The main objective of establishing the training program was to help village people in the Solomon Islands to improve their poultry husbandry so that there was more meat and eggs to eat with the possibility of small cash incomes from sale of surpluses. Over eighty percent of the almost 500,000 population of the Solomon Islands lives a subsistence existence mainly from their own vegetable garden produce and whatever natural food they can find in their larger environment. Despite these lush gardens, 30% of the children are malnourished and protein starved.

The methods used to teach village people the improvement principles were based on simple backyard poultry keeping practices.

The initial training is delivered at a village level and then the more successful students are selected to attend additional training so they can become trainers in their own right.

Due to the impoverished nature of the villagers all components for the training workshops were sourced from the local environment so that there was no reliance on expensive imported feed, equipment or breeding stock and each improvement project could commence immediately after training was received.

As part of this training program occurred during the ethnic conflict in the Solomon Islands, one of the targeted groups was the displaced village youth who were forced to return home from various educational facilities and employment.

By attendance at the workshops many of the youth had their self confidence restored and were able to return to tertiary education or new job training opportunities. They also left behind successful family chicken projects which were continued by other family members.

Due to the success of the initial training programs and nucleus of trained students in a wide area of the country this program continues to grow.

The contents of the manual are also being adapted as the prototype subject for the new Distance Learning Centres which are being established in the Solomon Islands so this will also allow a world wide use of the material.

Although the training principles originated in the Solomon Islands they are well suited to the majority of subsistence cultures around the world as well as other small farmer or backyard poultry keepers in other countries.

Keywords: Improved; Village; Chicken; Keeping;

Introduction

Early in the 1990s it was recognised by the author that the principles of the simple backyard poultry keeping he had been practicing all his life in Australia would be of immense benefit to village people who live a subsistence lifestyle across a large part of the world. As he was visiting the Solomon Islands close to Australia in the far south-western Pacific at the time he naturally commenced working in that area first.
Chickens have lived around these island villages for centuries in an almost feral existence with very little regular care so therefore there have been only small returns from the discovery of a nest of eggs or a captured rooster for the cooking pot. It is believed by the author that descendants of these chickens actually traveled on the migration canoes with the people when they spread out across the Pacific 3000 or 4000 years ago.

These village chickens are smaller in size than conventional chickens because of being stunted from the lack of care and also the almost accidental infusion of red jungle fowl blood from the wild fowl which live in the jungles on islands in the east of the country. This mixed breeding with the jungle fowl has had some benefits as the village chickens are hardy, self reliant to an extent and usually survive the rigours of the tropical climate. Many different varieties of both purebred and hybrid imported chickens have been crossed into these wild jungle fowl over recent decades to produce this basic village chicken. Therefore it has a mixture of genetics which when stimulated by improved care and feeding can produce increased numbers of eggs and better meat.

**Materials and methods**

The methods used to teach village people the improvement principles were based on simple backyard poultry keeping practices. This is a voluntary development program which commenced back in 1996. The name of “Kai Kokorako Perma-Poultry” was given to this concept because “Kai” means “eat” in Pidgin English” and “kokorako” means “chicken”. The “Perma-Poultry” part of the name refers to the use of broad permaculture principles used in the village style of raising poultry.

The main initial tool used is a training manual specifically written for the conditions in the Solomon Islands. This was developed over 10 years from the lifetime of experience of the author with backyard poultry keeping in Australia and also from the initial field work in the Solomons.

The training is delivered first at a village level and then the more successful students are selected to attend additional training so they can become trainers in their own right. Many of the participants have a limited education so the training was centred on practical skills and demonstrations.

Due to the impoverished nature of the villagers all components for the training workshops were sourced from the local environment so that there was no reliance on expensive imported feed, equipment or breeding stock and each improvement project could commence immediately after training was received.

This was a deliberate because too often in the past development programs have tried to force outside concepts on needy people using introduced materials which need constant replenishment from overseas and are beyond the limited financial capacity of the recipients.

The Solomon Islands is made up of over 900 islands and even though it is in the lush tropics many of the islands are made up of poor sandy soil. The villagers are often forced to build their vegetable gardens considerable distance from their homes or to purchase their food from other areas. As most of the villagers live a subsistence existence they have little income to spend and they often exist with limited diets of yams or potatoes.

As chickens can be kept on the poorest of soils, even in some cases in houses raised out of tidal areas, this improved chicken keeping concept is open to almost everyone. Some of the villagers’ garden produce is used to feed the chickens and the eggs and meat from those chickens goes to help vary and improve the diet of the people.
Surpluses of eggs and live chickens can be traded for more vegetables and fruit or sold to raise small amounts of cash for the peoples’ other needs like school fees, medicine etc.

As part of this training program occurred during the ethnic conflict in the Solomon Islands from 1999 to 2004, one of the targeted groups was the displaced village youth who were forced to return home from various educational facilities and employment.

**Results and discussion**

More than 150 students from several areas were trained during this period and there was a wide variety of results. One particular older participant was so successful that he was able to raise school fees for his son at High School from the sale of his surplus eggs and chickens.

A video of the training was also filmed by students during the initial training programs.

By attendance at the workshops many of the youth had their self confidence restored and were able to return to tertiary education or new job training opportunities. They also left behind successful family chicken projects which were continued by other family members.

Due to the success of the initial training programs and nucleus of trained students in a wide area of the country this program continues to grow.

The development of a nucleus of local trainers in Improved Village Poultry Keeping is also an ongoing process.

The current Solomon Islands Government acknowledges that sustainable rural livelihoods are a top priority for the country’s future development and improved village poultry keeping is listed as one of the main segments of their policy.

An innovative development of rural email stations was established by Aid agencies across the Solomon Islands during the ethnic conflict to allow families and communities from even the most remote island to keep in touch with each other during the troubled times.

Whilst these email stations operate on solar power and high frequency radio and this has previously limited uses of the technology it has introduced rural people to the opportunity of electronic learning and communication.

Expansion of this network is currently underway with connection of the centres to satellite communication and development of Distance Learning Centres at each site.

The contents of the manual are now being adapted as the prototype subject for the new Distance Learning Centres which are being established in the Solomon Islands so this will also allow a world wide use of the material.

The electronic learning will be supported by the hard copy of the training manual and by the establishment of regional breeding centres where students can continue practical experience.

The initial breeding/training station will be established on St Cruz Island where the wild jungle fowl still live and the local people have a strong affinity with chickens.

Although the training principles originated in the Solomon Islands they are well suited to the majority of subsistence cultures around the world as well as other small farmer or backyard poultry keepers in other countries.