

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

GJ-18
A Chicken Co-operative

20 April 1972
P.O. Box 4080
Dar es Salaam,
Tanzania

Mr. Richard H. Nolte,
Institute of Current World Affairs
535 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York

Dear Mr. Nolte:

Scenic countrysides with a large selection of game reserves, the Indian Ocean with its mild year-round temperature and the warm personality of the inhabitants, are assets of Tanzania which assure the tourist of having an enjoyable and memorable experience in East Africa. On the other hand, for the non-tourist who comes to Tanzania on his own to work, the seemingly endless hot and humid weather, the confrontation with a never-ending bureaucratic network (which must precede any form of productive work), and the facing of hostile locals who see you as a threat to their movement in a tight job market, can also be a memorable experience, but most likely a frustrating and disheartening one. Under these latter circumstances, it is very easy to become cynical and to deride the system as well as to impugn those who, in spite of these frustrations, continue their attempt to succeed. It is also very tempting to retreat and head back home. There are however, those seasoned expatriates who have undertaken the role of facilitator. Instead of adding to the woes of the struggling individual with stories of their own tribulations, they attempt to assist newcomers to make a transition into this new environment. The African Co-operative (AFCO) is such an organization; it attempts to aid Afro-Americans with their adjustments to the Tanzanian way of life.

AFCO was pioneered one year ago. It grew, not out of frustration, but as a result of an increasing understanding of the meaning of "kazi na umoja" (working together), one of many Tanzania phrases used in the pursuit of nation building. "AFCO wanted to function as an ombudsman for Afro-Americans," said Jerry Hunt, one of the prime movers of the organization. "However, as time passed, we saw ourselves functioning in a much broader capacity. After thirteen months, we have settled for a modest, but realistic program centered around the following objectives:

1. To increase the meat protein intake of Tanzanians by raising meat, chickens and eggs in a socialist manner.

2. To provide training for Africans in those skills which are needed in Tanzania.

3. To send persons armed with poultry technology and

related skills throughout the country to Ujamaa Villages, schools and training centers to share their skills.

4. To participate in special projects with the Government for the development of the People's Republic of Tanzania.

5. To encourage the use and proficiency in the national language, Kiswahili, by Afro-Americans in the Co-operative.

6. To help acclimate Afro-Americans to life in an agrarian society.

7. To provide skills training for Afro-Americans in relevant areas.

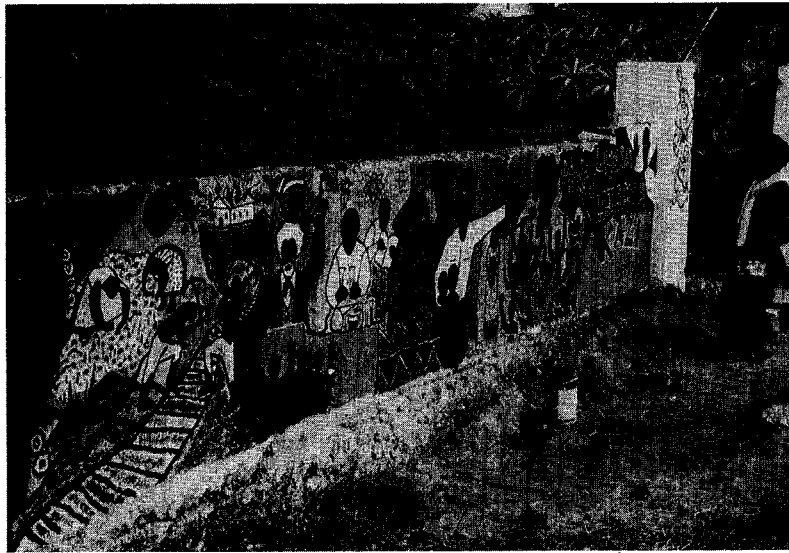
8. To provide temporary housing and information for Afro-Americans coming into Tanzania."

AFCO's base of operation is located eight miles from the center of Dar es Salaam. The trip to their headquarters is interesting in that it takes one through different sectors of the city. If one begins the trip in the down-town area of Dar es Salaam, within five minutes he finds himself in the industrial area of town. The transition is almost unnoticeable. Two miles farther one leaves this section and passes through several high-rise, Government owned housing developments. AFCO is situated just at the periphery of these new developments. It is evident that their acreage had been, at one time, a heavily forested area. Many of the trees which remain continue to offer considerable shade--a welcomed relief from mid-morning until late afternoon.

The eight acres of AFCO, which is called the farm, contain two large houses (used as dormitories for staff and visitors), six chicken coops, a workshop and a temporary slaughter-house for chickens. My first trip to the farm turned out to be a special occasion for the project. No, not because of my presence, but because Harry Belafonte, who was in Dar es Salaam at the request of the Tanzanian Government, decided to visit on that same day.

It did not take Harry very long to outlive the visitor role. Within minutes he had involved himself in the operations of the co-op. We soon learned that his expertise goes beyond that of the arts; he is also quite knowledgeable about chicken farming. While he asked appropriate questions, I busied myself taking photographs of the farm.

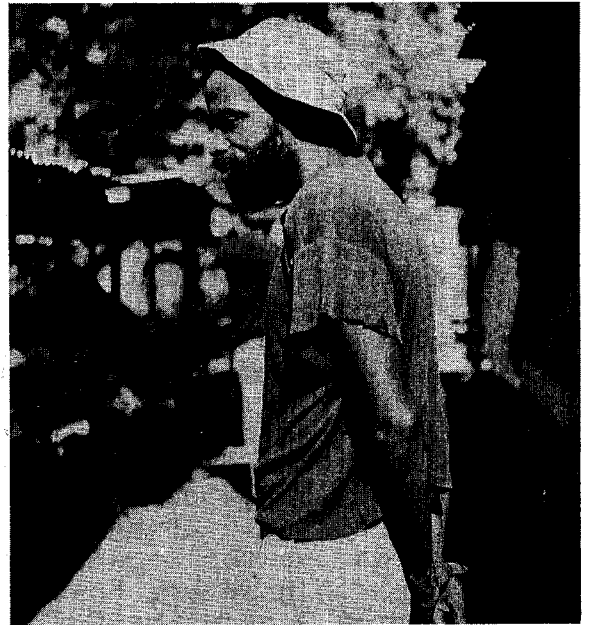
Our two AFCO hosts, Jerry Hunt and Shubedo Harrison, were straightforward in their answers to the questions directed to them during the course of our visit. They are responsible for the day to day administration of the farm. Jerry, a former commercial pilot instructor who also has a background in chemistry, is the controller for the organization. He also handles most of the ordering and veterinarian chores. When one listens



The Great
Wall of
AFCO



Shamba ya kuku (Chicken Farm)



Farm manager,
Shubedo
Harrison

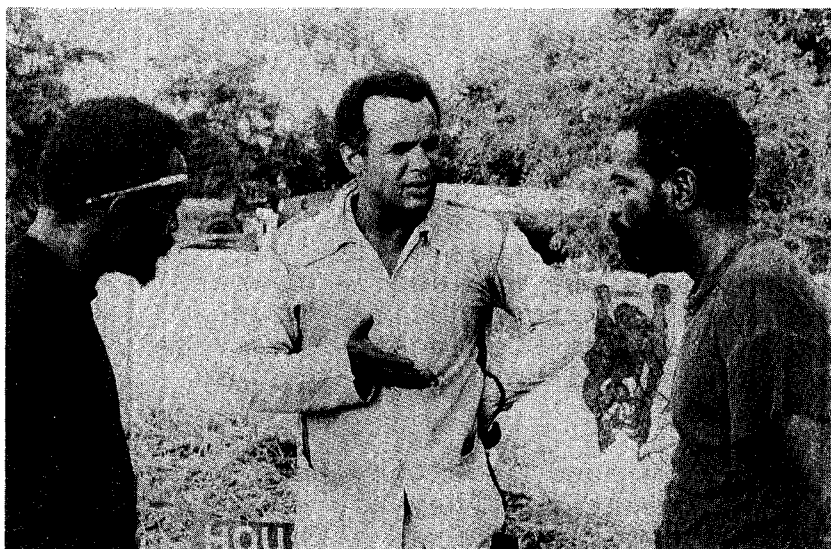


Harry Belafonte
&
visiting artist,
Baba Tunde

to his precise language pattern and his avoidance of small talk in favor of "tackling the real issues," as he phrases it, no doubt is left as to why he has been put in charge of the money. Shubedo on the other hand, enjoys just talking and listening and the more one discusses the topic of chickens the better he likes it. His demeanor reminds one of the old-time doctor who used to make house calls. Shubedo might have a host of things pending, but at that moment he gives the impression that you are number one on his docket. He is the farm manager. The "birds" (chickens) according to Shubedo are like children, they need, especially for the first 14 days, the same amount of attention as one would expect for a new baby. I met Shubedo in the bank this past week and it was the first time I have seen him anxious to the point of almost preoccupation. He did however, offer an apology for his abruptness as he had to rush from the bank to the hardware store before it closed. An unexpected air shipment of a thousand birds were arriving that afternoon from Nairobi and he was not quite prepared for them. (His panic reminded me of my camp counselor days when we would get a call from the city office explaining that they were sending up an extra bus load of children for two weeks). After he worked in the rain all morning and afternoon, I was told later that Shubedo had completed the last pen as the birds arrived.

The general manager, Fred Johnson, and the economic advisor, John Manning, were not present on the day of our visit. Jerry, Shubedo, Fred and John constitute the executive of AFCO. Jerry mentioned in his introduction of the staff that they all had one common denominator as they began AFCO; none had had any experience with chickens. They started with seventy-five dollars, one hundred chicks and lots of nerve.

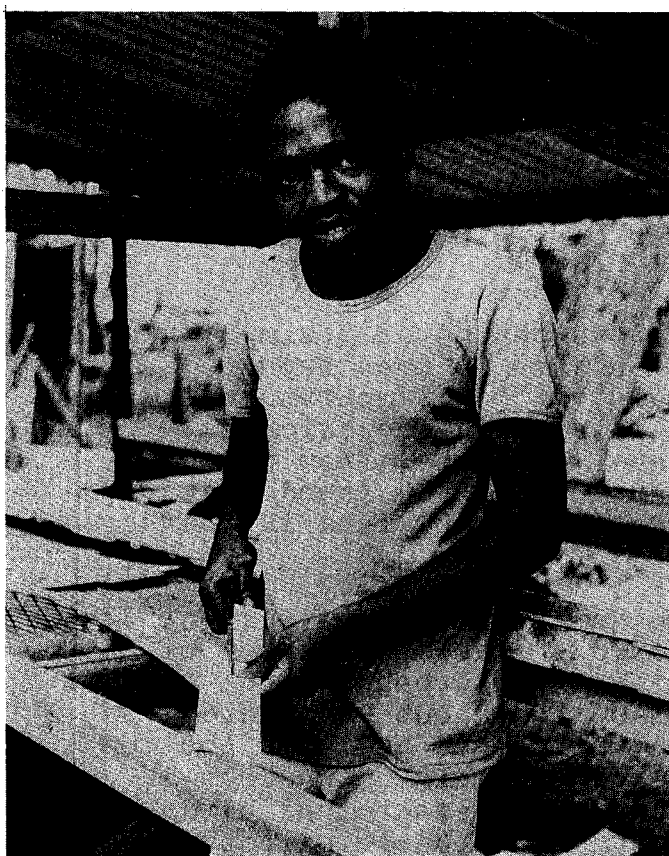
Since none of the group had training in the techniques of chicken farming I was curious as to why they would choose this area and not some other to make their contribution. "Brother Jones," said Shubedo, "after two months of hassling with the birds, we too began asking the same question." He went on to explain however, that most of his group prior to coming to Africa were quite familiar with the writings of President Julius Nyerere and when they arrived in Tanzania, they also sought out his speeches. They were determined to learn what Tanzanian socialism was all about and then, find out what they could do in return to be a part of Tanzanian development. Throughout most of the President's writings, it was noted that he stressed the need for health. Provisions to assure Wananchi (Africans) throughout Tanzania the very best in the way of health care services became one of the major tenets of his administration. After a few trips through Muhimbili Hospital, the medical teaching center for Tanzania, and viewing the number of kwashiorkor (nutritional disease) victims, the need for more and better health programs became evident to the members of AFCO, especially in the area of nutrition. The group also spent considerable time with Tanzanian families studying their daily menus. There are



Jerry Hunt, Harry and Shubedo



"The feed, medicine and vitamins have to be proportioned just right."



Sadi



Tanzanian Workers

Kenneth

very few people who go hungry in Tanzania, but at the same time, there are still fewer people who maintain a well balanced diet. Shubedo recorded that the daily menu for an average income family includes an over-abundance of starches and sugars in the form of ugali, ubwabwa (rice) potatoes, cassava and bananas. Very seldom does a family get ample protein in its diet, that is, proteins of the first order found in meats, fish, milk, eggs and cheese. For the majority, it is chiefly because of the high costs involved that these food products are avoided; a few are deterred by religious beliefs. The AFCO group decided that if chickens and eggs could be produced in the States at a relatively cheap price to the buyer, then they should be able to provide the same in Tanzania.

Jerry and Shubedo are now convinced that they have almost halved the present market price of chickens. They are even more convinced that chickens are "damned hard" to raise. "The chicken we turn out for market," explained Jerry, "is far more tender and of a better quality than the others currently being sold. After checking several sources, we found out that the markets were being sold hens as meat chickens. These birds were not only old, but also improperly fed."

A precedent for raising chickens in Africa, we were told, was established by "Chicken Davis," a graduate of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. As an advisor to Nigeria, "Chicken Davis" revolutionized the chicken industry with up to date methods of feeding and care. AFCO has attempted to adopt some of his methodology. The AFCO group has also studied the Israeli method of chicken raising. "With the exception of these two models," they asserted, "our attempts were strictly on the basis of trial and error."

The work-day at the co-operative begins at 5 a.m., when the birds are watered and fed. The process is then repeated between 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. Because of the cool temperatures, these times are best for both workers and chickens. The chickens seldom eat when the weather is extremely hot and, from past experience with people and heat prostration, AFCO found that workers are more productive during early mornings and late afternoon.

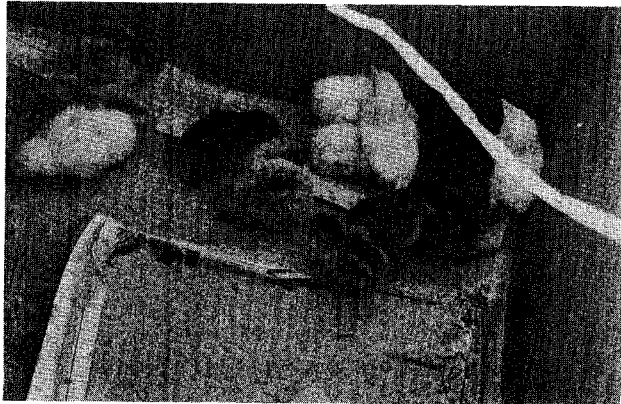
The feeding process, as with human beings, is very critical for the overall development of the bird. Correct mixtures of vitamins, medicines and feed are a must if the proper growth pattern is to be maintained. The co-op found out very early that chickens are susceptible to many illnesses and, for the most part, the majority of these illnesses are highly contagious. Medicines are given daily as a preventative measure and birds are immediately isolated if there is the slightest indication of illness. During the rainy season such as now, close vigilance has to be maintained to keep the young birds dry. Last year, the co-op lost several hundred birds before this fact was realized. There was also a pandemic of fowlpox last year which

destroyed many of their birds. Shubedo reported that sickness has not been their sole enemy. Not too long ago AFCO signed a declaration of war against a very sliopery poacher, the weasel. "Brother Jones," said Shubedo, "when we lost forty chicks to that sneaky creature, I was furious. We spent a whole day mending fences and replacing stones in two of our walls. We did not rest until we were certain that every possible entrance had been secured. We were wrong; that same evening the weasel got away with thirty more chicks. It was at that point that we decided to declare war. We donned our camouflaged uniforms, rounded up all the weapons we could find (a piece, 2 pangas, a sling-shot and 2 flashlights) and had two briefing sessions on tactics. We were ready for combat. Sure enough, as soon as it became dark our enemy, the weasel, accompanied by two other weasels, stealthily crept into the compound. At a given command we opened up with all we had-- the results, 3 dead and 1 casualty. The rubber in the sling-shot broke and caught its owner on the cheek, causing a big swelling." Shubedo said that the group was admonished during the briefing of the need to be alert, as the weasel was "slipperier than Gale Sayers on an end around, trickier than Shine, and meaner than Stagolee." "From that description," he added, "our crew had no doubt about the capability of that weasel."

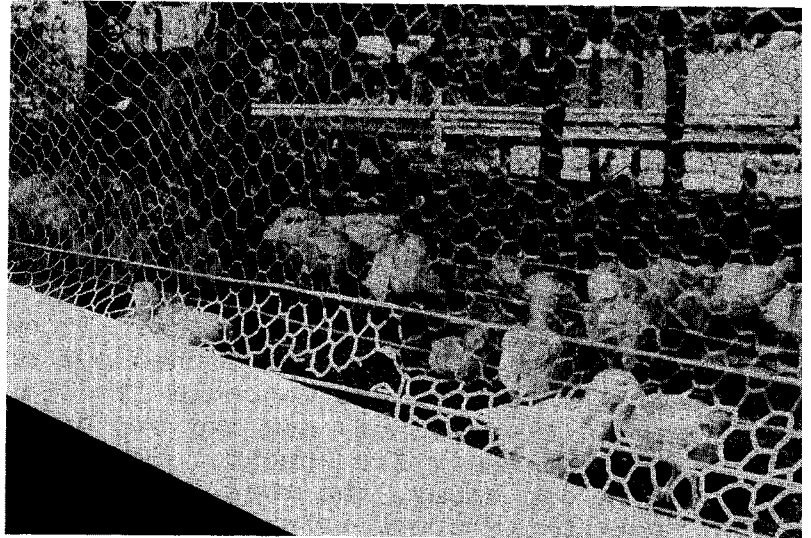
The life span of the chickens at AFCO is seven weeks. Starting with day-old chicks, they are fed continuously so that at the end of this compressed life span of seven weeks, they hopefully will have attained the weight of 2 kilograms. At this stage of development they are ready for butchering.

During this seven week period the birds, along with the intense feeding program, are subjected to "jamming." Shubedo explained the process of jamming as being a deliberate attempt to cut down on the living space of the bird in order to limit its amount of movement. "The idea is to get them to just stand and eat themselves to death," said Shubedo. As we moved through the noisy coops Shubedo called our attention to the different age groups and the different levels of jamming. He pointed out that the jamming period begins at 5 weeks. "Our present pens which we have modified several times are ideal for jamming," Jerry said; "the walls are built so that we can either expand or contract them depending on the number and size of the birds. Our first pens were fixed in size and consequently we lost the whole effect of jamming."

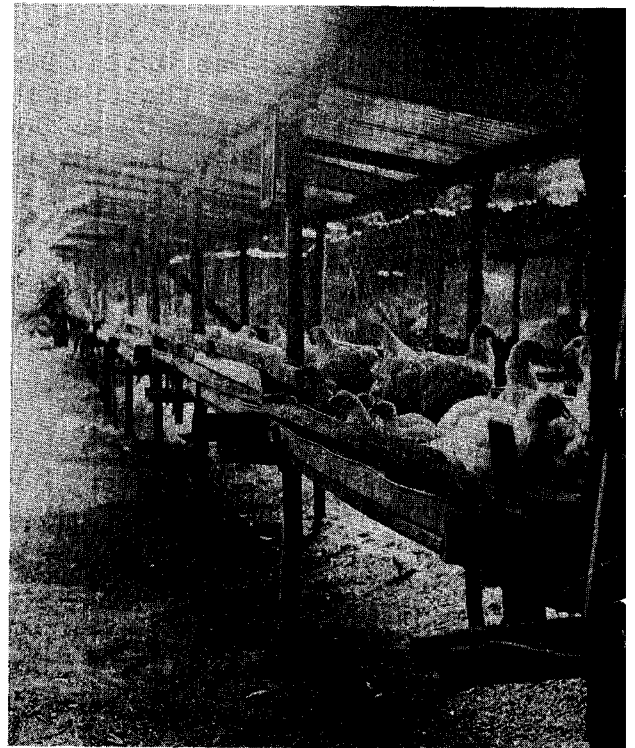
In addition to the collapsable walls, the co-op also moved from a ground level pen to one which is suspended 2½ feet above ground. The chickens not only fared better at this height, but the space below the pen made possible the construction of a wire meshing floor which allows the droppings from the chickens to fall through. So, rather than having the daily task of changing the maize husks which were used on the floors of the old pens, the ground is now simply raked and swept.



Abv: Day-old chicks
Rt: End of 14 days



3½ weeks



5½ weeks



7 weeks and 2 kilos

Shubedo is now experimenting with a double-tiered pen in the hope that they might double their capacity. He is trying to construct a floor for the above portion which will be easy to remove for cleaning. A solid flooring would then have to be fitted directly below the wire bottom.

At the end of a seven week cycle, the birds are prepared for the market. This means a morning of slaughtering which involves five stages after the kill:

1. The bird is held over a feather plucking machine which takes 20 seconds to remove the feathers, wet or dry. The machine is a power driven drum with a number of solid rubber stubs jutting from its sides.
2. The pin feathers are plucked manually.
3. The birds are gutted.
4. The gutted birds are washed in two separate buckets of water.
5. In the final step they are wrapped in cellophane bags and stored for market.

The morning of the day we arrived, ten workers starting at 5 a.m. had 500 chickens at the market ready for purchase by 12 noon. The co-op only sells to the Government.

Shubedo noted that on some days there have been up to 16 workers on the farm. On an average however, there are about seven workers each day. Four of the seven are the only paid employees. These are four Tanzanians who are training and working full-time at the co-op. They are being tutored in the entire operation of the farm, including the managerial aspects, so that they will be able to initiate a farm elsewhere upon completion of their apprenticeship. A little confused by his statement that there were only four paid employees, I asked Shubedo how does he and the remainder of the staff survive, especially given the high cost of living in Dar es Salaam? Shubedo explained that the co-operative has adopted the Tanzanian philosophy of "self-reliance." In addition to having an ample supply of chickens and eggs, they have cultivated a well stocked shamba (farm), from which they get all their vegetables. On our return from the pens he pointed out rows of maize, tomatoes, beans, peppers, squash, potatoes, and of course, greens. The buildings which house the staff are owned by AFCO. It was emphasized that all the money which the co-operative earns from the sale of chickens, is invested in the buying of more day-old chicks and equipment, and is not used for salaries or subsistence of staff. The work is strictly voluntary.

As for the future, our two hosts remarked that their plans were in two stages: short term and long term goals. For the near future, they would like to expand their cages from the present number of six to ten so that they might accomodate at least two thousand birds at once. For the distant future they would like to have 50,000 birds, but subdivided amongst three separate locations. Along with the expansion of their chicken capacity, the group, for another long term goal, has set out to build a slaughter-house for chickens. To their knowledge there are presently no slaughtering houses for chickens in Tanzania.

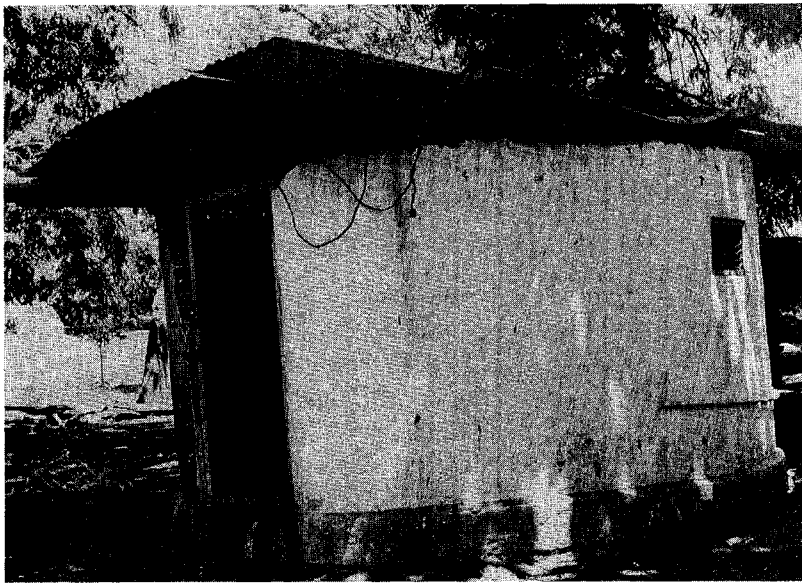
The slaughter-house, centrally located, could then serve the needs of Dar es Salaam and all areas within transporting distance. It is anticipated that chicken farms will definitely increase in volume over the next decade as the co-op proves to the Tanzanians that raising chickens can be an economically feasible project.

As with many new projects without organizational support, AFCO faces the problem of lack of funds and equipment. Our hosts mentioned to us that they have had many well wishers, but as yet, there have been no big donors. Tourists passing through Dar es Salaam have given a little but, in relation to what is needed, it was meagre. On one occasion a tourist accompanied them to a hatchery and purchased 300 chicks as his donation to AFCO. This type of participation is welcomed and encouraged. "One of the big needs is the equipment for an incubator," Shubedo asserted. "This machinery will allow us to cut down considerably on the costs of buying birds from outside sources, especially after considering duty and transportation expenses. The need for a lighting system which would enable the chickens to eat throughout the night was also mentioned as a need.

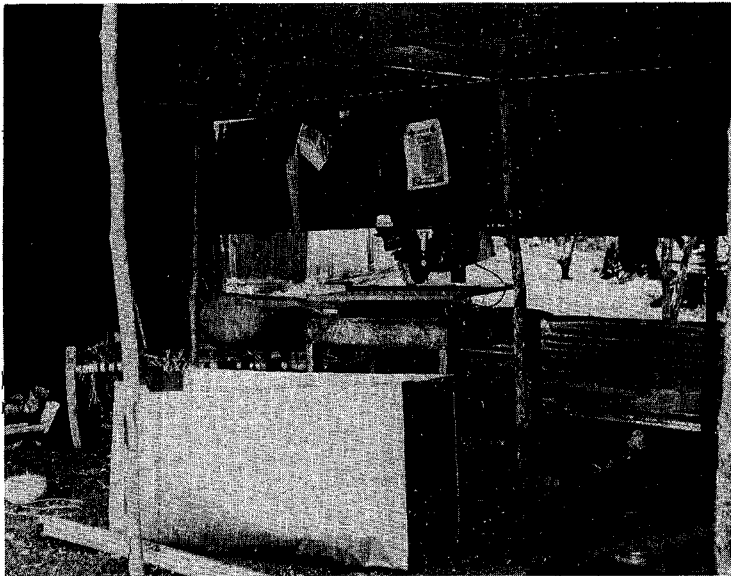
When asked how widespread is their appeal, our hosts said that they are now in the process of developing a brochure which will be sent to all parts of the States. The pamphlet will outline their program as well as give details of their needs. Harry Belafonte felt that this was one area in which he could lend assistance, both in designing the brochure and in making the appeal as he travels across country.

Each time I return to the farm I see new aspects of its development. Last week I was shown an area set off for experimentation with ducks. Starting in June, the co-operative will also attempt to raise a few turkeys. Beginning with the new chick, they are aiming for a 12 kilogram bird by December--in time for Christmas.

The experience in seeing a group such as AFCO determined to make a contribution to Tanzania and also the "brothers" and "sisters" coming to Africa for their first time has been rewarding.



The temporary
Slaughter
House



The Workshop



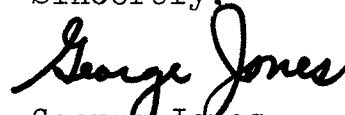
No longer a
visitor...a
"brother" and
advisor.



"This is a new
variety of
greens."

It has also been fun just going to the co-operative periodically to chat and find out the latest news about the operation, as well as to share personal experiences of our stay in East Africa (perhaps a newsletter for the future).

Sincerely,


George Jones

Received in New York on May 1, 1972