This project was designed for a different geography, however it necessitated the relocation of the project to Burkina Faso, where the project was able to run its course.

Read more about Vache du Faso and learnings from both projects.

Case study: The Vache du Faso Project

What can we learn from the two projects together?

Both PdF and VdF had ‘theoretically’ profitable business models on paper, however the scale of the investment that has to be borne by the farmer for cattle AI and the delay of the return on investment (3 to 4 years to get a lactating female calf) meant that the autonomous business phase of the VdF fizzled out not long after the end of the subsidization of the AI programs. This is in contrast to PdF, where the return on investment was quick (just three months) and the initial investment ‘scalable’ to the size of the farmers pocket (i.e. some farmers could start with a small investment by purchasing a small batch of 100 chicks, and re-invest the profits into ordering progressively bigger batches). Short production cycles in chickens mean that benefits are more immediately perceivable and the risk that the process will be affected by external factors is lower.

PdF chickens remain suitable for production in less-intensive systems in contrast to dairy production which is best suited to a more intensive mode of farming, which was not the case in Burkina where herds were traditional transhumant (extensive). Hence PdF was well suited to the extensive livestock production system of Burkina whereas VdF was not.

There was a greater sense of ownership in the service provision and distribution nodes of the PdF value chain, since these were treated like a business which was handed over to staff members at the end of the project timeline. Whilst this was also the case with the VdF, the high cost of inputs versus the low demand meant that very quickly the business ran into cash flow issues. Ultimately VdF was not able to reach the minimum target of 1,300 AIs per year to breakeven.

Dairy AI programs are best suited to public-private approaches where the state subsidizes part of the cost of AI which is prohibitively expensive for farmers alone. In countries which have achieved genetic improvement of their national herds, this has always been undertaken through state-funded initiatives; including in Europe, the USA and North African countries and some countries in SSA such as Ethiopia and Kenya. This is in contrast to developments in the poultry sector, which are mostly borne out of private sector investments, such as investments to build new hatcheries (which can be foreign but often in Africa are local), and this trickles down to the existence of entrepreneurial spirit at the level of even the smallest scale of poultry farmers. Investment in poultry is lucrative and less risky as inputs are cheaper and returns on investment faster.

The creation of additional nodes in the poultry value chain gave farmers more business opportunities – e.g., sale of surplus Coq du Faso. In contrast, there were limited additional opportunities for actors within the VdF value chain. The fact that the VdF was conducted in a region where the market for fresh milk was poorly developed contributed to the fact that demand for AI was low, because farmers who had money to invest where not sure how they were going to market the milk. Hence AI programs should always be conducted hand-in-hand with pre-existing access to a milk collection, processing and marketing network.

Do you have a learning to share, or a story to tell? Get in touch!

This case study was prepared by SEBI-Livestock in collaboration with CEVA. It is an output of the SEBI-Livestock work package on Monitoring & Learning of livestock investments.