



Food Rights Alliance, Rikolto and Global Consumer Centre, with Training and Research Support Centre (TARSC) in the Regional network for Equity in health in east and southern Africa (EQUINET)



Transforming Mbale City's urban food system in the Good Food for Cities Programme



The photo on the left shows Food Vendors' stalls in Mbale Central Market before the GF4Cs Program Interventions, P Businda, November 2021

On the right, the photo shows stalls in Mbale Central Market reorganized by Partners with well-maintained hygiene standards, L Brian, July, 2023

Key messages

- Rapid urbanization in Uganda especially in cities like Kampala and Mbale is reshaping the urban food systems, altering demand and introducing food related challenges. Despite the positive aspects of urban development, there is an increase in unregulated activities that lead to unsafe food practices.
- The Good Food for Cities programme recognizes these challenges as opportunities to establish more sustainable, fair and healthy food systems in Mbale and Kampala.
- The programme aims to forge coalitions involving businesses, consumers, local authorities and other food system actors to ensure inclusive, resilient and healthy food environments for all citizens.
- Two crucial mechanisms of the Good Food Council and the Good Food Parliament serve as platforms for consultation, dialogue, accountability and collective decision making.
- The programme adopts a three-tier intervention strategy of promoting sustainable production, inclusive urban food markets and an enabling environment. These areas give emphasis to regenerative agriculture, and multistakeholder participation, addressing climate change, and urban inequalities and food insecurity.

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Context and challenges

Globally, urban food systems are far from static, driven by diverse trends, including urbanization, population growth, climate change, technological advancements, and policy adjustments (FAO, 2018). Urbanization is increasing urban populations. By 2050, 80% of all food will be consumed in cities (C40, 2019). Food also represents the largest source of urban consumption-related emissions, contributing to 13% of total emissions. If current trends continue, urban food-related emissions could thus surge by 38% by 2050 (C40, 2019). The impact of these factors on food systems calls for adaptive responses



Aerial view of urbanization in Kampala city
M Freeman, Flickr under CC, 2021

While Uganda has a relatively small urban population, with only 25% of its total population living in urban areas, this is projected to increase to 50% by 2040 (Bertram de Rooij, 2020). The rate of urbanization rate at 5.3% is higher than the population growth rate at 3.2%, and with rapid urbanization, by 2050 the country will be among the most urbanized in Africa (GOU, 2017). By mid- 2023 it is estimated that 17 million people lived in Uganda's urban areas (UBOS, 2022). While urbanization is seen to contribute to vision 2040 development objectives, including to become an upper middle-income country (MoFPED, 2016), it is a key driver of changes in food systems, impacting on food demand and consumer preferences.

Kampala and Mbale have improved urban conditions by increasing access to services and infrastructure in densely populated areas (WorldBank, 2015). However, these areas also have unregulated activities, including sale of unsafe food in response to increased demand from a growing urban population. Urban food is poorly integrated in urban planning, with prime agricultural land used for building houses and restrictions on longstanding urban agriculture practices in Mbale to facilitate urban development (Brown, 2022). An [EQUINET conceptual framework](#) outlines the urban responses for food and waste management systems as key entry points to foster innovation, collaboration, accountability, literacy and system-wide change to support healthy people, healthy ecosystems and an inclusive, productive, regenerative and circular urban economy (EQUINET, 2023). This brief outlines the experience of implementing the Good Food for Cities Programme (GF4Cs) in Kampala, Uganda, as one of an EQUINET series of case studies in east and southern Africa on integrated approaches to urban health.

The GF4C programme is currently implemented in 16 Cities. In east Africa, the program is in Mbale and Kampala City (Uganda), Arusha (Tanzania), Kalemie (DR Congo) and Rubavu in Rwanda. In Uganda, it is implemented by a consortium of six partners, viz Global Consumer Centre (CONSENT), Rikolto, Food Rights Alliance (FRA), Shona, Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) and Mbale City Council (MCC). Reflecting elements of the EQUINET conceptual framework, this programme aims to support city-regions to implement policy and practice that contribute to more sustainable, fair and healthy food systems. It does this by building local coalitions of businesses, consumers, local authorities and other food system actors working together to improve consumption of healthy, sustainable and nutritious food by all urban residents, regardless of their income-level, especially women, youth and vulnerable groups. In doing this and building bridges between smallholder farmer organizations and other stakeholders, it tackles the inter-related challenges of food insecurity, climate change, biodiversity and economic inequality by building bridges between smallholder farmers and other stakeholders. actors across rural and urban areas.





Peter Businda, highlighting the importance of the Good Food for Cities Program to the implementing partners in Mbale, L Brian, 2023

Areas of intervention and practices implemented

GF4C in Uganda is implemented in both Mbale and Kampala, but with more efforts directed towards Mbale City at present. In Mbale city, local researchers, local and city government Authorities, food transporters and processors, market vendors, non-government organisations, schools, hotels, media, cultural institutions, consumers and farmers that work and live in Mbale City have come together around the initiative. All depend on the city's food system for over 85% of their food needs, but are affected in different ways by a rising rate of urbanization that has increased challenges related to service provision, informality, pollution, poverty and food systems (UN-HABITAT, 2016).

"In an environment with high urban population, challenges related to hygiene waste disposal, food handling techniques are common. As such consumer awareness on food safety becomes a big challenge due to their mindset and ignorance coupled with absence of local standards or policies to regulate food safety risks. It is vital for us to implement such a Program that will help in addressing food related challenges."

Peter Businda Rikolto Program Coordinator addressing Good Food for Cities partners, 2023.

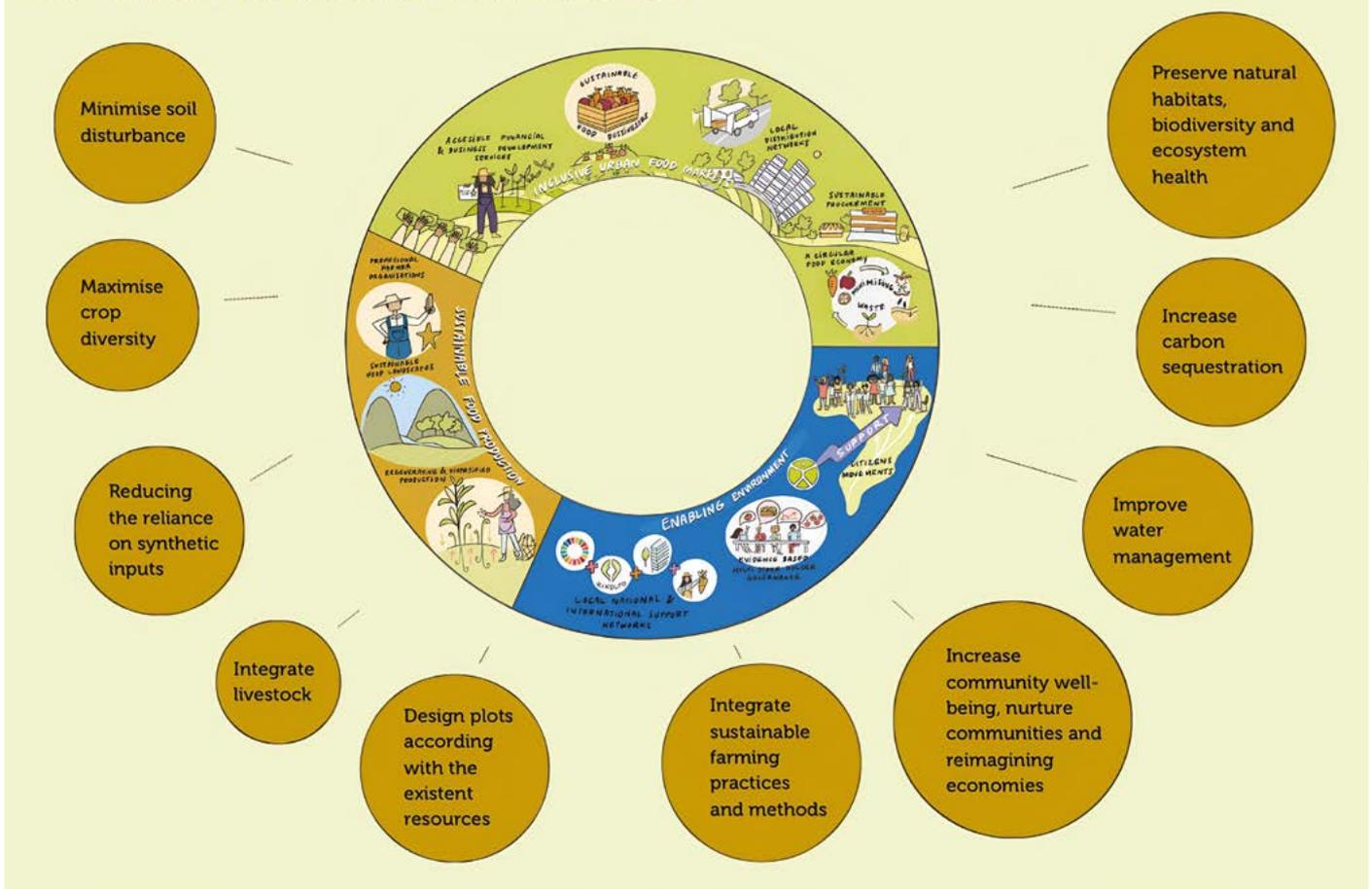
The GF4C programme interventions cluster in a 3 tier Approach outlined below.

Supporting sustainable production to provide good food in cities

To provide healthy, nutritious fruit, vegetables, pulses and similar foods to local markets in a context of climate change, GF4Cs focuses on preserving food landscapes, promoting regenerative agriculture and improving farmers' resilience to climate change and other shocks. Implementing partners work with farmers' organisations to enhance their production through continuous improvement. They provide advice and training on the application, adaptation and adoption of regenerative farming practices, including agroforestry systems and diversification. The figure overleaf shows areas of regenerative agriculture. In Mbale, this has included use of organic fertilizers from market waste to minimize use of synthetic fertilizers, as well as promoting urban farming technologies such as sack gardens to for urban dwellers to grow food in limited places.

In a holistic approach, practices benefit people, communities, and the natural environment, and build farmers' resilience to climate shocks. (See figure on page 5 for the 3-tier approach)

Rikolto's guiding principles for regenerative agriculture



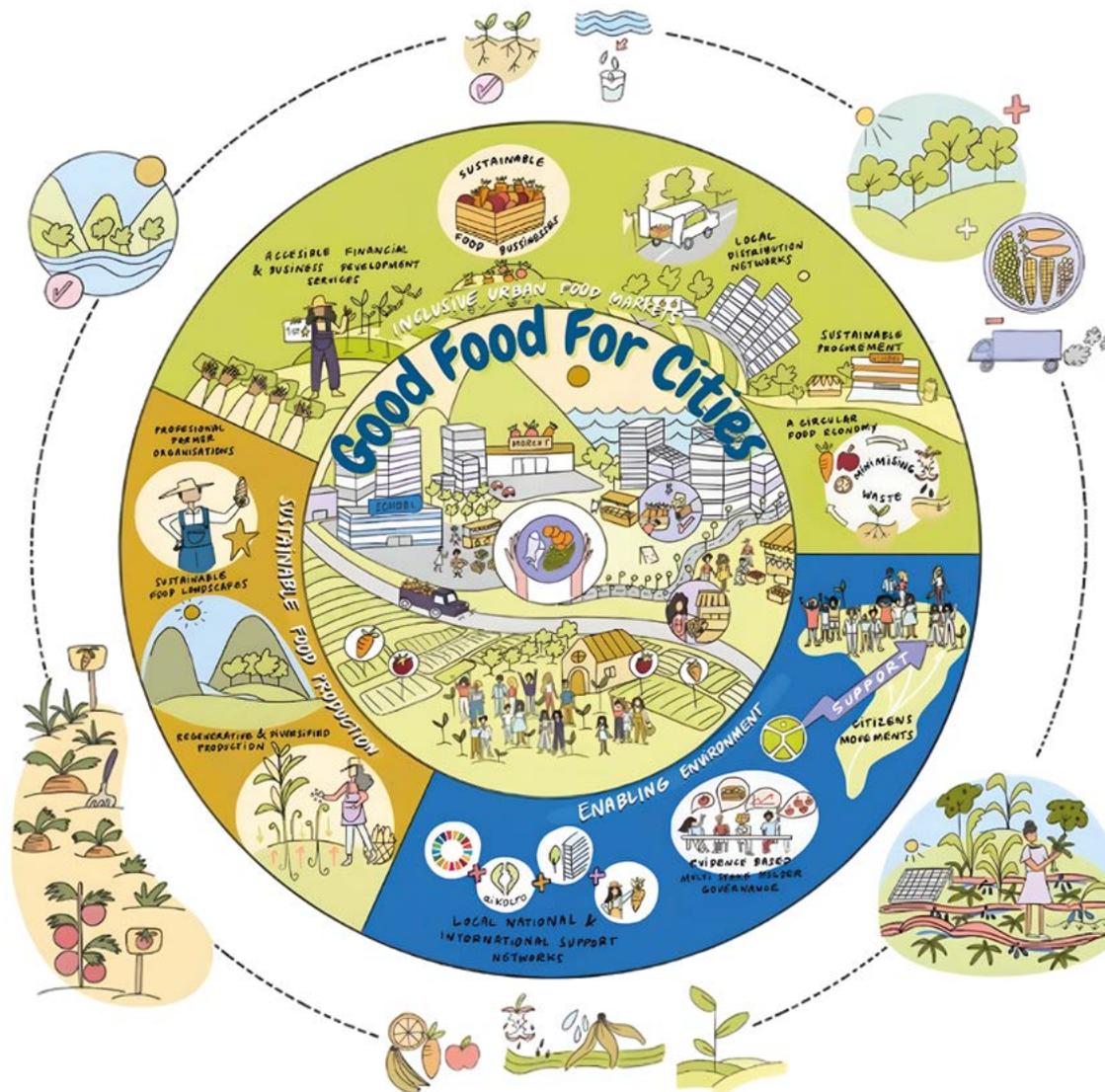
Regenerative agriculture practices are integrated within each of the three pillars, Rikolto, 2021

In this first tier of intervention, the programme supports pilots with partners to assist the city to develop and implement local food strategies and policies and to set up innovative governance mechanisms. Partners and stakeholders facilitate inclusive business models between urban retailers and peri-urban farmers, and strengthen rural-urban links. They engage schools to adopt sustainable catering practices and promote healthy and sustainable food, support improved food safety and develop effective and engaging local food safety mechanisms. To consolidate this consumers are to encouraged make healthy and sustainable food choices.

In Mbale City, partners are designing a one stop learning center for various actors including schools and urban farmers, among others, to implement and learn from urban food experiments such as establishment of food courts for the street food vendors to improve food safety in the city and reduce food wastage.

Strengthening inclusive urban food markets, so that no one is left behind

For healthier and more sustainable food supplies to reach urban markets, there must be incentives for behaviour change at all stages of the chain. Inclusive business relationships are therefore a powerful enabler of the transition to sustainable food systems in cities and beyond. In Mbale, GF4C has stimulated this by facilitating the arrangement of market stalls in Mbale Central market, by sensitizing vendors on safe food handling through regular training sessions. Through these practices farmer organizations' gain better access to local and national markets by building business relationships with a long-term outlook, fulfilling the needs of farmers and buyers alike. For both farmers and buyers, the programme helps to build the business case for regenerative agricultural practices and contributes to ensure that safer and sustainably produced food reaches the markets that supply people at all income levels. A network of small-scale local farmers and traders transport the food using various means, including bicycles, boda bodas, hand carts and small vehicles, as a direct and community-based distribution system.



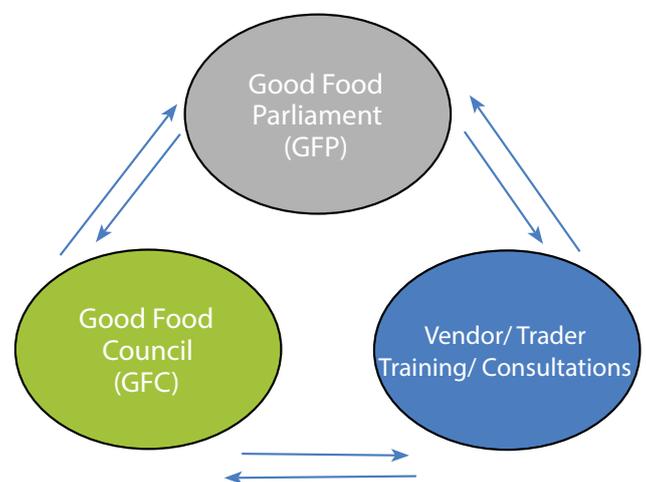
The Good Food for Cities 3 Tier Approach, Rikolto, 2021

Ensuring an enabling, participatory environment

The programme facilitates multi-stakeholder participation, proposing policies and strategies and partnering with the local government, research institutions, university, residents and private companies. It does this through multi-stakeholder dialogues or platforms at city level, described further in the next subsection. This has created a shared understanding of local food system issues, built a common vision and created a collective strategy or action plan on how to put it into practice.

Mechanisms for consultation, dialogue, co-production and review

GF4Cs employs two major mechanisms for consultation, dialogue, co-production and review, that is the Good Food Council and the Good Food Parliament. The two mechanisms, described further overleaf, are integrated in their terms of reference that define the relationship between the two mechanisms, and that clarify the roles, duties and composition of each and their mechanisms for measuring performance, and both draw input from the public and key communities like vendor groups.



The interlinking Multi stakeholder Platform meetings and consultations, Rikolto, 2021

Regular consultations are conducted with the distinct stakeholder groups especially vendors and traders in Mbale Central Market. Sessions are designed to actively solicit their input and feedback regarding specific urban food system issues within the city. A diverse range of stakeholders including men, women and youths actively involved in the fruits and vegetables sector are involved, facilitated under a mentoring and coaching program led by CONSENT. Key issues related to food safety handling and storage are documented and presented before the monthly meetings of the Good Food Council.

"I thank CONSENT for training market vendors on issues of food safety handling. I am actually surprised that our issues are brought to such an inclusive platform for discussion. It is an opportunity for us as vendors and other vulnerable groups to share our voices and influence decisions of the City Council. We hope FRA will continue facilitating such meetings to enable us interface with our duty bearers to find solutions to the existing problem together."

Yusufu Nsubuga, Executive Secretary, Mbale Central Market, 2023

The Good Food Council

The Council is a smaller independent organ that was formed at the initial stages to technically support the implementation of the programme, as facilitated by the technical partners. Nineteen Council members were selected by stakeholders during the urban Food Systems multistakeholder meeting organized by Rikolto in August 2022 and included men, women and youths from various sectors and local institutions. The Council thus represents diverse actors in Mbale, such as political and technical officials from Mbale City Council, vendors, farmers, businessmen and women, media, researchers, cultural institutions among others. The Council makes decisions and develops action plans for the programme, and proposes resolutions for consideration by the Good Food Parliament. The Council reviews the interventions monthly to assess the implementation of the plans developed and (re)strategise where needed how to improve implementation and deliver shared goals.

The Good Food Council provides technical guidance in the city for effective realization of programme interventions. For example, it identifies local urban food safety needs and recommends corrective actions to various stakeholder platforms. The issues brought for discussion emerge from training sessions with vendors and traders, such as on include the need to develop food safety by-laws, legal and regulatory frameworks to regulate consumption of unsafe food in the city. The Council also brings issues arising from / voiced by vulnerable communities to meetings for discussion to identify how to address them. Topics and issues arising from Council discussions are also taken for debate in the Good Food Parliament (discussed below) where resolutions are passed for implementation. The Council thus provides an accountability platform where members with equal powers debate and hold each other accountable for delivery on planned actions.



City Authority and vendor representatives discussing their challenges and the impact of GF4Cs interventions in Mbale, L Brian September, 2023



GFC Chairperson introducing the Council to key food safety issues emerging from vendor training in preparation for a multi stakeholder engagement, Mbale, L Brian July, 2022

"We are grateful for the support of Rikolto, FRA, and CONSENT in addressing food safety challenges in Mbale City. They have directly involved us in the implementation of the Program through the Good Food Council and Parliament they initiated in the city. We have a better understanding to make informed decisions to transform our city."

Khaukha Busiku, Good Food Council Chairperson during a meeting with members of the Good Food Council, 2022.

The Good Food Parliament

The Good Food Parliament is a wider multi-stakeholder platform that was launched in Mbale City with a membership of over 70 food systems actors representing Mbale City Authority, the District Local Government, vendors, farmers, civil society organisations, schools, youth, businessmen and women media representatives, among others. All represented groups in the Good Food Council also appear in the Parliament. The sessions are led by the Speaker and supported by the Executive Committee of the Good Food Council. It provides a forum for diverse actors to collectively explore the conditions required to shape the desired food system in Mbale City. Through this collaborative approach, the Good Food Parliament seeks to address the unique challenges faced in ensuring sustainable urban food security.



Members of the Good Food Parliament discussing the role of actors in promoting food safety during the Parliamentary session, L Brian September, 2023

The Good Food Parliament helps to strengthen coordination and implementation of the GF4Cs interventions through the sharing of experience and knowledge, to explore different viewpoints on how to improve the urban food system in Mbale City and build mutual understanding on what to do. During these engagements, feedback on the implementation of the previous actions is provided by the Good Food Council to inform the Parliament on how its resolutions were implemented, to foster transparency, inclusivity and accountability and make clear the shared responsibilities. This enhances the quality of decision making and supports continuous improvement.

"I am happy with Rikolto, FRA and CONSENT for such a brilliant idea to create a Good Food Parliament. It is a platform that can foster transparency and help us to iron out issues affecting our urban food system. One day I went to the market road side and bought a rotten fish from a vendor. I could not take it back. Many consumers suffer because are ignorant and do not what to do about such. Let's publicly discuss them in such a platform to find solutions."

Aaron Mulyanyuma Ayeta, Mbale City Clerks representative during one of the dialogues, 2023

After a Good Food Parliament session, representatives report back to the public on the earlier agreed actions and respond to questions raised by people. The Parliament also relays its proceedings to the public through the media, and sends its resolutions to the relevant City Council offices for implementation.

The Good Food Parliament is the highest decision-making organ of the programme, involving diverse state and non-state actors, whose voices are shared to inform interventions to promote production and consumption of good food for cities and on governance issues that require the attention of the City leadership. For example, the need to develop a Food Ordinance to regulate consumption of unsafe food in Mbale City and the need to establish an incubation project as a center for urban food experiments are among the resolutions agreed during the Parliament. The City Council is working with GF4C programme partners to ensure implementation of these and other resolutions. A virtual WhatsApp group facilitated by FRA also allows dialogues to continue beyond the discussions in the Parliament, with updates shared and debates conducted on the platform.

As part of a regional east African programme, GF4C also supports city to city exchanges, storytelling, learning journeys and training courses. Participants share learning in international networks and conferences and are supported to document innovative practices. Internationally, the programme uses its evidence and practice to leverage changes in policy and political agendas in favour of sustainable food systems and inclusive rural-urban food chains, contributing to discussions on the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Outcomes and future plans

There are multiple outcomes from the programme, including the following:

- Dialogue and accountability mechanisms have been established among the food actors in multi stakeholder platforms guided by structured meetings, through the monthly Good Food Council and the Good Food Parliamentary sessions. The regular interactions have generated awareness among vendors selling food, and food waste has been reduced in Mbale central market, especially in the fruits and vegetables sector. The interactions and training have also enhanced the capacity of vendors and mindset of consumers to uphold food safety and hygiene standards and healthy diets.
- Urban food issues have been raised in the City Authority agenda and city leadership have participated in the Good Food Parliament and sought regular reports from the Council, FRA and partners to actively participate in planned interventions. The authority has started developing local legislation, the Food Ordinance, as one measure to address food safety issues and have constituted multi-disciplinary technical teams in the city. The City Council has offered to host both the council and parliament in the City council chambers, formally grounding these structures and their agenda within City.
- The GFC and GFP as multistakeholder platforms have brought the issue and understanding of the food system and its various drivers and actors closer to the local communities, including through their active representation and engagement in the discussions and forums.
- The collaboration with CONSENT resulted in [the renovation of 70 stalls](#) in the central market with improved hygiene standards, creating a healthy and safe environment for consumers to buy their food. The different groups as represented on the market management committee self-regulate food safety and compliance with food standards. Vendors voted for and receiving awards for their compliance with food standards have reported increased sales, as many consumers choose their stalls. A reward mechanism of this nature has built consumer confidence and increased vendor sales.



GF4Cs Partners with Mbale Central Market food vendors launching the Food Safety Campaign to award best vendors, L. Brian 2023

In the future GF4Cs plans to continue to support efforts to implement sustainable, fair, and healthy food systems, to promote collective action among local food system actors, and to contribute to global discussions on urban food sustainability and climate justice. The programme plans to establish an incubation centre in Mbale to serve as a hub for innovation, collaboration, and knowledge exchange to foster the wider development and scale-up of innovative solutions to address food safety challenges in the face of climate change. The center will be facilitated by Rikolto and partners and managed by the City Authority. The center will also serve as a space for research, experimentation and knowledge sharing enabling diverse stakeholders to collaborate and co-create solutions that will advance a sustainable, safe and resilient food system in Mbale. Partners have encouraged Mbale City to integrate the programme into the City plans and budgets to sustain the interventions. This requires a signed Memorandum of Understanding between partners and the City Authority to formalize their working relationship and commitment towards the Good Food for Cities initiatives.



'Best vendors' compliant with hygiene standards in the market awarded by Rikolto during the Food Safety Campaign, L. Brian, July 2023

Areas for shared learning

Capacities, challenges and responses

Leaders from urban local government have capacities and power to create change, but need mobilization, organisation and engagement on visioning. Local governments have control over the allocation of resources including budgetary allocations that allow them to prioritise projects that can transform the urban food systems. They have authority to develop and implement policies that impact on communities, and to shape the urban physical environment through land use and urban planning that has potential to transform and sustain urban food systems.

These have been important assets for the programme in Mbale City. However, there are gaps. For example, there are no existing by-laws a city level to regulate production and consumption of unsafe food in Mbale. Following a resolution passed by the Good Food Parliament in October, 2023, the Good Food Council has influenced the City leadership in Mbale to begin drafting a food ordinance for the City, with resources from Rikolto in the programme.

Beyond the local authority, most of the challenges faced in the urban food system in Mbale require the collective contribution and capacities of different actors, including vulnerable groups and food vendors within the City and those from the neighboring districts marketing their produce in the city.

While great advances have been made in inclusive decision making bringing the ideas and capacities from all stakeholders to interventions, resource limitations remain a challenge. Each idea from inception thus needs regular information and engagement to build understanding on what elements require funds beyond government budgets, and to lever support for these resources.

Food production and marketing is business, some of which is big business. Raising food safety issues or reshaping foods towards healthier options can generate resistance, especially from stakeholders actively involved in and benefiting from the current urban food system and the high food demand.

With multiple actors engaged in the food system, many activities in the chain are unregulated, lacking a clear policy or legal framework to guide their actions. While the Integration Good Food Council and Good Food Parliament have helped to generate proposed local standards and policies, they are informal structures. While holding their meetings in the Mbale city council offices helps to ground these mechanisms, their processes are not integrated or sustained within formal government structures.

Features and learning for holistic, integrated approaches

This case study reflects principles, goals and system features shown in the EQUINET framework in *Figure 1* overleaf, aligning well to the three-tier approach of sustainable production, inclusive markets, enabling environments and systems thinking at the center of GF4Cs programme strategy.

Figure 1: Representation of the EQUINET framework with ticked areas addressed in GF4Cs programme

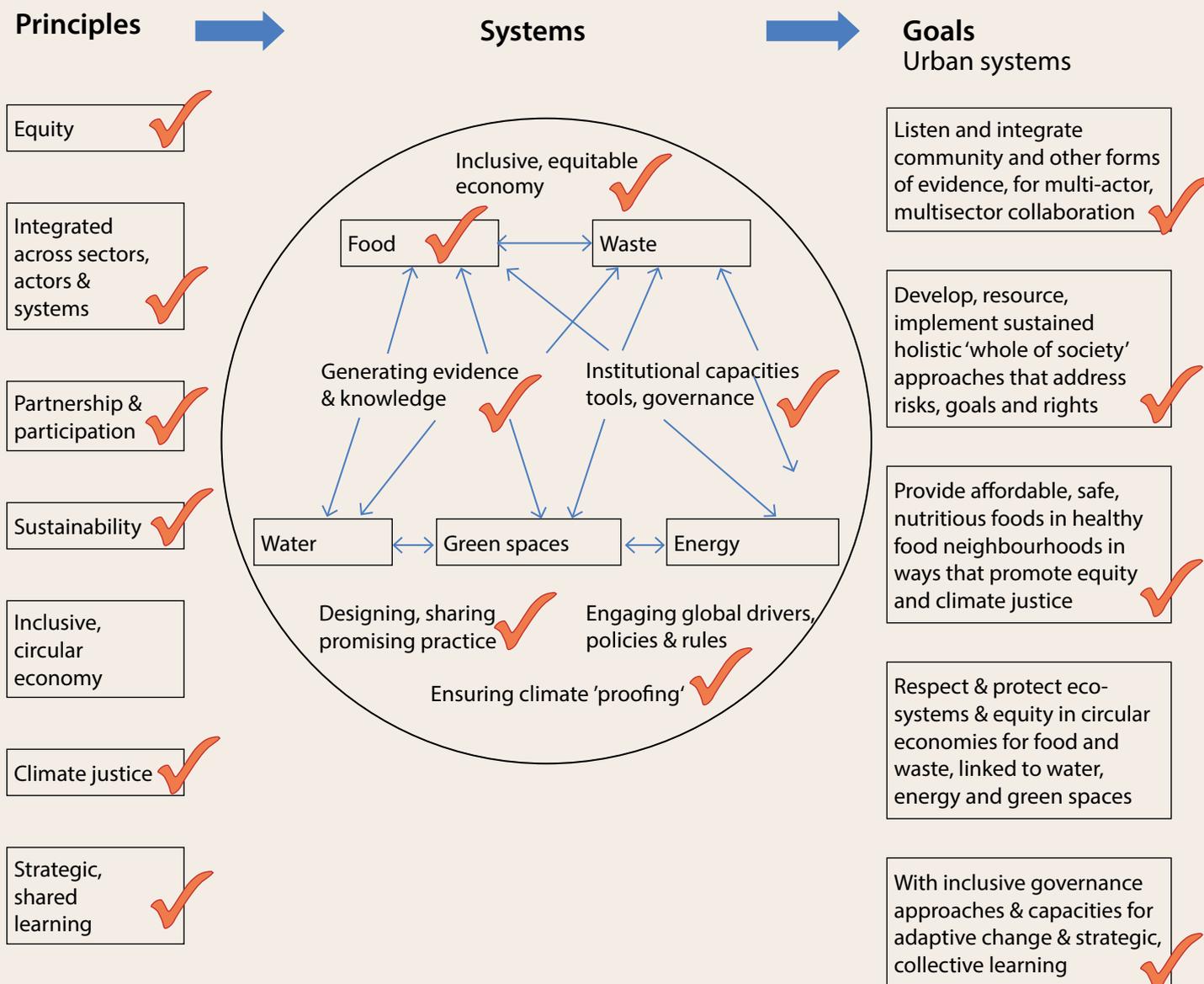


Figure source: EQUINET, 2023

The case study underscores the importance of adopting holistic and integrated approaches to urban food systems, the interconnectedness of the drivers within the urban environment and the need for comprehensive and interlinked strategies and actors. GF4C includes smallholder farmers, women and youth in urban food chains under fair trading conditions, increasing the affordability, availability and acceptability of safe and healthy food for city-dwellers, reducing negative environmental impacts and increasing urban food system resilience to climate challenges. While yet to be explicitly integrated with other sectors in a circular economy, they provide entry points for this. At the heart of its work, GF4Cs sets up participatory governance for diverse actors to collectively identify local solutions to their local food related challenges.

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