

Diagnosing priorities for rural women's welfare through participatory approaches in the Punjab, Pakistan

By **BASHIR AHMAD, NAZIA TABASSUM, and PARSA ARBAB GILL**

Introduction

The most urgent problem that blights the lives of most people in Pakistan is the wholly unacceptable poverty. The largest number of the poor live in rural areas, where the rural market is characterised by low wages and as a consequence of this, a substantial section of the rural labour force lives in a state of under-nourishment, starvation, and despair.

A very high rate of population growth in the past annihilated most of the development achievements and the country remained poor in terms of socio-economic indicators. For example, the annual per capita income in Pakistan is \$460. Only 24% of women and 50% of men are literate, and about 60% of the total population has no access to safe water; satisfactory sanitation is available to only 30% of the population. Various indicators show that compared to men, women have a relatively low status, compared to other countries of the region.

Women's status can be improved by making them 'earning' family members. Women who participate directly in production activities (whether it is on the farm, in the family craft business, or any other enterprise) can expect a higher status within the household than those women whose work is confined primarily to housework. In rural households, both men and women need to work to realise

a reasonable living standard. In order to reduce poverty, illiteracy, and to improve their health status, women need to actively participate in income-generating activities; this can have a far greater impact on household security and child nutrition than men's income, as women's incomes tend to come more frequently and in smaller amounts, and it may be spent more readily on daily needs.

The present study was conducted to identify major problems faced by rural women while engaging themselves in various income-generating activities. An attempt has also been made to assess the nature and operation of these income-generating activities in which the rural women are engaged.

Methodology

The study was conducted in the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO)-UAF project area in Tehsil, and the Faisalabad district in the Punjab province. Four villages were selected for the purpose of this study. Women in the project area carried out a number of activities. The present study related mainly to poultry and sewing income-generating activities, where female labour is involved. The participatory rural appraisal (PRA) techniques used in this study included semi-structured interviews, causal flow diagrams, and problem ranking of these activities.

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Problems and problem ranking

The PRA team evaluated the problems identified by the participants, by constructing a direct ranking matrix on the criteria of frequency and seriousness of the problems.

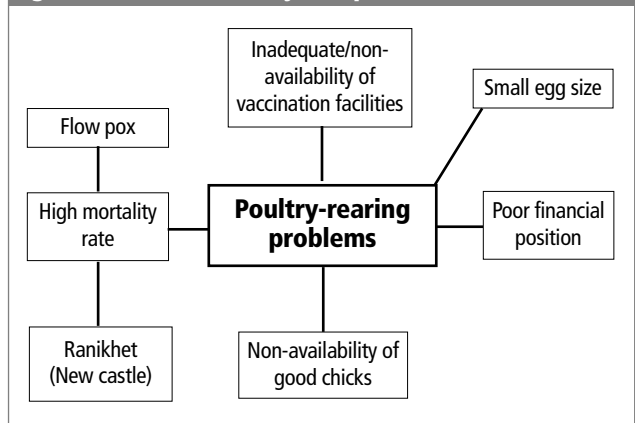
Poultry

Backyard poultry rearing is an important micro enterprise in most of the households in the villages, supplementing household incomes, especially for those families that are relatively poor. This enterprise is most often run on a very small scale, where a few poultry birds are kept for eggs and meat, generating additional income for families by selling eggs and live birds. According to the women participants, poultry farming requires less time and a smaller initial capital investment, with the promise of high and quick returns, compared to other side business. Chickens and chicks do not require sophisticated feed supplements; the feed mix is generally made up of grain, flour, and unused bread, all of which are readily available at home.

The participating women found that a decent amount of money could be easily earned/saved from poultry farming even when it is run on small scale, in addition to fulfilling domestic meat consumption needs. An egg is generally sold at Rs.4 during winter and Rs.2–3 in summer. On an average, Rs.5000 to 5400 can be earned per annum from a dozen healthy laying birds. This income is spent on items of daily use like sugar, tea, ghee, vegetables, and soap. This opinion is consistent with other studies, which report that in contrast to men's, a high proportion of women's earnings is spent on basic daily needs.

Women who were involved in this activity were more confident and enjoyed a definite social status in comparison to others who were not participating in this type of activity.

Figure 1: Problems in Poultry Enterprise



Ranking poultry raising problems

In order to look at the causes of low-level participation in poultry enterprises, a problem-causing diagram was constructed (Figure 1) with the active participation of the women's poultry group. From the final version of the problem-causing diagram, a short list of key issues was distilled, and subsequently used for ranking problems and arriving at some concrete conclusions.

Two common poultry breeds raised in the project area are the Missri and Golden breeds. Very few birds of desi (local) type were reported. A direct matrix ranking exercise was conducted to prioritise the problems in raising poultry. A similar approach was adopted by Drinkwater (1993) and Chambers (1992) for ranking varieties of crops and fruits. In the present study, various problems were identified and ranked. The most significant was disease prevalence, which was given a value of ten, followed by care of chicks (nine), and the lack of vaccination facilities (eight). The direct matrix exercise showed different levels of problems in the Missri and Golden poultry breeds. Using date seeds as counters, an exercise was done to ascertain the seriousness of problems in the two poultry breeds. Table 1 indicates that the disease prevalence is the most serious problem, and is ranked highest. However, this problem was found to be more serious in the Golden than the Missri breed, and mainly due to the lack of vaccination cover available at the village level, and also that no treatment facility was available for young chicks during any disease outbreaks.

The proper care of chicks was another problem. The women participants were of the view that chicks were to be protected from cats, birds of prey, and from cold weather. Extreme cold weather conditions resulted in high mortality rates and losses in overall production to a considerable extent. The participants assigned a score of three to Missri and six to the Golden breed.

A woman from a poultry group feeding birds at her house



Table 1: Matrix ranking for the two breeds of poultry

| Problems | Poultry Breeds | |
|---|----------------|--------|
| | Missri | Golden |
| Disease prevalence (10) | **** | ***** |
| Mortality rates in chicks (9) | *** | ***** |
| Non-availability of vaccination (8) | **** | **** |
| Non-availability of quality poultry birds (6) | *** | *** |
| Small size of eggs (4) | **** | - |
| Total score | 133 | 164 |

Table 2: Ranking problems relating to sewing/stitching:

| Problems | Frequency | Seriousness | Score | Ranking |
|---|-----------|-------------|-------|---------|
| Deferred payment | 5 | 5 | 10 | 1 |
| Health Problem | 5 | 2 | 7 | 2 |
| Inefficient marketing | 3 | 3 | 6 | 3 |
| Non-availability of required quality material | 2 | 1 | 3 | 4 |

Members of the participating group ranked the lack of vaccinations as the third important problem. Eight date seeds were placed for this problem by participating women, four each for the Missri and Golden breeds, indicating an equal seriousness in both breeds.

The participants identified the lack of quality poultry birds as another problem, preferring to raise birds of a more disease-resistant breed, with good egg production. According to the women, the Missri chickens lay smaller eggs than the Golden breed.

Ahmad and Ahmad (1995) ranked non-availability of quality chicks, inadequate availability of quality feed, and poor vaccine quality as the three most important problems on commercial layer poultry farms. This difference in problem ranking was probably due to the fact that the present study was confined to those participants who had household-level experience, raising poultry on a small scale rather than on a large commercial scale.

The overall score for both breeds was obtained by multiplying the value of the problem by the breed's ranking for that problem and then summing the values. The value of the overall score was 133 for Missri and 164 for Golden. Thus in an overall context, Golden was more prone to problems than Missri.

The matrix scores were discussed with a group of women to see their response. They were of the view that *Ranikhet* disease is the major problem in rearing poultry. The Golden breed is more susceptible to this disease compared to Missri; Missri chicks are sturdier, more resistant to disease, and, like the local breed (which has disappeared in the area), have acclimatised well in the poor rural area conditions. A higher

incidence of mortality in the Golden breed has resulted in a decreasing number of these birds over the last few years. The participants pointed out a similar problem regarding the lack of available quality poultry birds, as the chicks are supplied by peddlers in rural areas.

Interventions proposed:

- the provision of vaccination facilities against various diseases;
- for technical help to be extended, to locate and purchase quality birds; and,
- the provision of credit facilities for the purchase of quality chicks.

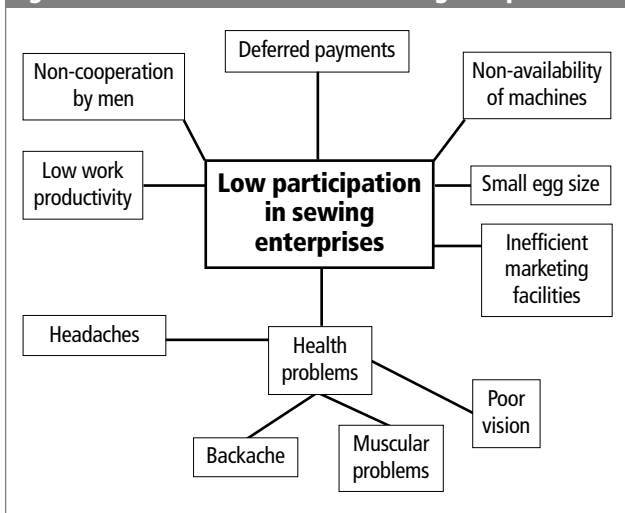
The project has expanded the vaccination programme to reduce levels of disease incidence and mortality rates, besides advancing micro credit facilities.

Sewing

In a village within the project area, a group of women had a common interest in stitching clothes. About 16 village households were actively involved in this activity. Of this group of women, 50% were married. They were able to spare some time for sewing after finishing their daily chores, whereas the other 50% were unmarried and were able to devote more time to this activity. Both married and unmarried women can earn Rs.50 for a simple dress and Rs.70 for a gentleman's suit. One simple suit was completed in three to four hours. Specially designed dresses take longer to sew, and cost more.

It was noted that married women could barely complete one suit daily. Without an electric sewing machine, the task took extra time. In addition, it was difficult for them to regu-

Figure 2: Problems associated with stitching enterprises



lary spare time as they had to look after their household affairs, and attend to their children, husbands, visitors, and other related family matters.

Ranking sewing activity problems

Problems/causes of low participation in sewing activities are indicated in Figure 2.

These problems are made worse due to the frequency and seriousness of them. It was observed that the members of the group were interested expanding this activity, provided that customers paid for their clothes in good time. It was noted with concern that even resourceful people did not pay them at the appropriate time. The participants ranked these deferred payments as the number one problem.

Health problems associated with this activity were ranked as the second highest. The usual symptoms reported included headaches, backache, and muscular strain. Also mentioned

A girl from a sewing group is busy sewing clothes at home



were inadequate marketing facilities and the non-availability of required matching thread.

When the women involved in this activity discussed the matrix scores, they noted that due to poor financial conditions, or to bad habits (including those of well-off people), often fees were not paid in time, despite several requests for payment. In some cases, people did not pay for several months. For the other problems, their ranking was similar to the one estimated above in the matrix.

Proposed intervention

It was proposed that proper marketing facilities must be provided, as well as credit to purchase electric sewing machines for the further expansion of this enterprise.

The project is now providing loans for sewing activities. However, the solutions to the problems identified do not come under the purview of the project activities.

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