

# Local poultry under threat

By Tsundu Dorji

**Thimphu:** Indigenous poultry in the country is facing increasing competition and replacement by exotic breeds, and the need to conserve their genetic diversity is a must for food security and a guarantee against other emerging threats in the future.

This was highlighted in a workshop organized by the Department of Livestock (DoL) and National Biodiversity Centre (NBC), Ministry of Agriculture and Forests (MoAF), in collaboration with the South Asia Pro Poor Livestock Policy Program (SAPPLPP) yesterday. The program targeted the development of a policy framework to conserve and increase the number of indigenous poultry breeds in Bhutan.

The presentations and discussions at the workshop focused on the productivity and rearing advantages of indigenous poultry breeds as compared to exotic breeds, their suitability in different agro-ecological zones and the need to conserve them.

In addition, presentations on the existing status of indigenous poultry breeds in the country, details of government initiatives to promote the conservation and rearing of indigenous poultry breeds, and the contribution of indigenous poultry to rural livelihoods were some of the key workshop highlights.

The participants included representatives of the National Livestock Breeding Program (NLBP), the NBC, Serbithang,

Research Development Centre (RDC), Bumthang, College of Natural Resources (CNR), National Centre for Poultry Development (NCPD), Regional Poultry Building Centre (RPBC), and Livestock extension officers from Paro, Haa and Tsirang dzongkhags.

Representatives of the SAPPLPP coordination team and country teams from Bangladesh and India also participated in the workshop and shared experiences of indigenous poultry breed conservation and development from their countries.

The benefits of rearing indigenous poultry birds are numerous: It is believed they help appease local deities during rituals; one does not have to compromise with layers and broiler birds; they fetch good money from eggs and meat, and management can be easier compared to improved birds where disease resistance and prophylactic measures have to be implemented.

About 66 percent of the farming households in the country own chickens. Approximately 95 percent of birds reared are native chicken types. Indigenous breeds accounted for 83 percent and 65 percent as per the 2005 and 2009 poultry census respectively. The total chicken population is 208,213 out of which 155,790 (75 percent) are local chicken (Livestock Statistics, 2008).

The program will include field visits to Punakha and Wangdiphodrang dzongkhags where farmers rear indigenous poultry breeds.