



STATE OF ANIMAL WELFARE IN AGRO-FOOD SUPPLY CHAINS: A CASE OF CHICKEN FARMING IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

As the demand for animal products rises, cases of animal cruelty are becoming more common, particularly in the effort to meet this demand. In Kenya, chicken farming plays a significant role in food security and provides a source of livelihood for many. However, it is often characterised by poor treatment and handling of chicken across various farming systems, including small-scale, backyard operations, and large-scale farms. Common issues include beak trimming, overcrowding, uncontrolled use of antibiotics, and cruel transportation practices. This study aims to explore the extent of these harmful practices, assess existing animal protection policies, and identify possible solutions to improve animal welfare while maintaining production levels. By reviewing the existing literature on the subject, this research hopes to inform policymakers, industry stakeholders, and consumers about respecting animal rights in farming. A balanced approach that considers both animal welfare and economic viability is the ultimate goal of a more sustainable and humane agro-food sector in Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

The rising demand for livestock products to meet the nutritional needs of the human population can compromise animal welfare standards in a livestock production system. (Onono, 2023). In Kenya, animals suffer from a variety of issues such as neglect, malicious physical harm, deprivation of food, confinement, use of improper transportation methods or facilities, assault during transportation (Photo 1), congestion, overloading, overworking, cruel treatment at slaughterhouses, inhumane capture practices, branding, and improper working tools (Mogoa et al., 2005).

Chicken farming in particular rearing of indigenous chicken is highly popular in Kenya's rural areas where most of the population lives. It is the main source of livelihood and a source of animal protein (Magothe et al., 2012). Policymakers in developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, have been hesitant to formulate animal welfare policies despite the potential advantages of such policies such as the rise in the demand from domestic and international consumers for products that are compliant with the humane treatment of animals (Otieno and Ogutu, 2015).

It is therefore against this background that this research is established to highlight the various forms of animal welfare issues in Kenya particularly in chicken farming and identify efforts in place to ensure the humane treatment of the animals in terms of policies and regulations. The research findings will be used to recommend policy-making and implementation to ensure sustainability in agro-food supply chains within Kenya.



Photo 1 Trader loaded with chicken on a motorcycle (Messo, 2023)

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For this research photographs retrieved from various sources were used to display the reality of the cruelty that chickens are subjected to whether on the farm or in transit to the markets. The use of photographs as a research method in social sciences has proven to be an essential tool in the provision of unique perspectives of a wide range of organizational dynamics and human experience. Researchers can take their images or engage participants in photo-taking activities (Holm, 2014).

Information on animal welfare was extracted from relevant documents such as policy drafts/documents, sessional papers, commissioned or non-commissioned specific studies, project appraisals, mid-term or terminal evaluations, progress reports, and various articles in journals and newspapers (Aklilu, 2008).

DISCUSSION

Current practices in chicken farming

In Kenya, chicken is slaughtered in a variety of brutal ways. These include strangling or twisting a chicken's neck, and manually removing its feathers. At the same time, it is still alive and inflicting agonizing death on chickens by dipping them in boiling water before severing their neck (Mogoa et al., 2005). Due to the prevalence of poultry diseases in Kenya, most farmers administer drugs without prescription leading to uncontrolled use of antibiotics which compromises the health of the animals and that of the consumers of poultry products (Onono, 2023).

Review of animal protection policies in Kenya

Kenya was ranked D for its incorporation into the law of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)'s animal welfare standards. The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Transport of Animals) Regulations 1984 provides guidelines for the humane transport of animals, including provisions on safe unloading and loading, overcrowding, vehicle construction, and care during transport. Despite this there's no policy looks into the welfare of broiler chickens (Animal Protection Index, 2020)

Proposed solutions

Promoting animal welfare in chicken farming requires raising awareness of its benefits, enforcement of legislation, punishing extreme suffering and investing in mobile abattoirs and welfare-friendly transportation (Otieno and Ogutu, 2019). Veterinary education should focus more on the welfare of farm animals (Ostović et al., 2016) while advanced AI technologies can enhance disease detection, improve flock health management and reduce antibiotic use (Elango et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

This paper highlights welfare issues in chicken farming in Kenya's agro-food supply chains, including beak trimming, overcrowding, excessive use of antibiotics, and cruel transport methods. Kenya's ranking on the Animal Protection Index reflects progress, but enforcement and monitoring remain weak. Therefore, it advocates for stronger policies, awareness initiatives, and improved infrastructure for ethical animal treatment.

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