



## UNITING FOR CHANGE:

HOW MULTISTAKEHOLDER  
APPROACHES ARE TRANSFORMING  
FOOD SYSTEMS IN MBALE CITY

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## A City at the Crossroads of Opportunity

Mbale City, situated at the foot of Mount Elgon and bordering Kenya, is one of Uganda's most promising urban centers. Its strategic location, fertile soils, and favorable climate have long established it as a regional business hub and an agricultural powerhouse. However, as Mbale continues to grow and urbanize, the complexity of its food systems has increased, bringing forth new challenges and opportunities that require innovative and collaborative solutions.

## The Emergence of Multistakeholder Platforms

In response to these evolving challenges, Mbale City became a central participant in the Good Food For Cities (GF4C) initiative in 2022 and late the Afrifood links initiative. These initiatives, led by Rikolto in partnership with CONSENT, Food Rights Alliance (FRA), and the Mbale City Council, introduced a pioneering multistakeholder platform. The platform, which includes the Good Food Parliament and the Good Food Council, brings together a diverse group of stakeholders, including farmers, traders, processors, consumers, community leaders, civil society organizations, media, researchers, and government officials.

These stakeholders meet quarterly to discuss and identify pressing, context-specific food system issues. Far from being mere forums for discussion, these meetings serve as dynamic think tanks that generate actionable recommendations. These recommendations directly inform city planning, budgeting, and policy, ensuring that interventions are not only relevant but also inclusive and sustainable.

## Diagnosing the Challenges

The participatory nature of the platform has enabled the identification of several critical challenges affecting Mbale's food systems:

**Food Loss and Waste:** The absence of adequate storage and handling infrastructure has led to substantial post-harvest losses across Mbale City's food supply chain. Perishable commodities, particularly fruits, vegetables, and grains, suffer from spoilage due to exposure to unfavorable environmental conditions, pests, and contamination. This not only diminishes the quantity and quality of food available for consumption but also severely undermines local food security. Moreover, these losses translate into significant economic setbacks for farmers, traders, and other value chain actors, reducing their incomes and limiting the overall economic potential of the region's agricultural sector. Addressing these infrastructural gaps is critical to preserving food value, enhancing market efficiency, and ensuring sustainable livelihoods for the community.

**Food Safety Concerns:** A pervasive lack of awareness and training among food handlers, coupled with inadequate enforcement of local food safety regulations, has significantly compromised the integrity of food products within Mbale City. This situation is exacerbated by substandard infrastructure in key areas such as markets and abattoirs, where poor sanitation, insufficient waste disposal systems, and inadequate facilities for proper food storage and processing prevail. These deficiencies increase the risk of contamination and foodborne illnesses, posing serious threats to public health. Strengthening regulatory frameworks, enhancing



Leaders of the Good Food Council leading the Good Food Parliament session in Mbale City



*Radio talkshow on BCU FM in Mbale City on food safety facilitated by CONSENT staff*

capacity building for food handlers, and upgrading market and abattoir infrastructure are essential steps to safeguard food safety and protect the wellbeing of the community.

**Market Infrastructure Challenges:** Many women engaged in cooking and selling food within Mbale's central market operate under precarious and unsanitary conditions. These vendors frequently prepare meals near open drainage channels, exposing food to contamination from wastewater and environmental pollutants. The lack of designated, hygienic cooking and serving areas forces them to work in cramped, poorly ventilated spaces that do not meet basic health and safety standards. Such substandard infrastructure not only compromises the quality and safety of the food offered but also jeopardizes the health of both vendors and consumers. Addressing these infrastructural inadequacies through the provision of safe, well-equipped cooking shelters and improved market layouts is crucial to fostering a healthier and more sustainable food vending environment.

**Malnutrition:** The persistently high prevalence of malnutrition in Mbale City highlights a critical public health concern that demands immediate and sustained attention. This ongoing challenge reflects gaps in both awareness and access to adequate nutrition, particularly among vulnerable populations such as children, pregnant women, and low-income households. The situation underscores the urgent need for comprehensive nutrition education programs that promote balanced diets, optimal feeding practices, and the prevention of micronutrient deficiencies. Additionally, targeted interventions ranging from community-based nutrition support to school feeding

initiatives are essential to address the root causes of malnutrition and improve overall health outcomes across the city.

**Waste Management:** The inefficiency of waste collection and disposal systems in and around Mbale's food markets presents a significant threat to both environmental sustainability and public health. Accumulation of organic and inorganic waste due to irregular collection schedules and inadequate disposal facilities creates breeding grounds for pests and vectors, contributing to the spread of diseases. Moreover, improper waste management leads to contamination of soil and water sources, exacerbating pollution and undermining the overall hygiene of market environments. Addressing these challenges requires the implementation of systematic waste segregation, regular and reliable collection services, and the development of environmentally sound disposal and recycling mechanisms to safeguard community health and preserve the local ecosystem.

### **From Dialogue to Action: Interventions and Achievements**

The progression from diagnosing food system challenges to executing targeted solutions has been both prompt and impactful. A range of significant interventions has been successfully implemented, demonstrating the commitment and coordination of all stakeholders involved. These achievements reflect a strategic approach to addressing identified gaps and improving the overall functionality and resilience of Mbale City's food systems.



**Infrastructure Improvements:** Significant infrastructural enhancements have been undertaken to promote safer and more hygienic food environments within Mbale City. Key projects include the comprehensive renovation of the Mbale Central Abattoir and the central market food court, which have improved sanitation standards and operational efficiency. Additionally, the construction of a dedicated cooking shade for market vendors has provided a sheltered, clean space that safeguards food preparation from environmental contaminants. The development of well-organized market stalls has further streamlined vendor operations, enhancing both accessibility and hygiene. Complementing these efforts, the central market was repainted in collaboration with MTN, revitalizing the market's appearance and contributing to a more welcoming and sanitary atmosphere for both traders and consumers. These infrastructural investments collectively strengthen the city's capacity to uphold food safety and public health standards.

**Capacity Building:** Robust capacity-building initiatives have been implemented, targeting market leaders, market vendors, and media personnel to enhance their knowledge and skills in critical areas. These comprehensive training programs emphasize food safety protocols, proper hygiene practices, and the importance of maintaining orderly market operations. For market vendors, the training equips them with practical techniques to minimize contamination risks and ensure the safe handling and storage of food products. Concurrently, media personnel receive specialized instruction to accurately communicate food safety messages and raise public awareness through various

channels. Together, these efforts foster a culture of responsibility and professionalism that supports safer food systems and informed consumer behavior within Mbale City.

**Awareness Campaigns:** A series of targeted awareness campaigns has been launched to elevate public understanding of critical food system issues. Utilizing radio talk shows as a primary platform, these campaigns disseminate vital information on food safety standards, nutritional best practices, effective waste management, and consumer rights and responsibilities. Complementing the broadcast efforts, community-based consumer education initiatives engage diverse audiences through workshops, outreach programs, and informational materials. Together, these strategies have significantly enhanced community knowledge, empowered consumers to make informed choices, and fostered greater accountability among food system stakeholders in Mbale City.

**Nutrition Initiatives:** A comprehensive school nutrition program has been initiated to strengthen the capacity of students, teachers, and parents in Mbale City. This program provides targeted education on the principles of balanced diets, the importance of essential nutrients, and practical strategies for preventing malnutrition. Through interactive workshops, curriculum integration, and community engagement activities, the initiative aims to foster healthy eating habits from an early age and promote nutrition-sensitive practices within households. By empowering key stakeholders with knowledge and skills, the program seeks to reduce malnutrition rates and improve overall health outcomes among vulnerable populations in the region.



*Members of the Good Food Parliament Pause for a Photo after the Good Food Parliament session in Mbale*



*The Good Food Council Session in Progress in Mbale City*

**Waste Management:** The implementation of waste sorting and collection infrastructure within Mbale's markets has marked a significant advancement in environmental hygiene and public health management. By introducing designated waste bins and collection equipment, the initiative facilitates the segregation of organic and inorganic waste at the source, thereby enhancing recycling efforts and reducing contamination risks. Complementing these practical measures, the establishment of a Nutrition Coordination Committee has strengthened the oversight and strategic planning of food and nutrition interventions across the city. This committee plays a pivotal role in coordinating stakeholders, monitoring progress, and ensuring that waste management practices align with broader nutrition and public health objectives, ultimately contributing to a cleaner, safer, and more sustainable food system.

### **Fostering Partnerships and Policy Development:**

The resolutions generated through the multistakeholder platform have catalyzed the formation of strategic partnerships and the advancement of critical policy frameworks in Mbale City. Currently, negotiations with private sector stakeholders are progressing to establish a pilot waste recycling project, with the acquisition of suitable land nearing completion. This initiative aims to address persistent waste management challenges through sustainable, community-driven solutions.

Concurrently, key governance documents, including the Mbale City Development Plan, a comprehensive Food Safety Ordinance, and a City Nutrition Action Plan, have been meticulously drafted and are now pending formal approval from city leadership and relevant regulatory authorities. Integral to this process

are embedded scientific research teams that provide rigorous, evidence-based insights, ensuring that all interventions are contextually appropriate and effectively address the unique needs and dynamics of Mbale's food systems. This collaborative approach strengthens the foundation for sustainable urban food governance and long-term resilience.

### **Roles and Responsibilities: A Collaborative Model for Food System Transformation**

The successful transformation of Mbale City's food systems is anchored in clearly defined roles and robust collaboration among a diverse group of stakeholders. Each entity brings specialized expertise and resources, ensuring a coordinated and comprehensive approach:

**Mbale City Council:** As the primary local government authority, the City Council spearheads the multistakeholder platform, providing leadership and governance. It is responsible for integrating the platform's





recommendations into official policy frameworks, urban planning, and budgeting processes. By aligning food system interventions with broader development goals, the Council ensures sustainability and institutional ownership of initiatives.

**Rikolto:** Serving as the coordinating body for implementing partners, Rikolto plays a critical role in harmonizing activities across various organizations involved in the GF4C initiative. Rikolto ensures that all efforts are strategically aligned with the project's objectives, facilitates knowledge sharing, and supports capacity building to enhance the effectiveness of interventions.

**CONSENT:** With a focus on community engagement, CONSENT leads awareness creation and capacity-building efforts among stakeholders, including farmers, vendors, consumers, and local leaders. Through training

programs, outreach campaigns, and participatory workshops, CONSENT empowers these groups with the knowledge and skills necessary to adopt best practices in food safety, nutrition, and sustainable market operations.

**Food Rights Alliance:** FRA champions advocacy efforts aimed at fostering an enabling policy environment for sustainable food systems. This includes lobbying for the enactment and enforcement of food safety regulations, nutrition policies, and waste management standards. FRA also facilitates dialogue between civil society, government, and private sector actors to ensure inclusive and equitable food governance.

Together, this collaborative model leverages the strengths of each stakeholder to drive systemic change, enhance food security, and promote resilient, inclusive urban food systems in Mbale City.

### Conclusion: A Model for Sustainable Urban Food System Transformation

Mbale City's experience underscores the profound impact of participatory, multistakeholder approaches in effectively addressing the multifaceted challenges inherent in urban food systems. By fostering collaboration among government entities, civil society organizations, the private sector, and local communities, Mbale has made significant strides in improving food safety, enhancing nutritional outcomes, and advancing waste management practices. These collective efforts have laid the foundation for a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable food system that can adapt to future demands and complexities.

As urban centers across Uganda and the broader region confront similar food system challenges, Mbale's journey provides a compelling and actionable blueprint for transformative change. Rooted in evidence-based interventions, inclusive governance, and a shared commitment to sustainable development, this model offers valuable lessons and inspiration for cities striving to build healthier, more equitable, and environmentally sound food systems for generations to come.

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