



# Conserving the indigenous poultry breeds

Exotic poultry breed replaces the indigenous ones

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Changing pattern of farmers' lifestyle is increasingly posing huge threat to the indigenous poultry breeds (native poultry breeds) in the country if the present trend is any indication.

Over the years, it is found that exotic poultry breeds (commercial breeds or cross-breeds) are in more demand in the market than the indigenous breeds which most Bhutanese farmers raised earlier.

According to the Livestock Census of 2009, the total poultry production in Bhutan is estimated at 248,118 of which 158,348 are of the indigenous breeds with Sarpang producing the highest number of poultry in the country.

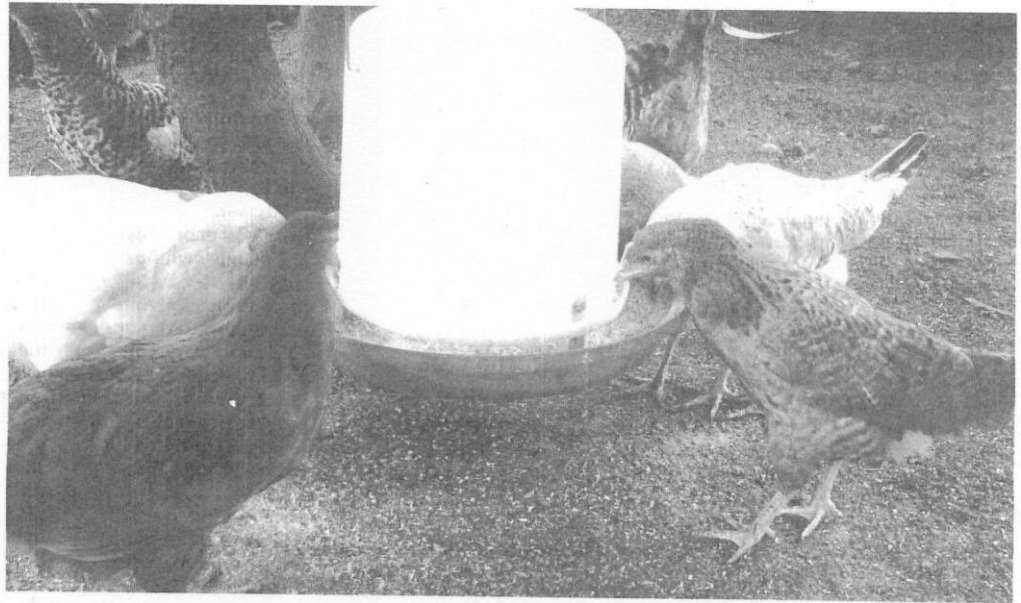
However, the record of poultry population from 2005-2009 exhibits that exotic breeds' population has increased by 253%, while the population of indigenous breeds is a meager 18%.

It is further estimated that over 66% of rural households rear exotic chickens with an average flock size of four birds per household.

Although the trend of rearing fowls is scattered across the nation, it is more concentrated in Samtse, Chukha, Dagan, Tsirang, Mongar, Trashigang and Sarpang. Poultry product still remains as the primary source of income for most farmers.

The project director of the Department of Livestock (DoL), Sither Dorji, said there is a risk of losing the native breeds with the present trend.

"Presently we have



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more numbers of exotic birds because these birds give more than 100 eggs annually while our native birds give about 57 eggs. This is the reason why the farmers opt for exotic birds," he said.

Indigenous hens lay three clutches of eggs a year varying from 16-21 eggs a clutch and sits on the eggs for 21 days to hatch the chicks. Given this intensive broodiness, the clutch size is small and the number of eggs laid averages to about 57 in 318 days.

However, a study carried out by the College of Natural Resources (CNT) revealed that hatching chicken is high among the indigenous breeds and thus it also make raising chickens a sustainable business for the resource poor farmers.

When a study was carried out on the cost

benefit of the village chicken farming at Dop Shari in Paro in 2005, it was also found out that each farmer has an average total net benefit of Nu 8,738.37 per year with an average of nine laying birds.

The study states that this is much higher than the national average annual income of Bhutanese farmers. The cost of one egg was then Nu 5 which has now increased to Nu 10 per egg.

"Given this situation, farmers would earn Nu 17,476.76 per year, making poultry rearing a potential tool for alleviating poverty in rural areas," states the study.

However, the deputy chief of National Biodiversity Centre (NBC), Sonam Tamang, said the indigenous breeds should be conserved and they need to come up with some strategies.

"There are benefits. They can produce good eggs, their meat taste good; they are adaptable to any environment and they also have resistance to some diseases," he said.

The indigenous breeds are most commonly found in places where there is absence of road accessibility, thus keeping the farmers away from commercial market.

With the increasing demand for exotic birds in the commercial market, a team from DoL, Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, along with the NBC in collaboration with South Asia Pro Poor Livestock Policy Program of India and Bangladesh met together in the three-day workshop last week to develop a policy framework to conserve and increase the number of indigenous poultry

breeds in the country.

They also recommended the need for the development of an action plan for breed conservation and up scaling.

The teams from both national and international also made field visits to places in Punakha and Wangduephodrang where farmers rear indigenous poultry breeds.

Meanwhile, the officials from both DoL and NBC pointed out that a research is pivotal for the indigenous poultry breeds are to be conserved.

About 10 types of indigenous poultry breeds are reported to be existent in the country such as Bobthra, Native White, Frizzle, Kauray, Naked Neck, Banded Yubjha, Belochem, Native Black, Shekheni and Short Legged.