For years Asmau Mohammed has lost chickens to Newcastle disease. Now however, she is one of thousands of small-scale poultry owners who can at last buy a vaccine against the virus and whose flocks and incomes are growing.

A pioneering partnership between Agriprojects Concept International, National Veterinary Research Institute and a network of village-based vaccinators is making poultry vaccines available and affordable for poor rural people in northern Nigeria.

Vaccine sales save poor farmers’ poultry

A disease that decimates chickens

From October, a dry harmattan wind sweeps across northern Nigeria. It marks the start of the peak season for Newcastle disease, a virus that kills tens of millions of chickens every year. These chickens are a vital source of savings and income for poor households in northern Nigeria, and particularly for rural northern women who own the chickens. Nigeria’s large-scale poultry farmers can immunise their poultry against the disease, but poor women and men in rural areas have no knowledge of, or access to, these life-saving vaccines.

60% of northern Nigeria’s chickens are raised in small flocks, by over 5 million households. Vaccine distributors have yet to realise the potential of this large customer base. Some distributors believe that poultry must be vaccinated by a vet; but vets are scarce in rural Nigeria. Distributors are also discouraged by the high costs of reaching unfamiliar customers in rural areas. But the main reason for the vaccine’s unavailability is a widely-held belief that poor women and men will not pay for it.

Reaching farmers with vaccines

Asmau Mohammed is one of a growing number of small-scale poultry farmers that now buys the ND-I2 Newcastle disease vaccine. ‘I only vaccinated half of my chickens the first time,’ she explains. ‘Now I want to vaccinate all the birds that were not done the other day’

Asmau paid around 20 Naira (8p) to vaccinate each of her ten chickens. They all survived this year’s Newcastle disease outbreak, and her flock size has also increased. She now has 20 birds and can sell each for N500 (£2) each, giving her a total of 10,000 Naira (£40) from selling her 20 birds. Asmau Mohammed was able to buy the vaccination due to a new business model that Agriprojects Concept International (ACI) piloted in partnership with Propcom Mai-karfi.

Central to the business is a thermo tolerant Newcastle disease vaccine ND-I2 developed by the National Veterinary Research Institute (NVRI), the foremost veterinary research organization in the country. NVRI has a pool of qualified researchers who have long standing experience in this ND-I2 vaccine. NVRI produced the vaccines for ACI to sell and also provided vital technical advice on its use and distribution.
A Dynamic Company

In an environment where veterinary distributors cater primarily to commercial farmers, ACI is a unique company. Keen on innovation, they saw the potential scale of selling to small farmers. Since August 2012, they carefully coordinated the activities of the ND-I2 promotion while contributing key business insights throughout the process. They quickly selected distributors and vaccinators to pilot the business model and started to train vaccinators. Trainees were taught how to administer the ND-I2 vaccine and how to sell it to farmers. Trainees then bought a vaccination kit with 1300 Naira. Within nine months, the first set of vaccinators trained by ACI has protected around 20,000 chickens across four northern states.

‘Garkuwan Kaji’ - Chicken Protectors

Isa Musa epitomises the type of vaccinator that ACI looks for. A village school cleaner, Isa Musa explains what being a vaccinator means for him, ‘I’m very happy about this extra income. I use the money I make from vaccination for my family’s day-to day needs, while waiting for my salary, which is sometimes delayed.’

Vaccinators like Isa Musa are entrepreneurial and diligent people who are key to the success of the pilot. Wearing their ‘Garkuwan Kaji’ vests they travel from village to village and door to door convincing first village heads and then other villagers about the importance of their vaccines.

Learning from the Pilot

Vaccinating small farmers’ chickens isn’t easy, as ACI and its vaccinators have learnt and finding vaccinators who are business-minded is central to success.

Vaccinators like Isa Musa have faced their own challenges. Some rural poultry owners expected the ND-I2 vaccine to be free. But vaccinators successfully explained the cost: benefit ratio. Fortunately for Isa Musa, growing numbers of poultry owners now value his vaccines. Seeing neighbours’ vaccinated chickens survive, when yours’ die, can quickly change attitudes.

Having witnessed how poor women and men benefit, the government’s Directorates of Veterinary Services are also supportive of the vaccinators’ initiative.

A success that can grow

An initial review has found that small-scale poultry owners, like Asmaw Mohammed, feel positive about the results of the vaccines and are keen to pay for the vaccine again.

As small farmers’ demand for the vaccine grows, ACI plans to have 140 vaccinators in 7 states in 2013. ACI’s desire to expand shows the company’s confidence that serving poor women and men makes sound business sense. ‘It is not a temporary distraction; it’s a business’, ACI director Dr Umaru recently observed.

The company also plans to supply other animal health products to rural villages, using the same vaccinators. Having had no access to vaccines, poor farmers could soon benefit from a range of them. For millions of rural families like Asmaw Mohammed’s, long excluded from protecting their animals properly, such a change in business perceptions could be life changing.

Vaccinator Isa Musa has increased his income by 35%