



Livelihood improvement of rural farmwomen through backyard poultry farming in Assam

Dr Richamoni Deuri¹, Dr. Saurav Dutta¹, Dr Janmoni Shyam², Dr Sadananda Payeng², Dr Leema Bora³, Dr Monosri Johari²

¹M.VSc, Scholar, Department of Extension Education, College of Veterinary Science, AAU, Khanapara, Guwahati, Assam

²Assistant Professor, Department of Extension Education, College of Veterinary Science, AAU, Khanapara, Guwahati, Assam

³Senior Extension Specialist, Directorate of Extension Education, AAU, Khanapara, Guwahati, Assam



INTRODUCTION

The people of Northeastern region are mainly non-vegetarian and mostly consume poultry meat, goat meat, fish etc. in their religious feast and other rituals. Chicken meat is one of the most popular meats as there is no social stigma in consumption of the meat irrespective of caste and religion for which it is the most preferred meat. However, poultry industry in Assam is not at par with other states of India and could not produce the day-to-day requirement of meat and eggs for the state and is dependent on other states like Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, West Bengal etc to meet this deficit. Backyard poultry farming has been practiced since time immemorial in this region traditionally which can be improved by scientific intervention like encouraging rearing of improved varieties of poultry, timely vaccination, proper disease management etc. for generating more income from the existing practice leading to reduction in the import of eggs and meat from other states. Backyard poultry farming refers to the practice of raising chickens, ducks, or other poultry birds in one's own backyard or a small-scale setting. It is mainly comprised of rearing desi varieties of chicken characterized by low input scavenging system with occasional supplementary feed of home-grown grains. There is hardly any requirement of infrastructure setup for backyard poultry farming and it can be easily managed by women and other family members. Backyard poultry serves multiple purposes with economic, social, cultural and religious value for the people of the state. Poultry rearing can enhance household food security and contributes to poverty reduction through



provision of food, income and employment. In Assam, it has been practiced since ages by the rural people and is mainly a female dominated enterprise. The state of Assam, have a majority of the population that are non-vegetarian and because of this there is a huge demand for eggs and poultry in the form of meat. Backyard poultry farming is an extremely important economic activity particularly in the rural areas of the state as it helps in providing the families with additional income, nutritionally rich food sources, boosts up women and unemployed youths, and can reduce the gap between demand and supply of poultry eggs and meat. For women, backyard poultry farming can provide an avenue for empowerment, economic independence, and improved livelihoods. It allows them to actively participate in agricultural activities, contribute to household nutrition, and generate additional income for their families. This form of farming offers flexibility, as it can be managed alongside other household responsibilities, making it particularly suitable for women who may have limited time or mobility and can act as potent and impactful means for women's economic empowerment and livelihood promotion of the rural masses of Assam.

Income generation and Access to credit: -

Backyard poultry farming can provide opportunities to contribute to earn additional income through selling of eggs, meat or even live birds. As it is a low investment and easily manageable activity for the farm women, it can serve as one of the best incomes generating source which can be used to fulfill their own needs and other family expenses like education, healthcare etc. which in turn will help to enhance their social status in the family as well as the community.

Nutrition and food security: -

In rural areas, there is often shortage of valuable source of high-quality protein, vitamins and other minerals. Thus, through backyard poultry farming women can ensure that their families have access to nutritious food by managing their own poultry units throughout the year through production of nutritious eggs and meat.

Skill development and employment generation: -

Rearing poultry birds will help the women to gather required knowledge on management practices like selection of breeds, feeding, housing, healthcare etc and marketing of egg, meat and live birds which will enhance their skills and can lead to employment generation.

**Decision making: -**

In backyard poultry farming, women often play a significant role in making decisions regarding daily operations like flock management tasks like feeding, watering, cleaning and managing poultry shed. In addition, they are often involved in decisions related to egg collection, incubation and selling of eggs or birds. This creates a sense of ownership and control over productive assets leading to involvement in decision making in economic activities which promotes gender empowerment and community development.

Backyard poultry farming holds promise for egg and meat production and income generation, particularly among rural women in the North Eastern region. (Kalita and Borah 2024). Considering the per capita availability of eggs (17nos/ individual/year) and meat (1.5Kg/individual/year). (BAHS,2024). It is estimated that at least 20% of the state's requirement of egg may be produced through backyard poultry rearing given the popularity of the practice, if the non-descript local birds are replaced by Low Input Technology (LIT) birds such as Vanaraja, Kalinga Brown, Black Rock, Chhabro, Giriraja, kuroiler etc. and duck varieties such as Khaki Campbell, Indian Runner, Chara Chameli etc. which adapts well with the local conditions. The system will also generate a considerable quantity of meat for the rural populace at low cost. (Strategy paper on Poultry development, Govt. of Assam, 2019-24). The ICAR-Directorate of Poultry, a leading institute dedicated to research in poultry production of India, has developed chicken varieties specifically tailored for backyard farming i.e., Vanaraja, a dual-purpose bird, Gramapriya, predominantly a layer, and Srinidhi, a dual-purpose bird meant for free-range and backyard farming. A new variety Vanashree (PD-4) has been developed from Aseel and is being popularised as a high producing improved native bird. Kamrupa, a dual-purpose, multi-colored chicken variety developed by All India Coordinated Research Project (AIRCP) on Poultry Breeding at Assam Agricultural University (AAU), Khanapara. These chicken varieties have become extremely popular and are being reared in every part of the country.

Conclusion: -

There are numerous challenges such as inadequate knowledge regarding poultry farming, high feed cost, limited access to veterinary services, disease outbreak and lack of bio-security, poor market access etc. However, with appropriate strategies like promotion of dual-purpose improved varieties, capacity building and skill training, strengthening veterinary and extension service, access to institutional credit and insurance etc. the challenges can be addressed effectively. Backyard poultry keeping in rural areas among women not only contributes to



household income and nutrition but also plays a vital role in women's empowerment and community development. So, backyard poultry farming can act as an effective tool for gender equality and women empowerment in rural areas of Assam.

References

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