

SMALL GRANTS MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE

Success Stories

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What is the NICE Small Grants Initiative?

In 2022, the Nutrition in City Ecosystems (NICE) project in Bungoma and Busia kick-started a Small Grants Initiative to increase dietary diversity of beneficiaries in the two counties. The initiative was implemented under the project workstream on strengthening food systems governance by incentivizing women and youth to meaningfully engage in local food systems processes for improved nutrition in two rounds so far 5 grants provided in 2022, 13 grants provided in 2023.

The groups are selected through a selection process spearheaded by the NICE Project and the Food System Platforms in the cities. The platform ensures that women and youth who have an impact on the project's value chains in their communities are given priority.

The grant implementation was designed to run for 6 months and women and youth groups from Busia and Bungoma counties were selected to receive the grants under the key NICE value chains that include African Leafy Vegetables, Poultry, Fish and Groundnuts.

How were beneficiaries selected?

For selection of Small Grant beneficiaries, key members of Bungoma's and Busia's multisectoral Food System Platforms suggested promising women and youth groups. After consensus about the groups to invite in the multisectoral Food System Platforms, the NICE project team then reached out to the proposed groups to share the application form. Invited groups submitted the completed application form where they shared relevant details. The NICE project finances seed, equipment and value addition materials to a value of Ksh 150,000.

The platforms then evaluated the proposals and chose 7-8 women and or youth led groups or enterprises who will receive the funding.

Irrigation benefits school diets

Keeping vegetables well-watered



Phanice Ilamwenya displays African Leafy Vegetables on her farm.

Phanice Ilamwenya owns Phanice Farmers' Hub in Bungoma's Misikhu Ward. She is one of our successful women farmers in the NICE Project. Through her Hub, the mother of six children works with more than 360 farmers. They greatly appreciate her leadership and warm nature.

"I joined NICE with my Farmers' Hub in May 2023", says Phanice. "Later in the year, I read about the Small Grants Initiative on social media. The call sounded like something that would suit my Hub and add value to the community." The NICE project's Small Grants Initiative helps women and youth groups to grow their business activities. The aim is to increase household income and improve food security.

After consultation, Phanice applied for 150,000 shillings to boost the Farmers Hub production to the community, about \$1100. Her grant proposal was successful. When she told her farmers, they were elated – and rightly so! "The grant has let us acquire seed trays, seeds and a complete drip irrigation kit", Phanice explains. The drip irrigation kit includes a roof tank for rainwater and a unit for supplying water to the drip system. In addition, the Hub's farmer group received a shed net for raising seedlings and 20,000 shillings towards initial costs.

The group has already made great sales from African Leafy Vegetables (ALV). So far, local schools and other Bungoma customers have bought about 300 kg. With lots of farmers growing ALV in a small geographical area, there is a risk of a glut at harvest time and therefore lower prices. But Phanice's clients have learned how to benefit. They now sell any surplus during the dry season when prices are higher.



Black Nightshade and Spider Plant growing in a shed net at Phanice Farmers' Hub.

A cool boost to vegetable sales

Charcoal extends shelf life



Margaret Atulo with sacks of her dried vegetables.

Margaret Atulo lives in Webuye, Bungoma County. The daughter of a maize-grower, she has been a farmer since 2005. In 2021, she heard about the NICE project at a sub-county meeting with other farmers. She now runs Margaret Atulo Farmers' Hub, a local aggregation centre for African Leafy Vegetables (ALV). Joining the project has improved life for her and her community.

"I heard about the opportunity to get infrastructure support", Margaret reports. "I assessed what I truly needed, which was a modern charcoal cooler. So I put in a proposal." Charcoal is an ideal material for natural coolers. Its pores store water, which prevents a lot of outside heat from reaching the vegetables.

To get support from NICE, Margaret had to demonstrate the need for investment as well as the resulting economic opportunity. "After I passed the evaluation, the project team built me a charcoal cooler and provided crates for the ALV." She uses the cooler to prevent losses during vegetable storage. As well as the charcoal, good ventilation and well insulated walls also help to keep the temperature low and humidity high. These and other design features extend the vegetables' shelf life by 5-7 days.

The NICE project also provides training on Good Agricultural Practice, quality management for safe food production and post-harvest handling. Thanks to all this support, Margaret Atulo and her community can ensure regular sales. During the peak season, Margaret herself employs two workers for weeding and harvesting. Among her customers are two local schools. The Hub supplies them with ten kilos of ALV five days per week. If she has a surplus, Margaret dries vegetables for separate sale.

However, as is usual in agribusiness, Margaret still faces some challenges. As well as fluctuating prices, lack of water for the charcoal cooler can be a problem at drier times of the year. But overall, Margaret is very happy: "Since we began growing Black Nightshade and Spider Plant, my whole community has more access to fresh nutritious vegetables." In the future, she also hopes to sell her dried vegetables to exporters.

“ A modern charcoal cooler has not only extended the shelf life of our vegetables but has also improved access to fresh, nutritious produce for the entire community. ”

– Margaret Atulo



When TikTok talks chick work

Neo Hen grows with two grants



Lennson Mumo and his new barn which can house 5000 birds.

Lennson Mumo from Kibabii Lumasa is the founder of Neo Hen Farmers' Hub. In 2018, before the NICE project, he started with 50 chicks and gradually increased his flock to 1000 birds. At any one time, he now employs up to 20 casual workers, depending on demand. To expand his operations further, he acquired a plot of land and built a new barn. Thanks to the NICE project, he has received a second small grant after achieving great success with his first one.

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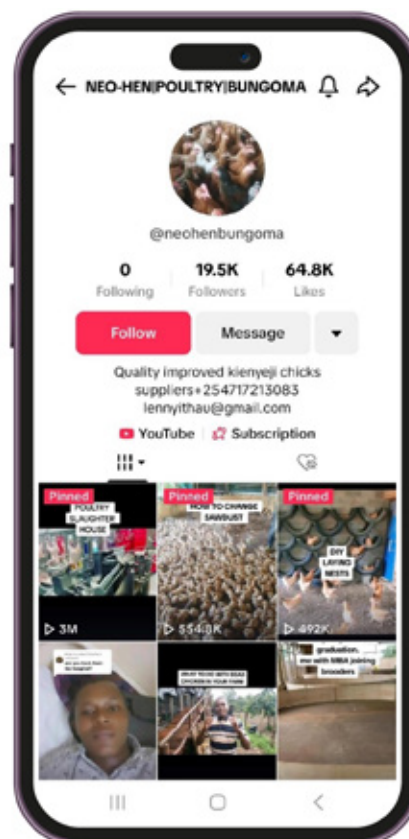
Lennson's passion for poultry stems from watching his mother breed indigenous *Kienyeji* chicken. After graduating from university, Lennson decided to launch his own business. He attributes part of his success to a strong presence on digital platforms. (See screenshot).

"I reach most of my farmers on TikTok, where I post educational material about poultry rearing", Lennson explains. "I also connect digitally with some clients who buy from me directly." Apart from poultry production, Neo Hen Farmers' Hub also conducts training sessions. Lennson provides additional advice to his farmers on such topics such as basic brood management, disease control, production economics, marketing, and business promotion.

For many poultry farmers, the high cost of feed can be a headache. Lennson has tackled this hurdle by increasing the size of his flock. As a result, he can now reliably supply about 500 farmers. Between January and April, for example, he sold them about 960 chickens and 9500 chicks of various ages. When he gets the right incubator, Lennson plans to considerably increase his hatching business.

“ Success in business is not just about making a profit; it's about making a positive impact in the lives of others and ensuring access to nutritious foods such as chicken and eggs. ”

- Lennson Mumo



The group behind the coop

Women seek to get their business flying



Members of the St Magdalene Women Group.

In 2006, the first members of Bungoma's St Magdalene Women Group came together to help each other and eradicate poverty. The group seeks to display the care and humility of the biblical figure of Mary Magdalene. The members aim to promote food security by increasing the production of maize, African Leafy Vegetables, and potatoes, while improving livelihoods in their community. To ensure financial inclusion, the group engages in "table banking", an internal savings and lending scheme. To enable good governance, the members meet every week.

"We learnt about the NICE Small Grants Initiative through a NICE project workshop and decided to apply", says Eveline Wepukhulu. "Our effort was rewarded with a poultry starter kit. We received 500 day-old chicks and nine bags of feed." Some group members had kept poultry before, the others wanted to try. They all benefited from a two-day course at the local Agricultural Training Centre in April 2023.

With many members new to poultry farming, lack of husbandry knowledge nevertheless initially led to high chick mortality. "One of the challenges we faced was in handling the birds at a tender age", Eveline elaborates. "Another problem remains the cost of feed: a 50kg bag costs about 3600 shillings."

The group sees further capacity-building as a route to success in both meat and egg production. If they can scale up their production, they have an excellent market nearby: The Chwele slaughterhouse needs a regular supply of chickens.

“ Our aim is to build a sustainable poultry farming enterprise that not only benefits our members but also contributes to the food security and consumption of healthy food in our community. ”

– Eveline Wepukhulu

Vacant Space fills a gap

Small grant opens the door to avocados



“By leveraging resources and partnerships, I aim to expand Vacant Space Kenya Enterprises, providing communities with nutritious produce for consumption.”

– Kelvin Chagira

Kelvin Chagira presents a tray of vegetable seedlings.

Kelvin Chagira started his farming journey in 2019 after experience as a social worker and running farm surveys. His father provided a 100m² plot, on which Kelvin started growing kale. His business Vacant Space Kenya Enterprises has since expanded into African Leafy Vegetables such as Black Nightshade, Spider Plant and Amaranth. He also grows cowpea leaves and deals in seeds.

“I chose to go it alone because group dynamics can be challenging and people have different commitment levels”, Kelvin comments. “The downside is that I need to hire at least three workers during the peak season, and their daily wages are a big expense.”

Researching into key foundations that work with Kenyan farmers, Kelvin came across the NICE project on social media. Having tried for various other funds, he successfully applied to the project’s Small Grants Initiative. “Items I’ve received include a small water tank, piping, a shed net, Hass avocado seedlings and 100 crates”, lists Kelvin. The high price of inputs can quickly eat into profits, but he is satisfied with business so far. “I have already made 17,500 shillings from Hass seedlings and have ordered lots more because my clients like this variety so much.”

Kelvin now hopes to tap into work run by his local County Assembly member with women’s groups and young people. State sector support for expansion into tree seedlings and additional vegetables would enable him to further grow his business, Kelvin is convinced.

From savings group to poultry producers

Women's group now also includes men



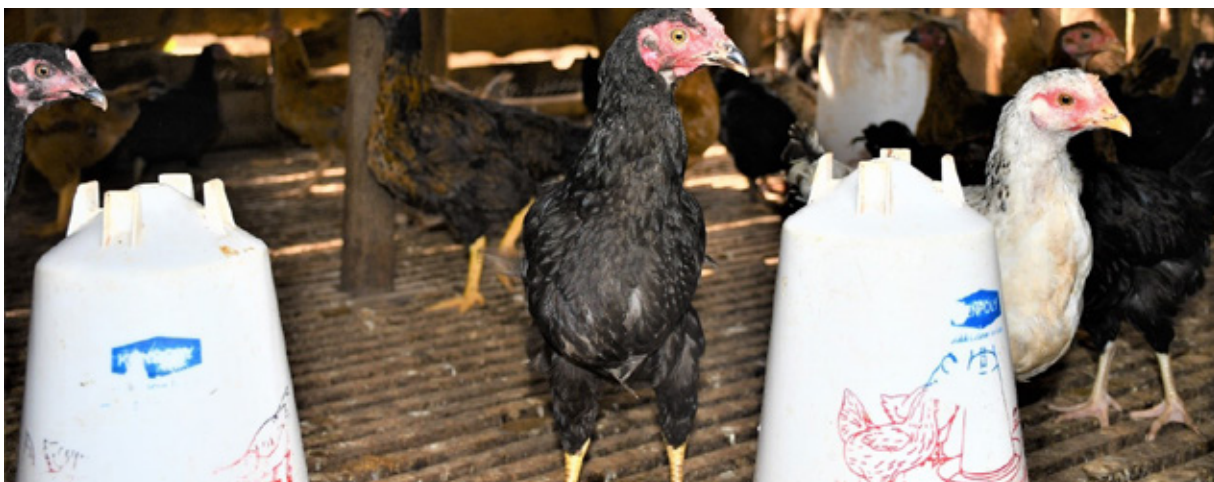
“ Our poultry business has not only empowered our group economically but has also enabled us to provide better education and nutrition for our families, showing the real impact of our hard work and dedication. ”

- Beatrice Wanyonyi

Beatrice Wanyonyi, Chair of Tulia Women Empowerment Group

Tulia Women Empowerment Group started in 2008 as a savings circle to tackle poverty. Today the focus is more on farming. There are 15 female, ten male and three youth members. Their main business is poultry; some of the farmers also practice horticulture. They grow African Leafy Vegetables, maize, and groundnuts on farms of up to one acre.

“We learned about the NICE project’s Small Grants Initiative from our local extension officer here in Bungoma”, says the group’s chairwoman Beatrice Wanyonyi. “The county agriculture office gave us the proposal template and we entered the items we needed.”



Poultry belonging to Tulia Women Empowerment Group

The group received 840 chicks, four bags of feed and four of grower mash. The result has been impressive. “So far, we’ve sold about 560 chickens, earning our group more than 277,000 shillings,” Beatrice reports. “Before selling, we consider the weight and age of each chicken. The big ones can go for 600 to 700 shillings per kilo.”

At its monthly meeting, the group discusses how to solve various poultry and other livelihood challenges. Recurring issues are the high price of feed and a shortage of vaccines. But on the bright side, Beatrice notes that, thanks to poultry, her members can now pay for school fees and better food.

NICE knowledge pays dividends

Member helps Self-Help Group start in poultry



Members of the Mwenge Self-Help Group

People in the Mwenge Self-Help Group in Busia had been meeting informally for years. In 2023, however, they decided to register officially as an organization that addresses poverty and food security. Most of the 11 female and youth members are close neighbors. They include David Kioko. He is also a Network Manager with the NICE project and told the group about the NICE's Small Grants Initiative. "I heard about it from our NICE coordinator Daniel Nyauke", explains David Kioko. "Thanks to working in the project, I knew that the Initiative benefits farmers and the community at large."

After discussing the idea, the group members put in a proposal. Their objective was to engage in poultry production. They received 28 bags of feed, valued at 98,000 shillings, and 100 chicks. The initiative also provided drinkers, feeders, and health supplements such as vitamins and dewormers.



“Our objective is to address poverty and food security within our community by engaging in poultry production and promoting consumption of nutritious food in our community.”

– David Kioko

Poultry belonging to Mwenge Self-Help Group

The group makes sure to sell enough cocks to maintain a good ratio between the sexes. The hens currently lay 25-30 eggs per day. Bird sales make more money, however: During a period in which eggs earned the group some 2700 shillings, cocks and hens brought in about 14 times as much.

The high cost of feed remains a challenge, and disease outbreaks can also rapidly cause problems. But Mwenge Self-Help Group looks ahead optimistically. "Our vision is to run a Farmers' Hub that provides eggs for consumption and breeding. We also hope to be the go-to place for local people buying chicks", declares David Kioko.

Pumping up the business of fish

Youth group finds good customers for fingerlings



Members of the Goodwill Fingerlings Producers Youth Group

Edwin Pamba is the chairman of Goodwill Fingerlings Producers Youth Group in Busia. His members sell their fingerlings to people rearing fish in ponds or lake cages. They also grow African Leafy Vegetables such as Black Nightshade. The group learned about the NICE Small Grants Initiative during aquaculture training at one of the Farmers' Hubs in the NICE project. Edwin and colleagues decided to apply.

"We got a solar panel and water pump as well as high-quality brooders for tilapia and catfish", Edwin proudly reports. Group members use the pump for irrigating their vegetables as well as for the fish tanks. "We have now hatched more than 4000 tilapia fingerlings, worth over 32,000 shillings", he adds. The catfish will follow soon. "We sell them by weight", Edwin explains. "10-15g fingerlings can fetch ten shillings, the smaller ones are worth about eight. We sell them to networks organized through the county fisheries and agriculture offices."

“By empowering our youth to become successful fish producers, we’re not just growing businesses, we’re cultivating consumption of healthy nutritious diets.”

– Edwin Pamba



Tilapia fingerlings

The group is not yet as strong as Edwin would like. It can be difficult to advance certain activities if not all members are willing to engage. Further challenges include predators on the fish and the high cost of feed. However, the members look forward to a brighter future. "We hope to get stronger over the next five years", Edwin underlines. "We aim to strengthen our governance, secure our present investments, and expand our portfolio by investing in lake fish cages."

Hatching, sharing and growing

Self-Help Group has good reasons for pride



Mumbiri Self-Help group members

Women smallholders started the Mumbiri Self-Help Group in 2006 for mutual support in farming. Chairman Mildred Auma can now look back on plenty of success in growing African Leafy Vegetables and rearing poultry.

A big step forward came in 2023, when the group came across the NICE project's Small Grants Initiative. "We heard about it from our ward agricultural officer and decided to apply", Mildred says. "We were happy to win a grant worth 150,000 shillings." The members received 142 chicks, 400 fertilized eggs and 150kg of mash. The award also included raw material for making feed locally. This helps lighten the considerable burden of rising feed costs. The group has also benefited from similar schemes in other farming sectors.

All 142 chickens thrived and were ready for sale by Christmas. Each bird went for 700-800 shillings. The group used the proceeds to buy hens and cocks for fertilized eggs. When these hatch, the members will share them. Mumbiri Self-Help Group hopes soon to buy an incubator and a hatchery. The aim is to increase each woman's flock to at least 500 chickens.

“Through mutual support, hard work, and innovative initiatives, the Mumbiri Self-Help Group has proven that smallholder farming can be a powerful avenue for addressing food security and promoting nutritious foods.”

- Mildred Auma

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