Using poultry for the improvement and development of diet and income of rural families in Chiapas, Mexico

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Government has recognized smallholder poultry production as an effective tool in poverty reduction in rural families. The objective was to develop smallholders into medium-size poultry producers in twenty-eight of the poorest counties of Chiapas, México at three levels: 1) Backyard farm. 11,000 families received a basic package (20 pullets, 2 feeders, 2 drinkers, 6 plates and 45 m of netting), plus training in poultry management with emphasis on Newcastle vaccination, nesting differentiation, brooder management, and feed supplementation. Families increased their egg consumption from 3 to 6 eggs/week/person, meat from 1 to 2 chickens/week/family, and their incomes increased, while bird mortality reduced from 60 to 20%. 2) Small family farm. Selected backyard producers were supported to expand to 50 hens with ongoing training and assistance, with attention on: a wider vaccination program, lighting, feeding, avoiding mixing hens with other birds, preventing poultry from leaving the farm. There was no difference in egg and poultry meat consumption compared with backyard, but incomes increased. 3) Farm. Some 76 farms were built and fully equipped with two flocks of 400 hens, each with 10 female staff. Staff were trained in production, marketing, organization, administration and record keeping. Barred Plymouth Rock and Rhode Island Red birds were used. Egg production peaked at 85%; but peak lay was also the major cause of mortality. Most staff depended on technical assistance, didn’t understand bio-security terms and didn’t like team work. Most eggs were sold, with a staff allowance of 30 eggs/week. In conclusion, Newcastle vaccine reduced mortality, but it was noted that performance was more irregular in backyard flocks. Backyard and family farms are more sustainable and empower women. In large farms it was complicated to create collaborations and confidence within staff. These three approaches improve social stability and reduce migration.