

## Poultry Based Livelihood of Rural Poor in Manipur

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ARTICLE ID: 45

### Introduction:

Manipur has a geographical area of 22,327 sq.kms. which constitutes 0.7 % of the total land surface of India. 90 % of the total geographical area of the state i.e. 20,089 sq.kms. is covered by hills, the remaining area is a small valley covering only 2,238 sq.kms. and accounting for only one-tenth of the total area of the state. (*Economic Survey Manipur 2021*). As significant from the above data with the dominance in area by the rural populace mainly tribals residing in the countryside and hilly regions bring about the remarkable contribution of these sections of society towards the development and prosperity of the state and the need for focus to uplift and empower these neglected and deprived societies by providing them various amenities such as job opportunities, social and scientific assistance for improved farming, capacity development and training, access to community services, etc. One such area that has helped in providing supplementary income and helped sustained livelihood for the rural poor is poultry farming.

Poultry farming, an animal husbandry that raises fowl for meat and eggs, particularly chickens is a farming system one can see at almost every household in the hilly regions of North-Eastern State of Manipur, either for commercial or subsistence purposes-to meet their small cash needs or for dietary or both. One such is backyard poultry- which is a poultry farming system mainly run by women farmers in rural areas of the state. In this part of the country, poultry rearing is a traditional practice among the tribal populace with local breeds. Backyard poultry farming is characterized by an indigenous night shelter system, scavenging, natural hatching of chicks, low productivity of birds, scant supplementary feed, local marketing and minimal health care practices (Rathod P., 2020).

**Trend of current poultry industry in India and rural poor of Manipur**

Livestock and poultry provide a major contribution to India's economy (Nath *et al.*, 2012). Poultry farming in India has reached remarkable growth especially in commercialized and integrated farming activities like a broiler and layer with the average growth rate of 4 to 6 per cent and 8 to 10 per cent respectively per year (Chatterjee and Rajkumar, 2015).

Poultry industry is a fast-growing sector in Indian agriculture. It has tremendous and remarkable progress evolving from small-scale backyard venture to the status of full-fledged, self-sufficient, and most progressive agro-based industry. According to Food and Agriculture Organization Corporate Statistical Database (FAOSTAT) production data (2020), India ranks 3<sup>rd</sup> in Egg Production and 8<sup>th</sup> in meat production in the world. Backyard poultry is practised by majority of the poor and marginalized rural households all over India. These households rely on low-cost backyard poultry rearing to supplement and enhance their livelihoods. It not only provides nutritional and financial security to the rural community but also reduces livelihood vulnerability and promotes gender equity. Backyard birds are usually low producers with high resistance to diseases. The eggs produced by rural poultry are not in significant proportion with the total production, yet it helps the rural masses in self-employment and caters much needed animal protein. Though income in monetary terms from backyard poultry farming is negligible but it also acts as “Walking bank” for poor and marginal farmers. Besides income generation, rural backyard poultry provides the demand of nutrition supplementation in the form of valuable animal protein through meat and eggs to the rural families. (Praharee *et al.*, 2023)

One of the most important positive characters of native chicken is their hardiness, which is ability to tolerate the harsh environmental condition and poor husbandry practices without much loss in production. The native breed chickens are the reservoir of genomes and major genes for improvement of high yielding exotic germplasm for tropical adaptability and disease resistance.

According to the Indian government's National Action Plan for Egg & Poultry-2022 (NAPEP), backyard poultry accounts for 20 percent of India's poultry sector, which is worth over ₹800 billion. The 19th Livestock Census of India estimated that around 30 million farmers are engaged in backyard poultry. While India's per-capita chicken meat consumption is around 3kg per year, compared to the world average of 17kg, the consumption of poultry meat has been very low in rural pockets owing to the low purchasing power of people living in these areas (The Poultry Site, 2019).



Farmers belonging to rural areas rear poultry mainly belonging to the indigenous breed which sets apart from the ones commercially reared in the urban due to their superior adaptability to their habitat and ability to survive, can reproduce with low nutrition under sub-optimal management; require fewer inputs as they scavenge and are raised with little veterinary care; exhibit broodiness and hatch their own chicks and a reservoir of superior genes.

The system of poultry normally followed in rural areas of Manipur is free -range or extensive type. In this system, the birds are allowed to roam freely outside the house whole day and find their own feed such as plants, leaves, ants, insects, agricultural by-products, leftover feed, kitchen waste, vegetable scraps, grains and other living organisms and are released back to its house by night-time. These are reared by constructing poultry houses either made of wood or bamboo, roof covered with aluminium zinc sheets or straws from harvested paddy. Good lightning, proper ventilation and comfortable bedding is provided to ensure convenient environment for growth of the birds.

Backyard poultry farming provides ample benefits in uplifting and providing livelihood source to the rural poor despite the challenges faced by them, from small to marginal rural farmers to landless labourers, from home-maker women-folks to jobless youths.

#### **Advantages of Backyard poultry**

1. Provides employment to the rural small scale and marginal farmers.
2. Provides additional supportive income to the rural households.
3. Feed cost is very less
4. Products from rural poultry farming fetches high price compared to those from intensive poultry farming.
5. Backyard poultry keeping is one of the most effective methods to assure the availability of poultry meat and egg in rural areas.
6. Poultry meat and eggs obtained from backyard by foraging hens is the cheapest source of animal protein to combat the malnutrition.
7. Egg and meat of birds reared under free range conditions have low cholesterol concentration compared to those produced under intensive poultry farming.
8. Any family member like woman, children can manage the backyard poultry.
9. It provides small but regular income and save money on egg, meat and garden fertilizers etc.

10. Keeping poultry as backyard is an enjoyable and satisfying hobby of some rural poultry keepers.

Backyard poultry farming in rural areas, albeit its numerous benefits pose a few challenges which may hamper its improvement, management and productivity resulting in lower returns.

**Limitations of indigenous backyard poultry are:**

1. Lack of technical knowledge
2. Inadequate veterinary support
3. Threat against attack by predators
4. Non-availability of improved germplasm
5. Slow growth
6. Low body weight
7. Late sexual maturity
8. Low clutch size, thus low egg production
9. Small egg size, and
10. Prolonged broodiness.

**Success story:**

Armed with nothing but passion, hard work and dedication, Mrs. TinkhochongHaokip, a resident of Saheibung Village, Kangpokpi District, Manipur, was one successful poultry farmer in rural districts of Manipur who belong to the Kuki tribe. She started her journey as a poultry farmer with the hope of supporting her family financially in the year 2018 at her resident. Initially, she invested Rs10,000 per 100 chicks to a local businessman who then supplied her chicks and feeds until they were matured enough for selling. She reared 400-500 chicks in total. Mrs. Tinkhochong carried out proper sanitisation using various disinfectants before she began rearing the chicks in the coop. She also maintained proper hygiene, fed the chickens timely, gave them proper and regular medication to ensure that they were healthy and could achieved maximum growth.

Like all others, she too was faced with few challenges in rearing and maintaining the poultry farm of which unavailability of adequate feed on time and improper electricity and light during rainy season were major ones which could lead to the outbreak of various diseases causing sickness to the chickens, even leading to death for some in severe cases. After 40 days,

the chickens attained maturity stage which were then ready for marketing and sold to the local markets or chicken centres either directly to them or through some middlemen.

Her journey of poultry farming came to an end on September, 2019 when there was an outbreak of flood in the neighbouring state, Assam, which leads to shifting of all the chicks in Assam to Manipur. Prices of feeds rose and became expensive and difficult to find for timely purchase. Hence, she decided to stop her poultry farming before she went into an enormous loss.

*"If given the time and opportunity to start poultry farming again, I would definitely grab the opportunity!"* proclaimed Mrs. Tinkhochongas she triumphantly retrospect at how successful she was as a poultry farmer and how it has helped herself and her family in providing a stable source of income and livelihood despite all the myriad of challenges she hurdled with. She considered her poultry farming a successful one and that it was worth investing her time, energy and money. She earned a handsome amount from her poultry farm and had also inspired other people from her community to take up poultry farming as a source of income generation and women empowerment in the society.

#### **Conclusion:**

Backyard poultry farming is considered as an integral part of livelihood for many rural families in Manipur. Poultry industry has contributed significantly in providing gainful employment and supplementary income to the rural people as is being recognized as an important instrument of socio-economic improvement among weaker section of the rural society due to its triple benefits namely generation of self-employment, supplementary income and availability of cheap source of protein to combat the malnutrition of the rural people. The per capita availability of land continues to decline under the pressure of population growth. Moreover, the agricultural production is reaching to its plateau. Therefore, viable alternative arrangement shall be made in such conditions to channelize the energy of unemployed educated youth, small and marginal farmers and landless labourers for earning their livelihood and backyard poultry farming can help bridge the gap.

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