

A proper chicken structure is the foundation of poultry farming, writes Beatrice Nakibuuka

Poultry farming is a profitable enterprise when you get the dynamics right, one of them being proper pens or shelter.

Enoch Mukokoma, a poultry farmer says building a shelter is one of the most expensive things in starting a poultry house farm business.

"My poultry shelter houses about 2,500 birds and although I did the basic to build a battery cage, it cost me about Sh54m even before I bought the feeds and the chicken."

His experience is likely to intimidate so many other prospective farmers due to the expenses but there are cheaper ways you can have a poultry done and be as effective as the modern expensive one.

Expert view

According to Dr Henry Nseroko a veterinary assistant at Conceed International, one should consider a deep litre shelter which can be used for all types of chicken.

Dr Nseroko says a deep litre is the best shelter type for a farmer who wants to maximise profits.

"Here, the birds have freedom to move around which stimulates production of eggs. In fact, birds in such a shelter are likely to lay eggs longer than those which are caged," he says.

Space

When one thinks of starting a poultry farm, having space is basic.

Appropriate housing for poultry is a must to give birds freedom to exercise which in turn increases the production of eggs especially for the layers.

It is therefore important to plan for your poultry business early enough by making sure your shelter has enough room for birds to spread their wings and move around. "Make sure your poultry house is big enough for your birds. Layer chickens should have 1.5 to 2 square feet of pen space but the broilers may require more space. Farmers should know that many chicken health issues, including egg-eating, stopping to lay prematurely and cannibalism are linked to inadequate shelter space," Nseroko says.

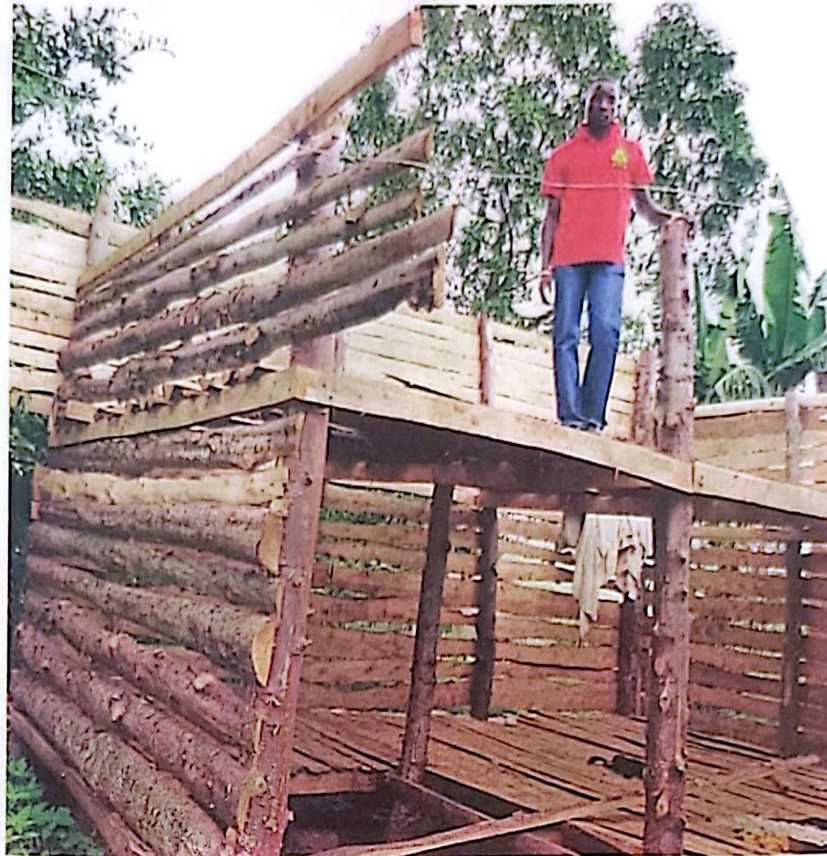
Height from the ground

During the construction, it is important to ensure that the shelter is elevated for about 1.5feet from the ground so that it is easier to remove the droppings. "All birds like to sleep off the ground and during the construction, make sure your roosts are at the right circumference so that your chickens can comfortably perch on them and off the ground. And for cleaning purposes too," Nseroko advises.

Ventilation

The most important aspect for a poultry shelter is for the birds to have a lot of air circulating around. A chicken house without proper ventilation may experience a build-up of toxic fumes from the droppings. This, according to Dr Nseroko is likely to cause coccidiosis, brooder pneumonia and other respiratory

Set up your poultry shelter on a low budget



A prospective poultry farmer stands atop his structure. Below is a super double deck cage suitable for layers. PHOTOS BY BEATRICE NAKIBUUKA.



Brooder

When the birds are brought in as chicks, they need to be warm all the time. The farmer should use a 200 watts bulb in such a shelter to keep the chicks warm. However, Galiwango advises that one can improvise by making an oval space in the shelter with a pot for the chicks. "The oval space is where the birds converge when it gets cold. Making a corner can lead to death of some chicks as they all tend to collect there. In the pot, hot charcoal is put to keep the chicks warm," he says.

The cage system

Andrew Okapis, an agent with Big Dutchman commends the cage system for space economy. Depending on the order of dimensions made by the prospective farmer, the cage is built and assembled by the supplier but the beauty with it is that it is elastic thus can house very many birds within very small space.

"If you have a shelter of 76mX9m you can have the capacity to keep 10,000 birds. We sit down with the farmer who explains how much space he has then we plan according to the costs," he explains. Okapis adds, "In the same cage, the bird can drink, feed and lay eggs. It limits spilling of the feeds; minimises space so you can keep more birds in a small place and is durable. When the birds are in the cage, their movement is restricted but the feed and energy is converted into laying the eggs."

DRINKERS AND FEEDERS

Having enough drinkers and feeders for the birds prevents competition while they feed.

After installing the feeders and water troughs, observe your birds to make sure all of them including those low in the pecking order, are able to access their food and water.

Galiwango says, "The feeders and drinkers should tally with the number of birds to avoid competition which later turns into non uniformity of the birds in terms of production. Some may start laying eggs at a later date because they are competing for feeds."

ROOFING

According to Nseroko, many people who build poultry shelters concentrate more on the floor but forget the roofing which is dangerous.

The roof must be strong enough because when it leaks, the water will drop into the droppings which causes dampness and therefore favours multiplication of bacteria in the shelter thereby causing infections among the poultry.

He says, "At the start of the poultry business, if one does not have enough money, they can improvise. Instead of having a roof made out of iron sheets, they can consider having a strong and efficient roof but at a cheaper cost by using polythene bags and papyrus mats."

Shs4m

AMOUNT OF SHILLINGS A MODERATE CHICKEN HOUSE COSTS

infections and create a smelly poultry house. He recommends use of mesh wire for the shelters.

Floor

Dr David Galiwango, a vet at Conceed advises that the floor of your poultry shelter should be made of material which is resistant to rodents such as rats and mice.

A concrete floor is ideal to proactively prevent pest problems because the rats not only eat into your feed costs or are likely to bite the birds, but can also carry diseases. Coffee husks and saw dust help trap the droppings. "For the start, if one cannot afford the concrete floor, they can make sure that the ground is compacted and leveled to avoid rodents. Also make sure your walls and fencing are secure enough to keep out creepy animals like snakes," he says.