

FAMILY POULTRY PRODUCTION IN AFGHANISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Family poultry production is the predominant production system in Afghanistan. The system is largely based on indigenous breeds and scavenging provides the main source of feed. It is mainly women who own poultry and who are involved in the village poultry production system which still provides more than 98% of the poultry products in the country (domestic production). The indigenous breeds have a low production potential and the annual mortality often exceeds 50%. Poor knowledge of the producers, non-availability of vaccination and veterinary support and other services are serious constraints of the system.

Many strategies to improve the village poultry production were tested by different agencies, but with little success. Based on these experiences the FAO Program for Afghanistan developed a new concept, which has now been successfully implemented with more than 16,000 families and 300 Village Groups. The new concept consists of intensive training and organizing village women in Poultry Producer Groups to arrange supply of inputs and services and the marketing of products. It also includes the support of small to medium-scale commercial poultry farmers who have been organized in Regional Poultry Associations. These Associations are at present a major supplier of services and poultry appliances in the country. This paper explains the successful development of Village Poultry Producers Groups and Poultry Associations in Afghanistan and their impacts. It draws upon the lessons learnt in the development process and indicates which actions are required to continue and expand in future.

KEYWORDS

Village poultry production, Poultry Producers Group, Poultry Farmers' Association, Training,

1. INTRODUCTION

The situation of poultry production in Afghanistan must be seen against the background of a country that has passed through more than 20 years of war and civil unrest and several years of drought. Poverty is acute and women are particularly disadvantaged. There are about 13 million chickens in Afghanistan, which are mainly kept by rural households with flock sizes below ten birds. Most birds are of local breed and fed on household waste and crop residues resulting in a productivity of 40-60 eggs per year per hen. Annual mortality of chicken under these conditions often exceeds 50% due to the poor management, Newcastle Disease and some other contagious diseases. In the past, intensive poultry production for eggs and meat was only initiated on few Government farms however, which are no more operational. Few larger poultry units with several hundred hens exist around the major cities which produce chicks and eggs similar to the village system, but with a higher input level.

At present, rural poultry and their products still contribute more than 98% of the poultry products in the country. Poor technical knowledge of the producers, unavailability of vaccines and health services and inadequate availability of other input like quality feeds have been limiting factors for increased production from the village poultry system. The demand for poultry and their products are thus not met, especially that of the bigger cities where consumption of imported eggs and poultry meat from the neighboring countries is common, and more than ninety Million eggs have been imported last year. Many development agencies and NGOs tested strategies to increase poultry production also with the aim to increase income of rural families from poultry production, but the majority of these efforts failed or had limited success. The FAO Program for Afghanistan studied the results of these approaches and tested a new concept, which showed better results. Starting with about 240 village women in 1999 the new concept has now been further developed and implemented with more than 16,000 village women. Simultaneously to the development of the village poultry programme efforts were made to develop and support the bigger semi-commercial poultry farms around the major cities. Support of these farms was not only important for the supply of the urban consumers, but also for the supply of chicks to the village programme. This paper narrates the evolution of the programme and indicates future development options and plans.

2. MATERIALS and METHODS

Village poultry production

A detailed survey of over 2000 families carried out by the FAO Programme in different provinces showed that women own more than 93% of the village poultry. The social and cultural conditions dictate that any

development activities with rural women in Afghanistan can only be done through female staff. It was assumed that a combination of formal training and practical implementation of the learned messages at the same time offered the best chances for success. Since qualified women trainers were not readily available specialized technical and extension training for educated women was the first step of project implementation. A special training package was then developed which takes into consideration, that nearly all village women are illiterate and had no prior exposure to any kind of formal training. The training package consists of a technical manual and of 46 lesson plans with detailed instructions to assist preparation of the trainers and a set of 179 colored drawings as visual training aids during the training sessions. For the implementation of the programme only those villages were considered where village elders gave their permission, where personal security of the woman trainers was without major risks and where the houses are arranged in clusters. In selecting the trainees priority was given to widows and poorer women. The actual training is a combination of classroom instructions for a group of women and practical training in the houses of the individuals. The whole training process lasts for 4-6 months with one theoretical and practical session each week during the initial 3 months and an additional 2-3 months work are later needed to establish Village Poultry Producer Groups. Construction of a new chicken coop according to a special design is an important initial step of the programme. The women are building these coops under the guidance of the trainers with their own resources, mainly from mud bricks. For those women who have successfully completed the coop and regularly attended the training the Project provides a drinker, a feeder and 12 crossbred pullets (one male) with a small quantity of balanced feed. The main objective of this distribution is to assist the families to implement the already learned ideas and to introduce some new interventions. The village women are contributing with 25% to the cost of the pullets, an amount that is used to establish a revolving fund for later operations. Each woman receives a package which has a value of about 20 US\$. Prevention of Newcastle Disease through regular vaccination of all poultry in the target villages is being introduced at an early stage of the training cycle. The final stage of each training cycle is the organization of the trained women from a particular village in Village Poultry Producer Groups (VPPG) and the selection of one woman as a group leader. During the last five years more than 16,000 village women have been trained in this way by about 50 female technical staff and organized in more than 250 producer groups. The development of the programme is shown in Table 1.

Semi-commercial poultry production

The semi-commercial poultry production is a unique system in the bigger cities of Afghanistan. With units between 50-500 layers nearly all have their own mother stock, 1-5 locally manufactured kerosene incubators of 400 eggs capacity and a chick rearing section. The main products are one-month-old chicks and eggs for sale during the winter months. Production of broilers is rare and has only emerged recently. Analysis of this production system and intensive interviews showed lack of technical knowledge by the owners, difficulties with unproductive poultry breeds and supply of inputs and problems with marketing as the main constraints. Initially these producers were supported as individuals with training and inputs but many of the supported farms did not survive. Later the FAO Programme for Afghanistan decided to approach these issues by organizing the poultry producers in three regional Poultry Farmers Association (PFA) located in Kabul, Mazar and Jalalabad. In addition to technical training by FAO staff and the introduction of crossbred poultry from Pakistan funds were provided to the PFAs to establish their own feed production and marketing system of products. Guidance was also provided how to organize and manage the PFAs, both technically and financially. Detailed information has been collected about the development of the biggest PFA in Kabul.

3. RESULTS and CONCLUSIONS

Village poultry production

The approach to improved village poultry production has now been tested with a large number of women in many different locations, including some which are far from the major urban centers. The more liberal conditions for working with women since 2002 and better funding has allowed for a large increase of the scale of the programme. The concept of intensive training and organizing the women in producer groups for providing follow-up services has been a success under all conditions, although the organization level of the groups differs. The most important contribution of the Producer Groups in all locations is the continuation of the regular vaccination programme, which allows many owners to maintain and build up their flock sizes. With few exceptional cases, losses of the distributed crossbred chicks have been minimal and the influence of the distributed birds with higher production potential is clearly visible in the poultry population of the villages where the programme has been implemented. Flock sizes have grown, depending on the available facilities with the families and their interest. Some families have grown their flock sizes up to 200 hens, but the majority has

20 birds at present. Egg production has grown by four times with the same number of layers, because the indigenous birds have been replaced by the improved crossbred hens.

Village groups in the Kabul region have become most active in developing their poultry production. Similar to the semi-commercial farmers the supply of mixed feed, which was started in 2003, has played an important role in intensifying the production. Although only considered as supplement the mixed feed has become rapidly popular and is being widely used. Suggestions and guidance to prepare mixed feed from family resources have been part of the training programme, but was difficult to implement for the village women. This feed is now produced by an NGO in Kabul and marketed to the VPPGs on a regular basis. As the demand for mixed feed is rapidly increasing plans have been made for establishing a new feed mill in Kabul. The group leaders of the VPPGs are well known in their villages and they provide services against payment not only to the originally trained women, but also to all who are interested. These services include the regular vaccinations, selling of mixed feed, treatment of sick birds and the marketing of eggs. Marketing of eggs was originally not envisaged by the Programme, but has become especially important for the poorer families, who sell both to their neighbors and to the Group Leaders. The Group Leaders have received additional technical training and becoming increasingly interested in commercial activities. The supply of inputs to the villages and marketing of eggs is still assisted by the FAO Programme, but efforts are being made to establish independent structures with linkages to the PFAs.

In addition to the training of the village women, intensive and continuous training of the trainers has been found to be of great importance for the development of the programme. Coming from different educational backgrounds with only two weeks orientation/technical training at the beginning weekly technical meetings have been of great benefit to develop knowledge and skills and to learn from each other. Intensive technical training about clinical diagnoses of poultry diseases, which was done in Pakistan, was also an important training with direct benefits for the implementation of the field activities.

The FAO development approach for village poultry in Afghanistan has attracted much attention among the assistance community in Afghanistan. Several other organizations have shown interest to copy the model and want to use it for their own activities. A training center is therefore being established which will provide potential village trainers the necessary knowledge. Additional funding has also been secured to extend during the next three years the training programme with 100 women trainers to another five Provinces and 25,000 families. Follow up will be especially needed to secure regular supply of mixed feed and quality chicks.

Semi-commercial poultry production

The Kabul PFA has rapidly grown from 16 to over 130 members. It operates its own feed mill (the only one in Kabul) and provides medicines, equipments, technical advices, insurance and other related services to its members and partly to other farmers against a service charge of 7% to 10%. It also supplies fertile eggs, DOC and pullets of different ages to customers in nearby villages and even to far distanced-provinces. The Kabul Poultry Association through its members is the major supplier of pullets to the FAO village poultry program and to NGOs and other organizations. Some of the achievements of the Kabul PFA are shown in Table 2. The new political situation in Afghanistan since 2002, the huge influx of people into the Kabul region and the resulting large increase of demand for poultry products has given a big boost to the activities of the semi-commercial poultry farmers. However, at the same time the differences with respect to the scale of operation of the members have become bigger. Some of the farmers are getting more specialized, keep larger flocks and beginning to establish more intensive system of poultry production outside of Kabul. Others have given up due to lack of housing facilities for their flocks within Kabul City. To strengthen the link between village and semi-commercial farmers efforts are being made to include the Village Poultry Producer Groups as members into the PFA. The PFA has sold more than 300 MT of mixed feed and more than 5000 pullets to the VPPGs last year. With the support of FAO a parent stock flock will be established and a big size incubator is being installed.

Table-1. Development characteristics of the village poultry programme:

Particular	Years				
	1999-2000	2001	2002	2003	1999-2003
Villages included	75	48	155	226	504
Women trained	1693	2842	6347	5804	16,686
Producer Groups	72	45	60	90	276
Feed Sold (MT)	-	2.1	72.9	746.0	821.0
Eggs Marketed	-	12,000	81,170	288,412	381,582

Table-2. Development characteristics of the Kabul Poultry Farmers Association

Particular	Years					
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Member farmers	16	96	120	130	130	130
Mother stock layers	4,800	13,000	14,500	16,000	18,000	21,000
Eggs produced	691,200	1,989,000	2,872,800	3,168,000	3,402,000	4,221,000
Day old Chicks produced	80,000	120,000	130,000	236,000	87,550	75,800
Chicks imported	9,880	0	80,000	110,000	266,580	369,000
Balanced feed sold (MT)	0	303	391	423	477	534