

# Policy Brief

## Transforming Mbale City's Food System through Coordinated Governance and Action

27 May 2025

### Executive Summary

Mbale City is well placed to become a resilient regional food hub despite the mounting urban food-system pressures such as post-harvest loss, food-safety risks, inadequate market infrastructure, persistent malnutrition and weak waste management. Since 2022, the Good Food for Cities initiative implemented by Rikolto in partnership with the Food Rights Alliance (FRA), CONSENT, and Mbale City has built practical multistakeholder platforms the Good Food Parliament and Good Food Council that translate local

priorities into municipal action. This brief clarifies responsibilities and sets operational priorities such as adoption and operationalization of the Food Safety Ordinance; approval of a phased Market Infrastructure Investment Plan; integration of nutrition into city planning and services; scaling market waste segregation and recycling into routine municipal services; institutionalization of vendor and food-handler capacity development; and securing predictable financing and public-private delivery arrangements to sustain and scale gains.



# A Framework for Action

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Mbale's productive hinterlands, active cross-border market links, and expanding urban population create a unique opening to strengthen peri-urban food systems and urban nutrition. Rapid urbanization is reshaping demand and placing acute pressure on markets, abattoirs, informal food vendors and municipal services, exposing gaps in storage, hygiene and service delivery. The stakes are both

economic and public-health: without clear policy, coordinated finance and locally led implementation, vendor livelihoods, consumer safety and reliable food flows will remain fragile. These realities led local actors to form a coordinated platform - the Good Food Parliament, which facilitates the translation of commitments into practical municipal action.

## Roles, Accountability and Partnership Mechanisms

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- **Mbale City Council:** lead policy adoption, budget inclusion, enforcement and institutionalization of nutrition and market management units.
- **Rikolto:** technical coordination, value-chain support and facilitation of peer learning across partners.
- Food Rights Alliance (FRA): advocacy, policy support and promotion of inclusive governance practices.
- **CONSENT:** community engagement, vendor training, public-awareness programming and delivery of nutrition and vendor capacity workstreams.
- **Private sector and market associations:** co-investment in infrastructure, maintenance partnerships and delivery of service contracts for recycling and cold-chain operations.
- **Other nonstate actors:** complement partners efforts by contributing specialized expertise, mobilizing communities, and supporting innovation in areas such as research, media engagement, and civil society advocacy. Their involvement broadens the reach of the GFP and reinforces its commitment to inclusivity and accountability.

# Turning Voices into Policy: Multistakeholder Platforms That Work

Since joining GF4C in 2022, Mbale has institutionalized a multistakeholder model convening farmers, traders, processors, market leaders, consumers, civil society, media, researchers, private sector partners and city officials on a quarterly basis. The Good Food Parliament and Good Food Council operate as action-focused bodies: diagnosing problems, drafting context-specific recommendations and routing them directly into planning, budgeting and regulatory processes. This model moves the city from episodic consultation toward iterative, evidence-informed municipal decision making and implementation.

At the heart of the GFP lies collective decision making, through which the desired food system is jointly shaped. The Platform thrives on the exchange of experience and knowledge where participants share practical insights and evidence, exploring different viewpoints on how to strengthen and improve the urban food system. This dynamic dialogue fosters innovation and helps uncover context-specific solutions that might otherwise remain overlooked. The diversity within the Platform allows members to address the unique challenges faced across the food chain, from production and distribution to consumption and regulation.

The GFP supports continuous improvement through inclusive processes that enhance transparency, accountability, and trust among

stakeholders. Decisions are not only consultative but action-oriented, ensuring that recommendations are grounded in shared priorities and evidence. Importantly, the platform actions are translated into concrete interventions. Outcomes from deliberations feed directly into municipal planning, budgeting, and regulatory frameworks, ensuring that the voices of food system actors are embedded in policy and practice. In this way, the GFP bridges dialogue and implementation, making it a cornerstone of participatory governance in the city's food system transformation.

## *“Since the establishment of the GFP in Mbale, “food has a voice.”*

Awareness creation sessions have empowered market vendors to adopt and share knowledge on food safety standards and practices. Information has been cascaded to peers within the central market to comply with food safety and hygiene standards strengthening consumer trust and reducing risks of contamination. Previously, vendors faced significant challenges, particularly the lack of shelter for cooking in the central market. Heavy rains often led to food spoilage and waste, undermining livelihoods and food security. These concerns, once overlooked, are now being addressed through the Good Food Parliament (GFP). *“Ms. Nakiyimba Sarah, Food Vendor, Mbale Central Market.”*



Currently, stakeholders' issues including vendors, women, youths are no longer sidelined but are incorporated into City planning and action. The city, working in collaboration with GF4C partners, has responded to vendor concerns with concrete interventions. A notable example is the establishment of a Food Court, designed to provide

safe, hygienic, and sheltered spaces for food preparation and sale. This development demonstrates how inclusive governance translates dialogue into solutions. By elevating vendor perspectives, the GFP ensures that food system actors at every level contribute to shaping a safer, more resilient urban food environment.

## From Commitment to Action: The Key Achievements

The Good Food Parliament's recommendations have produced tangible, practical interventions:

- **Infrastructure upgrades:** With the leadership of Rikolto, the GF4Cs partners working with Mbale City have managed to undertake renovation of Mbale Central

Abattoir and the central market food court; construction of a dedicated cooking shade for market vendors; stall reorganisation and a market repainting campaign executed with private-sector support. These works improved sanitation, operational flow and trader confidence.

- **Nutrition programming:** Rikolto and partners has also supported school nutrition programme linking classroom activities with community outreach and supplier engagement to promote dietary diversity and healthier household food choices. Efforts include raising awareness among parents, teachers, cooks, and committees on the importance of school feeding and diet diversity; reviewing menus and cultivating indigenous, nutrient-rich crops through class-based kitchen gardens; building capacity for waste sorting and linking excess to processing plants; and creating vegetable gardens and nutrition clubs where teachers act as food ambassadors and parents are encouraged to join midday meal programmes. At the policy level, city leaders are engaged to strengthen future support for school feeding.

- **Awareness and demand-shaping:** Under CONSENT's stewardship, radio talk shows, community workshops, and printed materials have been conducted to raise consumer awareness on food safety, nutrition, and rights, reinforcing behaviour change and public accountability. These initiatives partly informed discussions among platform members, leading to the commencement of the development of the Food Safety Ordinance as a cornerstone policy framework to safeguard public health, institutionalize accountability, and ensure protection of consumer rights across the food value chain.

- **Capacity building:** Targeted trainings for market leaders, vendors and media on food-safety protocols, hygiene practices, and responsible communication

have been done emphasizing hands-on, low-cost practices that vendors can sustain. Some of the issues raised during these trainings have been cascaded to the GFP platform to strengthen reporting, monitoring, reinforce compliance with food-safety standards and ensure all actors are empowered to champion safe practices and accountability in the City.

- **Waste management pilots:** In collaboration with Mbale City, partners have introduced source-segregation bins and basic collection equipment in markets. These efforts focus on improving food safety and waste management through inclusive, circular economy approaches. The pilot can be aligned with Rikolto's initiatives by embedding awareness campaigns, composting, and stakeholder collaboration to create cleaner, healthier market environments.

- **Policy integration and governance reforms:** With the support of FRA, partners have initiated discussions that led Mbale City to constitute a Nutrition Coordination Committee, ensuring nutrition programming is aligned with public-health and waste-management objectives. This collaboration has strengthened accountability, established clear enforcement mandates, and secured the sustainability of food-system improvements through formal policy channels.

## Next Steps

Priority Action	Delivery Mechanisms	Intended outcome
Adopt and operationalize the Food Safety Ordinance	The city council to finalise, adopt and submit the Food Safety Ordinance for approval to the Solicitor General, followed by enforcement and capacity building.	Clear standards, improved handling practices and reduced foodborne risk without excluding informal vendors.
Institutionalize nutrition-sensitive urban planning	The city to integrate the Nutrition Action Plan into the Development Plan, formalize the Nutrition Coordination Committee, allocate staff and annual workplans, and align school feeding procurement with local smallholder supply.	Stronger links between urban planning and diet diversity, leading to improved child and maternal nutrition.
Scale waste segregation and recycling into routine municipal services	The city to transition pilots into contracted services with scheduled collections, recycling hubs, and composting schemes, partnering with recyclers and incentivizing organic-waste collection for peri-urban agriculture.	Cleaner markets, reduced pest vectors, and new livelihood opportunities through circular-economy activities.
Institutionalize vendor capacity development and accreditation	The city to establish regular training cycles with standardized curricula, deliver modular training via associations and civil society, and digitize records for accreditation renewals and visibility.	Sustained behaviour change, higher-quality food handling, and stronger consumer confidence.
Secure sustainable financing and deepen private-sector engagement	The city to develop a food-system financing strategy combining municipal budgets, donor co-financing, private sponsorship, and user-fees, while offering performance-linked financing windows and transparent reporting.	Predictable maintenance financing and scalable investments in food-system infrastructure and services.

## Key Lessons

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- **Cleaner**, safer markets and abattoirs show that physical upgrades directly build confidence among traders and consumers. By improving lighting, ventilation, drainage, and sanitation facilities, these upgrades reduce health risks and create visible signs of safety, reassuring buyers and sellers that food is handled in trustworthy environments.
- **Nutrition gains are strongest when schools**, families, and local producers are connected in a shared effort. Through coordinating school meal programs with local farms, teaching families practical nutrition skills, and creating markets that prioritize healthy food, communities ensure that children and households consistently access diverse, affordable, and nutritious diets.
- **When actors are informed and engaged**, they influence their leaders to adopt measures that safeguard health and rights. Their participation in public forums, monitoring local policies, and voicing concerns through networks, create pressure that makes leaders more responsive and accountable, ensuring that regulations reflect real needs and protect public well being.

## Conclusion

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The Mbale City Good Food Parliament has demonstrated that structured, locally anchored collaboration can transform dialogue into tangible improvements in market hygiene, food safety, nutrition programming, and waste management. Beyond delivering projects, the GFP is reshaping governance structures to secure long-term impact. Early wins—through infrastructure upgrades, capacity building, and strategic partnerships—have laid the foundation for systemic

reform. To sustain and scale these gains, the city must adopt and operationalize ordinances and plans, commit phased financing, institutionalize vendor and stakeholder capacity development, and expand market and waste solutions through coherent public-private-civil society partnerships. With inclusive participation of diverse actor, Mbale can become a replicable model of resilient, inclusive urban food governance for Uganda and the wider region.



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