



Vaccinating chickens leads to better nutrition for communities in Jharkhand, India

For 33 year old Amrita Kunjur, vaccinating her poultry against Newcastle Disease (ND) has brought an added value to her family. Amrita who lives in the rural hinterland of Ranchi, the capital city of Jharkhand state in India, has always owned chickens. But due to the prevalence of Ranikhet Disease (Newcastle Disease), the flock never grew to a large enough size to earn a bit of extra income and for regular consumption.

“Earlier, we would hardly eat chicken regularly. We did not earn enough money to buy chickens,” says Amrita.

Amrita and her family exemplified the general condition of tribal families in Jharkhand. Many of their chickens were being wiped out mainly by ND and hardly had enough chickens to eat, let alone sell. For most of India’s tribal families, agriculture is the primary source of livelihood. But due to long dry spells, farming has not been as productive as desired and they often resort to buying food that they once produced. With inadequate income, most families find it extremely challenging to have proper nutritional intake, especially eggs and chicken. Buying chicken for consumption is not prioritised in comparison to other basic household needs. For families to afford to eat chicken, they must be able to keep free range chicken, free from diseases.

Vaccine leads to better nutrition

With the introduction of the Lasota ND vaccine in 2015, backyard poultry has flourished. Amrita’s family, who only managed to keep up to ten chickens before, have now increased their flock size to nearly fifty. As a result, the family can now afford to consume at least one chicken every week, giving them the much needed protein. Plus, considering the market value of one chicken at INR 300-400 (US\$ 4.5 – 6) within the locality, the family is saving about INR 1500 (US\$ 23), or about 60 percent of their present monthly food budget.

Another case is that of 32-year old Mariam Karkatta, who owns a flock of about 70 chickens, ten times more than she owned before she started vaccinating her chickens.

Being an early adopter, she was one of the first in her community to embrace the vaccination programme. After experiencing the benefits of vaccination first-hand, she actively promoted the vaccine in her village, which resulted in substantial increase in chicken population.

Consumption increases with growth in chicken flock

While Mariam's family could only consume a few chickens the whole year previously, consumption has gone up to about two chickens every month.

For Mariam, the main concern has been the nutrition of her children. Apart from serving the children a regular diet of chicken, she also serves them chicken soup when they are ill. Additionally, eggs are added into their diet. "My son used to catch the flu easily but now he is healthy," she remarks with a smile, pointing to her school-going son.

With the growth of her flock, Mariam keeps a healthy food budget. As she doesn't have to buy chickens, she spends about INR 4000-5000 (US \$ 60 – 75) on food every month.

With more and more families vaccinating their poultry against ND, it is evident that nutritional intake is slowly improving as families are now able to add chicken and eggs to their regular diets. This is a major boost to the health of community members, particularly children. It is a proof that, even supporting one parameter such as vaccination, goes a long way in improving the lives of poor rural families.



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