



RPC Volunteers Program

What it is:

The **RPC Volunteers Program** is an initiative whereby local volunteers based in Malawi gain valuable experience and knowledge while creating a real impact through a range of activities in rural communities. The major immediate beneficiaries will generally be the volunteers themselves.

Objectives of the Program as a Whole:

- To provide meaningful work experience for tertiary educated Malawi youth;
- To fill gaps in knowledge which are significant for the rural poultry sector;
- To assist rural poultry owners, directly or indirectly, through small or pilot initiatives;
- To leverage larger inputs on programs and initiatives which show promise.

How it Works:

Commonly, volunteer programs in Malawi are international in nature. They rely on international volunteers who spend time in Malawi and then move elsewhere. By contrast, the **RPC Volunteers Program** uses volunteers who live here in Malawi.

Whilst any eligible person might be involved as a volunteer, it is expected that participants will more likely be university/college graduates who have not yet settled into long-term or heavily committed occupations. Indeed, RPC will actively solicit prospective candidates from tertiary institutions such as LUANAR (Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources) at its Bunda and NRC campuses.

Each participant will be assigned to a documented program of activities which have been chosen and refined beforehand with an overall objective of improving small scale and village poultry production. RPC will keep an up to date list of potential programs and publicise these as appropriate.

Identification of volunteers and work programs will be consistent¹ with the ACFID Practice Note "Responsible International Volunteering for Development". Participants will be required (as do all RPC personnel) to conform with RPC's **Code of Conduct** which is based on internationally recognised principles.

Funding will be sought from individual donors or small groups, with a typical program expected to cost \$500-1,000 overall and be of a duration of about 2-6 months. In many cases, the work will be part-time or intermittent in nature.

The number of volunteers supported by RPC will depend on the extent of donor support. Volunteers will be asked to prepare reports and information about their activities specifically aimed at the respective donors.

¹ Consistent noting that the [ACFID Practice Note](#) is aimed at international rather than local volunteers. (Link accessed 22 December 2018)

Benefits for the Volunteer:

Typically, volunteers in the program will be young men and women who, perhaps more than many of their peers, are willing to chart unknown territory. The practical experience of working with RPC will assist these future leaders to understand rural communities and the challenges in achieving improvements in livelihoods. That experience will undoubtedly be beneficial for their future careers.

A key element of the program will be preparatory training of the volunteer. This will include technical training appropriate for their program, training and guidance in the RPC code of conduct and related operating policies, and familiarisation with the principles of international development in the context of RPC's work. This learning process and experience will also undoubtedly be beneficial for the future careers of participants.

Benefits for Malawi:

Much of the expected activities will be in the nature of practical field based research and investigation. There are numerous unknowns about the situation of rural poultry and the program will provide an ideal mechanism to collect information which is important in broader decision making. The use of local volunteers will have the advantage that cultural differences in rural areas will be minimal hence avoiding a lag phase which may exist with outside volunteers as they "find their feet". Moreover, use of local volunteers will have a more constructive development impact and reduce the likelihood of exclusion of local expertise or marginalisation of local individuals, groups or communities.

Benefits for the Donor:

Prospective donors will have the opportunity to support a specific work program they think is significant. They will have a say in the program of activities and may well contribute suggestions to improve the impact and outcomes of the volunteer's activities. Through the reporting arrangements for the volunteer, donors will get a clear indication of the results of their generosity.

Steps in a Typical Program:

1. RPC secures a pledge of financial support from a donor, who may be an individual or a small group, and who may wish to specify the area they want to be covered. Arrangements for the support are clarified before RPC begins the program.
2. RPC identifies and contacts a suitable volunteer from its list of potential candidates. The broad logistics (timing, location, program requirements, support, costings, security, etc) are discussed and agreed. As far as possible, the obligations and responsibilities of the volunteer are clearly outlined in writing so as to avoid misunderstandings.
3. Arrangements for preparatory 1-2 day training are made. Training includes technical aspects as well as the RPC's Code of Conduct, values, *modus operandi* and overall operations.
4. The volunteer is placed at their work location and begin duties as per the program description.
5. RPC monitors progress, in particular within the first fortnight, to ensure smooth operation.
6. Regular communication between the volunteer and RPC headquarters is encouraged.
7. The volunteer reports formally on at least a monthly basis on their work, in accordance with a pre-arranged format. Reports to the donor(s) are prepared and sent. The volunteer is encouraged to communicate directly with the donor(s), probably via email, as appropriate.
8. Towards the finish of the program, the volunteer prepares a final report, again following a pre-arranged format. The report includes a description of the work, the impact, successes and failures, and recommendations for extension or further inputs. This report, or possibly a derived version, is also communicated to the donor(s).

Some Current Proposed Volunteer Programs:

Each of the proposed programs will have a detailed description of the respective objectives and activities before activities commence. This list is not fixed - some programs may be split, some may be combined. The duration and costs listed here are rough estimates only.

- Population density and other data on village poultry in selected locations.
 - Duration: 3 months. Cost: \$600.
 - Impact: a better understanding of the dynamics of village poultry production and marketing which will assist in targeting other interventions.
- Intensity of Newcastle disease vaccination and use of medicines.
 - Duration: 2 months. Cost: \$500
 - Impact: better picture of which poultry owners are missing out on vaccines/drugs and why. If this is clear, solutions will follow, eg through fostering small local suppliers, to give more people access to these vaccines/drugs.
- Marketing systems and production data for village poultry.
 - Duration: 3 months. Cost \$600.
 - Impact: potentially huge. Commercial enterprises know village chickens are much more popular than intensively reared chickens - they are looking for a market which under present conditions is far too diffuse. This study can only be on a pilot scale but the impact of a better commercial environment for rural producers could be ground-breaking.
- Application of mobile phone technology in the rural poultry sector.
 - Duration: 3 months. Cost \$600.
 - Impact: Mobile phones have been a quiet revolution in Africa over the past decade. Smart phones are another generation of technology which could potentially change for the better access to markets and services.
- Production parameters for the I-2 vaccine production unit at CVL.
 - Duration: 2 months. Cost \$400.
 - Impact: Supply of the I-2 vaccine in Malawi has frequently not been in line with demand. With a better understand the factors which affect the availability we can design better planning strategies.
- Contribution of poultry vs other livestock to rural livelihoods.
 - Duration: 3 months. Cost \$700.
 - Impact: Village poultry have long been under-estimated. Not surprising, they are small. What is the real contribution of poultry compared to other livestock? How much emphasis should government and other agencies put on poultry?
- Constraints to sustainability of community based poultry technicians/vaccinators.
 - Duration: 2 months. Cost \$500.
 - The performance of community based vaccinators in Malawi has been highly variable. We need to understand why some are very effective while others lose interest and enthusiasm.

- A study of common diseases of small scale poultry.
 - Duration: 3 months. Cost \$700.
 - Impact: Newcastle disease is the most important disease of rural poultry but other diseases especially respiratory problems in young chickens are a significant problem. This study will work with Central Veterinary Laboratory in an attempt to better understand the more common sources of loss.
- Design of short courses in small scale poultry health and production.
 - Duration: 3 months. Cost \$500.
 - Impact: Small scale commercial producers are hungry for more information on feeding, breeding, housing, and other management aspects. This program will work with Bunda to put together some course modules.
- Support for rural poultry as a means of support for protected areas (reserves etc).
 - Duration: 3 months. Cost \$700.
 - Impact: This program will work with Wildlife Action Group International around Thuma Forest Reserve to promote rural poultry as an alternative to poaching as a source of income for communities bordering the reserve. WAG is has a long history in the area and can be relied on to adopt effective and practical strategies.