

BEYOND THE BACKYARD

Connecting Smallholder Poultry Production, Collective Enterprise and Agroecology

Not simply distributing poultry, but organising a community-based production and marketing system

GEMS Agribusiness SACCO | Uganda

Agroecology Knowledge Fair | 18 November 2026

What we did and why

The community-based poultry model

GEMS is not simply distributing poultry. It organises a community-based production and marketing system: shared brooding infrastructure, household production and cooperative market access.

SHARED BROODERS

1. GEMS buys day-old chicks
2. Chicks are raised in shared brooders until one month old

HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTION

3. Farmers buy the one-month-old birds
4. Farmers rear birds at home to maturity (min. 2 kg for buyback)

COOPERATIVE MARKET ACCESS

5. **Farmers choose: sell independently or to GEMS**
6. GEMS buys back at prevailing market prices
7. GEMS aggregates and sells to wholesalers, hotels and resellers

THE CHALLENGE WE RESPOND TO

Smallholder farmers face high start-up costs, uneven access to quality early-stage chick care, limited technical support and weak bargaining power when selling individually.

FARMERS ARE FREE TO CHOOSE

Selling to GEMS is never compulsory. Farmers decide whether to sell independently or to GEMS; GEMS offers a dependable outlet and buys back at prevailing market prices.

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What changed

Scale, results and agroecological contributions

12
Operational brooders, 1,000 birds each

160
Farmers directly participating

65%
Of direct farmers are young people

~600
People engaged across the value chain

<3%
Bird mortality

2 kg
Minimum weight for buyback

OBSERVED CHANGES

- ✓ Reduced chick mortality
- ✓ More birds in circulation
- ✓ Increased employment opportunities
- ✓ Improved poultry management practices
- ✓ Increased use of cleaner energy

AGROECOLOGICAL PRACTICES AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS

Practice	Contribution
Solar lighting	**Renewable energy use**
Briquettes made from husks and agricultural/food waste	**Waste recovery and alternative energy**
Poultry manure used in crop gardens and shared with other farmers	**Nutrient recycling**
Farmers growing crops alongside poultry production	**Crop–livestock integration**
Crop produce used in poultry feeding and household consumption	**Resource efficiency and livelihood diversity**
Shared brooding and bulk procurement	**Efficient resource utilisation**

Contributions are described qualitatively. No carbon or emissions savings are claimed until they are measured.

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What made it work

Infrastructure, markets, extension and savings

Shared brooders and bulk procurement

- Dedicated teams provide specialised chick care
- Farmers avoid the cost of building their own brooders
- Households with limited space can still participate
- Bulk procurement of feed, vaccines and inputs improves coordination
- Central vaccination, monitoring and supervision reduce early chick mortality

Farmers concentrate on rearing to maturity; GEMS coordinates the technical early stage.

Market access and two linked income streams

- Selling one-month-old birds to farmers, a batch every other month
- Trading margin: GEMS buys mature birds, aggregates them and sells wholesale
- A dependable outlet for mature birds encourages farmers to buy their next batch from GEMS

The cooperative retains its trading margin to cover operating costs and generate income.

Free veterinary extension

- Provided at no cost to participating farmers
- Poultry management training
- Disease prevention and biosecurity
- Treatment and veterinary guidance

Brings technical knowledge within farmers' reach and makes household production more resilient.

Member savings and reinvestment

- Members keep a share of poultry sales as formal membership savings
- Savings can be accessed for personal or targeted needs
- Earnings are reinvested in the next batch of birds

Members' savings belong to members and are kept separate from the cooperative's operating income.

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What did not work

Constraints and lessons

CONSTRAINT A

Limited working capital

Demand for mature birds from hotels, resellers and other buyers exceeds what GEMS can currently supply. Limited capital constrains how far production can grow.

LESSON

Demand is not the bottleneck; finance is. Working capital for chicks, inputs and buyback sets the pace of growth.

CONSTRAINT B

Delays in day-old chick supply

Supplier delays disrupt brooding schedules and sometimes leave available brooder capacity underused.

LESSON

Reliable chick supply matters as much as brooder capacity. Plan orders early and build dependable supplier relationships.

CONSTRAINT C

Market price risk

Buyback follows prevailing market prices, so when wholesale prices fall, GEMS' trading margin comes under pressure.

HOW WE MANAGE IT

GEMS sets a price floor and does not sell to buyers below it. That floor is always better than what farmers could get in the same period. Farmers are not guaranteed a fixed price.

Also learned: record mortality, growth, energy use, briquettes and manure reuse systematically so that results can be quantified.

What others can learn and apply

Replication opportunities for cooperatives and farmer organisations

1. **Share infrastructure to lower entry barriers**
   Shared brooders let households without space or capital take part.

2. **Connect production to reliable markets**
   A dependable outlet at market prices keeps farmers producing.

3. **Integrate technical extension and preventive animal healthcare**
   Free veterinary support and central vaccination reduce losses.

4. **Turn agricultural waste and by-products into productive resources**
   Husks and waste into briquettes; manure into crop gardens.

5. **Develop multiple revenue streams and encourage member savings and reinvestment**
   Bird sales plus trading margin; savings fund the next batch.

THE BIG LESSON

One connected system

Farmers, shared resources, household production, markets and ecological practices, brought together as a commercially viable community poultry enterprise.

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Thank you!

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