

# Nairobi and Environs Food Security, Agriculture and Livestock Forum

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**Mazingira Institute founded the Nairobi and Environs Food Security, Agriculture and Livestock Forum (NEFSALF) in 2003. NEFSALF is a platform for public, private and community sectors, as well as a network of urban and periurban farmers. It originated independently of food policy councils elsewhere. But gave rise to similar farmers' networks in other East African urban areas.**

NEFSALF has influenced urban food policy in Nairobi and nationally in Kenya, and continues to do so as an active part of Nairobi City County's efforts to convene a stakeholder forum. Mazingira Institute, a Kenyan NGO, belongs to the RUAF Global Partnership. Useful comparisons with food policy councils elsewhere can be drawn, yet strategies used in a city like Toronto cannot always be usefully adopted wholesale in a city where the vast majority of food is bought and sold in the informal sector at kiosks, by the roadside or over the fence between neighbours. The circumstances are different, yet the basic problem for food planners is the same – reconciling the supply of nutritious food with regulating food safety.

## History

In 1985 Mazingira led a national statistical survey of urban food production in Kenya that showed large numbers of urban households were farming. Mazingira's philosophy as a research and development organisation was always to put research into practice. So when advocacy for policy change bore little fruit, hosting the forum was a logical step; farmers were suffering from lack of support as well as harassment, while trying to feed themselves and others.

After informal meetings with farmers, Mazingira convened a meeting of all players and a model developed of how communities, businesses and government could interact to bring about change. Central government participated, although the City of Nairobi did not. The farmers asked for training, which government extension services agreed to provide. The space was provided by Mazingira and that model continues today, with two courses a year, now focusing mainly on young farmers. Mazingira also provides the food systems input and policy thinking. This worked so well that Nairobi was selected as the pilot for Kenya's National Agriculture and Livestock Extension Programme in 2006.

Urban farmers in Kisumu, Mombasa and Dar es Salaam copied the model, without any external support, and the latter two organisations survive today. Mombasa's Coast Urban Food Security, Agriculture and Livestock Forum is thriving thanks to collaboration with its county government.



Photo by Mazingira

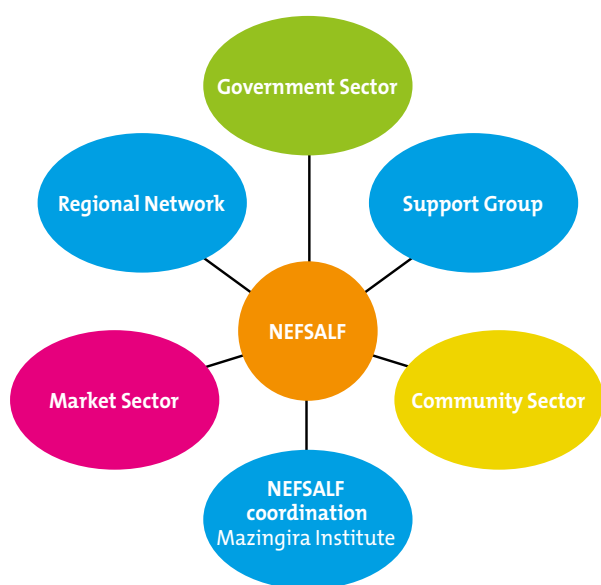
Devolution of agriculture to the counties of Kenya in 2013 was the secret to success at local government level. Central government policy makers had been taking part in NEFSALF meetings and this had fed into efforts to develop a national Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture and Livestock Policy. This failed to get through national top-level decision making in 2010, however. But it influenced the thinking of civil servants.

The policy setback was overtaken by events when Nairobi City County was created in 2013, with a large staff of agriculture, livestock, fish and veterinary experts. Many of these people had been interacting with farmers through the NEFSALF platform and network, as well as through their own extension services. The status of urban farmers was gradually transforming, and in 2015 the Nairobi City County Assembly passed the Urban Agriculture Promotion and Regulation Act, under a policy that guides this law.

## Nairobi City County in the lead

The story now shifts to Nairobi City County as the leader of food policy and consultation in Kenya's capital city, from 2013 to the present, six years later. With support from Mazingira, RUAF and Rooftops Canada, the city held a sensitisation workshop for senior county officials in 2016 and training for its staff and those of related sectors in city government in 2016. The emphasis was on food systems planning, and the role of urban agriculture (according to the Act) within this.

Then in 2017-2018, involvement of food system stakeholders and development of a Nairobi food strategy started, with a



NEFSALF sectoral mix and cooperation map

UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) project Nadhali. Apart from the FAO-led activities, the city itself made strides by renaming the local government sector “Food and Agriculture” and setting up a Food Systems Directorate within the Food and Agriculture Sector.

Nairobi City County Food and Agriculture Sector also continued interacting with NEFSALF and it took new steps to reach out to farmers in low-income informal settlements. The city now provides these farmers with extension support and encouragement. A field day for urban farming took place in late June 2019 in Mathare Valley, a large Nairobi slum. It was led by a youth group trained within NEFSALF, who keep livestock in an area noted for child malnutrition. A point to note is that Nairobi City County is far ahead of most cities in the global North in terms of the size and power of its governmental organisation – 250 professional staff in a sector of local government dedicated to food and agriculture.

The FAO-supported stakeholder forum that grew in 2017-18 did a lot of work on areas of the food system but was not entrenched in local government administration and seemed dependent on the FAO. This was despite the commitment of its members who had formed a core team with strong links to the city. Under a new FAO project 2019-2021, this stakeholder group was renamed Food Liaison Advisory Group (FLAG). Meanwhile the city government has incorporated most of the core team into its sector working group, which advises on budget. Unlike the stakeholder forum, this body is a formal part of local government and only meets when convened by government, which sets its agenda.

### NEFSALF's continued evolution

Following the model created when it was set up, NEFSALF's network members operate independently. They have variously formed “hubs” at different times, to carry out self-organised activities. Mazingira Institute provides a

*The NEFSALF model developed independently of food policy councils. But in 2010-2012 there were exchanges with Toronto Food Policy Council, thanks to project support from Rooftops Canada Foundation. Links have continued with Toronto through their attendance at the training of Nairobi City County employees in 2016 and stakeholder meetings in 2017-18. The Aga Khan Foundation in Nairobi has linked to the University of Fraser Valley in Vancouver, Canada as well, and the current City Food Advisor, a Kenyan seconded to Nairobi by C4o during 2018-19, was trained there.*

space to meet, and advice if needed. The NEFSALF women's hub is the longest-lasting and most successful. It meets monthly and accumulates savings. From that activity, they moved to extending loans, which are managed by the members, all of whom have expanded their enterprises, mostly adding value to food products.

Recently, long-standing members of the NEFSALF network who attend the forum regularly have started a practitioners hub, to counsel younger farmers. Attempts to form a youth hub have not lasted. A sectoral or commodity approach did not last either. A group of rabbit farmers formed a rabbit hub but did not continue formal meetings. Nevertheless, rabbit farming and rabbit meat have taken off in Nairobi, migrating from the informal to the formal sector; a rabbit slaughterhouse has been set up.

The prospects for replicating the organisational model seem good, based on the experience of two other urban farmers' networks so far, but the ability to relate to local government is crucial for the networks, in order to serve members' interests. Mombasa is doing well on this, but Dar es Salaam less so, although they now have some donor support. However, this is a less sustainable path—a policy environment that supports urban farming works better.

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