



# ENHANCING FOOD SAFETY INITIATIVES AT MBALE CENTRAL MARKET IN EASTERN UGANDA: A COLLABORATIVE INTERVENTION APPROACH

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Mbale Central Market stands as the primary commercial hub in Mbale City, eastern Uganda, functioning as a vital economic center that currently hosts over 10,313 registered vendors. This market serves as a nexus for diverse commercial activities, encompassing the trade of fresh produce, animal products, cereals, legumes, textiles, and telecommunications equipment, making it a crucial component of the regional food supply chain and economic infrastructure.

## Market Structure and Economic Significance

Mbale Central Market represents a critical node in eastern Uganda's food distribution system. The market's extensive vendor network facilitates the trade of numerous agricultural and non-agricultural commodities, including fresh fruits and vegetables, meat and meat products, fish and associated derivatives, dairy products, legumes, cereals, plantains, textiles, and telecommunication accessories. With its substantial vendor population exceeding 10,000 registered traders, the market constitutes a significant employment center and economic driver for the region, while simultaneously serving as the primary source of fresh food for urban consumers in Mbale City and surrounding areas.

## Multi-Stakeholder Food Safety Initiative

The Global Consumer Centre (CONSENT), in strategic partnership with Food Rights Alliance (FRA) and Rikolto, all members of Food Safety Coalition Uganda (FoSCU), is currently implementing a comprehensive food safety campaign through the Afrifood Links and Good Food for Cities (GFCs) projects. This collaborative initiative specifically targets Mbale Central Market and neighboring commercial centers to address critical food safety concerns. The campaign employs a dual-focused approach: strengthening market governance structures while simultaneously empowering individual vendors through capacity development in optimal food handling practices. This strategic framework aims to transform market operations systematically while creating sustainable improvements in food safety standards.

## Consumer Empowerment Strategy

A complementary component of the campaign focuses on consumer education and empowerment regarding food safety principles. This consumer-oriented approach equips market patrons with essential knowledge and skills required for making informed, health-conscious food purchasing decisions. Additionally, the initiative provides practical guidance on maintaining food safety throughout the preparation, serving, and consumption phases within domestic settings. This comprehensive approach addresses food safety across the entire consumer journey, establishing multiple intervention points to minimize the incidence of foodborne illnesses in the community.

## Implementation Methodology

CONSENT and its institutional partners employ diverse methodological approaches to achieve campaign objectives. These strategies include extensive consumer awareness programs, structured capacity-building initiatives for market leadership, and technical training for vendors. The capacity development curriculum encompasses market order maintenance, hygiene and sanitation protocols, stall management practices, optimal food handling techniques, financial management principles, and effective market governance systems. This multifaceted educational approach ensures that food safety improvements are integrated within broader market management reforms.

## Infrastructural Development Components

The campaign's effectiveness is substantially enhanced through complementary infrastructural investments designed to facilitate improved food handling practices. These physical improvements include the provision of standardized, hygienic stalls for vendors specializing in fresh produce, the construction of designated cooking facilities, and the distribution of sanitation and hygiene equipment. These structural interventions create an enabling environment for implementing food safety protocols by addressing physical constraints that previously hindered compliance with optimal handling practices.

## Case Study: Sanitation Equipment Provision

On February 11, 2025, CONSENT, in collaboration with FRA and Rikolto, convened a formal meeting with the Mbale Central Market Executive Committee to officially transfer essential sanitation materials. This equipment transfer represents a strategic intervention to enhance the market's cleaning capabilities and improve overall environmental sanitation. The comprehensive sanitation package included professional attire (overalls), cleaning implements (rakes, spades,

forked hoes), waste management equipment (wheeled waste bins), and personal protective equipment (helmets, heavy-duty gloves, dust masks, and gumboots), along with essential cleaning tools like brooms and scrubbing brushes.

## Strategic Guidance for Sustainable Implementation

During the handover ceremony, the market executive received strategic guidance emphasizing the importance of appropriate resource management and utilization. The leadership was specifically reminded of their fundamental responsibility in maintaining market cleanliness and order, critical prerequisites for ensuring food safety for consumers. The guidance further emphasized the leadership's role in continuous knowledge transfer through mentoring and coaching vendors on personal hygiene and sanitation practices. Additionally, the executive was advised on the importance of infrastructure preservation, acknowledging the substantial financial investment these facilities represent.

## Stakeholder Response and Commitment

The market leadership, represented by the market secretary, administrator, and vice-chairperson, expressed formal appreciation for the sustained interventions implemented by CONSENT, FRA, and Rikolto. The leadership collectively articulated their institutional commitment to safeguarding the donated resources and intensifying efforts to maintain elevated standards of hygiene and sanitation throughout the market. Furthermore, they pledged to ensure the safety and quality of food products supplied to consumers, demonstrating alignment with the campaign's core objectives and establishing a foundation for sustainable improvements in market food safety practices.