In a small trading centre in Mayange Sector more than a decade ago, there was little to suggest that the area would one day become one of Rwanda's growing economic hubs. The landscape was largely undeveloped, with fewer homes and scattered small shops along the road. Today, the area is buzzing with activity, showing the district's evolution into one of the country's fastest-growing regions.

Among the investors who saw potential in the area long before many others did was Shumei Lam, a Singaporean entrepreneur who founded Poultry East Africa Ltd (PEAL), becoming a significant contributor to economic and social development through poultry farming, food production, and job creation.

Shumei Lam is a Singaporean entrepreneur who founded Poultry East Africa Ltd (PEAL)

Lam first visited Rwanda in 2011 alongside her late father, Larry Lam, a businessman with extensive operations across Africa. Her father, who always wanted to give back to communities, chose Rwanda out of all the countries he had worked in. While helping after buying Magerwa, she toured warehouses and was struck by one thing: nearly everything was imported.

"There must be opportunities here to boost local production," she recalls thinking.

That observation planted a seed that would eventually grow into PEAL, Rwanda's largest chicken meat producer and one of the country's most integrated poultry businesses.

When PEAL was established in 2012, Rwanda's poultry sector looked very different from what it is today. Professional feed mills were scarce, modern broiler farms were limited, and processing facilities and cold-chain logistics were virtually non-existent. To achieve its mission of making poultry protein affordable and accessible, PEAL had to build almost the entire value chain itself.

The company invested in breeder farms, hatcheries, contract farming systems, processing facilities, logistics, and retail operations. It took a year and a half to acquire the land and a year for construction, licensing, and equipment installation before PEAL became operational in December 2014.

Creating Jobs and Strengthening Families

One of PEAL's most visible contributions has been employment. The company employs about 135 full-time staff, with approximately 90 per cent of them coming from surrounding villages. Nearly all employees are Rwandan, reflecting the company's commitment to local capacity building.

Women have benefited from these opportunities, comprising more than 65 per cent of the workforce, many of whom support their households and invest in their families' futures. According to Lam, the impact extends far beyond the company's gates.

"When people have income, the whole ecosystem grows," she says.

The ripple effects are evident throughout the community, where increased economic activity has driven rapid development over the past decade.

The impact of PEAL is best illustrated through the stories of employees whose lives have changed alongside the company's growth.

Niyidukunda Gisele joined the company in 2019 after completing her studies in veterinary science. Originally from Kigali, she moved to Mayange and now works in the company's hatchery operations.

She says the job gave her much more than employment. Through hands-on experience, she developed specialised poultry skills that complemented her academic training and allowed her to build a stable future.



Niyidukunda Gisele, at the poultry farm in Mayange Bugesera District

Today, she is married and has a child. She credits PEAL with helping her establish her life in Mayange and providing the opportunity to support her family.

"I am grateful for the opportunity to learn and grow here," she says. "The skills I have gained have helped me build a future for myself and my family."

Gasasira Albert's story mirrors the company's own growth. Joining as a young man right after completing high school, he seized the opportunity when the company

was starting operations in his home village of Mayange.

Over the years, he worked his way through the ranks and now serves as the Processing Manager. He says the company invested heavily in his development, providing training locally and exposing him to skills and knowledge from other locations.

Like many employees, Gasasira built his personal life while working at PEAL. He married while with the company, and his wife also worked there for a time.

For him, the greatest benefit has been the experience and expertise he has acquired.

“Apart from earning a living, I have broadened my skills and knowledge,” Gasasira observes. “Even if I left today, I would be able to use what I have learned here in many other areas.”

This reflects a broader pattern at PEAL where employment not only provides income, but also creates pathways for professional development, family stability, and long-term opportunity.

Supporting Farmers, Raising Standards Through Knowledge and Innovation.

Beyond direct employment, PEAL works with more than 450 contract farmers, most of whom are small-scale producers and many of whom are women.

The company provides chicks, feeds, vaccines, and technical support, then buys back the chickens after 45 days. This model, applied in partnership with One Acre Fund, allows farmers to participate in commercial poultry production without upfront capital.

For many rural families, the arrangement has become an important source of additional income and has introduced modern farming practices that improve productivity and resilience.

From the beginning, PEAL invested heavily in training and capacity building. International experts were brought in to establish best practices and mentor local staff. Today, most leadership and technical positions are held by Rwandans.

Strict biosecurity measures have become central to the company’s operations, helping protect flocks, improve food safety, and raise professional standards across the poultry industry.

More Than a Business, Growing for the Future

Despite PEAL’s commercial success, it continues its social-impact investments. The company has supported local initiatives, including sponsoring Bugesera Football Club and supporting the women’s cycling team, helping create opportunities for local athletes and strengthening community pride.

PEAL currently produces about 12,000 chickens every week and operates an expanding retail network under its consumer brand, Cooko. The company plans to continue expanding across Rwanda and eventually into regional markets.

Lam believes the future remains bright as new infrastructure, tourism, and investment continue to drive demand for food and agricultural products.

“It’s not just about making profits,” she says. “It’s about growing together with the community.”

More than a decade after she first visited Rwanda, Lam’s commitment remains rooted in the same idea that inspired her at the beginning, balancing responsibilities in Singapore and Rwanda. As PEAL grows, the stories of employees like Niyidukunda and Gasasira show that the company’s impact is measured not only by the number of chickens produced or shops opened, but also by the lives transformed along the way.

Cooko: Bringing Quality Chicken Closer

Cooko, the consumer brand of Poultry East Africa Ltd (PEAL), is making high-quality, affordable chicken more accessible to families across Rwanda. As Rwanda’s largest chicken meat producer, PEAL launched Cooko to provide fresh, nutritious, and delicious chicken through a growing network of outlets in Kigali and Bugesera.

Offering a convenient supermarket-style shopping experience at local market

prices, Cooko is helping make chicken an everyday choice rather than an occasional treat. Rich in protein, vitamins, and essential nutrients, chicken supports healthy living while delivering great taste. With Cooko, families can enjoy quality meals, celebrate everyday moments, and share the joy of good food.