

POULTRY PROJECTS ENHANCE LIVES OF AFGHAN WOMEN

WORKING FOR rural families of Afghanistan

WORKING TO improve diets and incomes through family poultry production

WORKING WITH Afghan Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock

WORKING THANKS TO the World Bank, IFAD



Backyard poultry production has always been a major contributor to family nutrition in Afghanistan, where women have responsibility for more than 90 percent of village production of eggs and poultry meat. Two FAO poultry training projects – aimed at introducing production systems for small-scale family-managed poultry – specifically targeted women. In addition to helping women improve poultry production, the projects offered an entry point for introducing women to other types of information and skills.

A very large number of village women in Afghanistan are illiterate. They rarely leave their houses, have limited access to classroom education and do not interact with neighbours or work in groups for common goals. By providing classroom training, the projects also provided an opportunity for women to meet and work with their neighbours, connect to input suppliers and establish markets.

Poultry production in Afghanistan must be seen against the backdrop of a country that has passed

The outbuildings that dot thousands of backyards in 22 districts of Afghanistan look like miniature houses. Some have curtains hung over the windows and bright designs painted on the walls. In reality, these little structures are chicken coops that the women of the families built themselves with locally available materials. Constructing the coops was the first step for participants in an FAO training project that was aimed at helping women generate income through poultry production. The project combined classroom teaching and at-home training. Starting with guidance in how to construct the coops, the project raised the standard from having a few chickens scavenging in the garden to having the necessary components for an actual poultry enterprise. As it turned out, the teaching-and-training formula that FAO developed for this project also provided an entry point to support Afghan women in other ways.

through 20 years of war and civil unrest, not to mention many years of drought and chronic poverty. Yet today, some 28 000 chicken coops, constructed by the women who participated in the two projects, provide visible confirmation of the FAO projects' importance to village women across Afghanistan.

28 000 chicken coops constructed by the projects' women participants provide visible confirmation of the FAO project's importance.



Participants produced 106 tonnes of poultry meat and 21 million eggs, some for family consumption but most for sale, boosting income.



RESPECT FOR TRADITION

The country's social and cultural traditions dictate that only female staff can handle development activities with rural women. That is why, at the outset, FAO met with village elders to explain the goal of improving poultry production, and then identified and trained local women to serve as instructors.

The curriculum was only developed after the project had conducted village poultry assessments and interviewed thousands of women to get a clear picture of their needs and constraints. For example, poultry production suffered previously because of poor technical knowledge, lack of vaccines and health services, and no access to inputs such as quality feeds. Women would keep a few – ten or less – indigenous chickens, feed them with household waste or crop residues and had no way of vaccinating their flocks, all of which contributed to high mortality.

The projects called for intense theoretical classroom work held weekly over a period of two months, set up in the home of one of the participants. In addition, there was six months of practical support during which the female instructors worked individually with the women at their homes. In addition to giving

the women the chance to meet their neighbours, to socialize and to learn about poultry production as a group, the classroom also provided opportunities to discuss other common family issues. Thus, the projects had the added benefit of increasing women's knowledge of family nutrition, hygiene and health issues.

PRODUCTION AND MARKETING SKILLS

Enabling the women to learn and work together led to the establishment of hundreds of village poultry producer groups, through which the women can continue improving the output of their poultry production. To ensure that their poultry enterprises started correctly, the project provided initial inputs of healthy chicks, feed and vaccines. Each producer group chose its own leaders who, in turn, received further training in areas such as vaccination. Now the group leaders are able to vaccinate the other members' chicks against Newcastle and other contagious diseases that had affected output in the past.

Training was then expanded to include marketing of products, and as the women became better organized, their groups were linked to input suppliers to ensure

dependable supplies. As a result, 18 "feeder" shops were established across the country and they continue to provide the supplies the women need.

During the three years of the first project, participants produced 106 metric tonnes of poultry meat and 21 million eggs, of which only 7.5 million were consumed by their families. This means they had plenty to sell, adding to their family income. And the impact continues. Today, the thousands of women who participated in the projects are not only connected to their village neighbours, they are connected to markets and to suppliers through their poultry producer groups. Meanwhile families in the entire country can benefit from a National Poultry Production Plan initiated with the support of the projects.

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