

The Advancing Food Security in Nairobi (AFSN) Project

TWO-YEAR IMPACT REPORT

Strengthening Food Security: Small Businesses Leading Change in Urban Settings



Hawa Akinyi Juma and Anne Kadogo Ndenga. Both received business and urban agriculture training from Concern. **Photo:** Shaloam Strooper/Concern Worldwide

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Why Urban Food Systems Matter

Concern Worldwide works at the intersection of humanitarian response and long-term development, recognizing that food security is both a life-saving necessity and a cornerstone of inclusive economic growth. In settings where conflict, poverty, and climate shocks collide, hunger is not only a humanitarian emergency — it is an economic constraint. Malnutrition undermines productivity, deepens poverty, and compromises health outcomes across generations.

Concern's approach treats food systems as economic systems, where nutrition, livelihoods, markets, and

financial inclusion are deeply interconnected. Short-term nutrition treatment is combined with long-term prevention strategies that address immediate dietary needs, caregiving practices, and the structural drivers of food insecurity — poverty, climate vulnerability, and exclusion from markets and finance.

AFSN is one of Concern's flagship demonstrations of this approach in an urban context: a project that shows how co-creating solutions with informal food vendors — most of them women — can transform local food economies and nutrition outcomes at scale.

The Urban Nutrition Challenge In Nairobi

Nairobi's informal settlements are home to 60% of the city's population yet occupy just 5% of its residential land. Chronic poverty, high unemployment — up to 36% in some areas¹ — overcrowding, and inadequate access to basic services shape daily life — and profoundly affect how families access food. Many households heavily rely on street food vendors to feed themselves, and informal labor for income, with no safety nets — a small shock can eliminate a household's ability to eat from one day to the next.

While informal food vendors are the backbone of food access in the informal settlements, they operate in high-risk, low-return environments — often unregistered, without formal trainings on health and hygiene, excluded from finance, and subject to punitive enforcement.

The consequences for nutrition are stark. Malnutrition remains a leading contributor to preventable child morbidity and mortality in these communities. Diets are dominated by low-cost, nutrient-poor and unhygienic street foods, while optimal infant and young child feeding practices are constrained by affordability, time, and knowledge gaps.



76%
of children aged 6–23
months do not meet Minimum
Acceptable Diet standards²



18.9%
of children experience stunting³



93%
of small food businesses are
unregistered, despite most
wanting to formalize²

For the last 10 years, Fresha Wamboi lives with her husband and two children in the Reuben settlement in Nairobi, a place where families work hard to meet their daily need. Fresha received business and urban agriculture training from Concern. **Photo:** Shaloam Strooper/Concern Worldwide

1 - [World Bank](#)

2 - Concern's Ecosystem Mapping Report, 2024

3 - [Mbogori, E. N., & Muriuki, A. W; 2021](#)

Rethinking the Solution

FROM TEMPORARY SUPPORT TO SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Concern recognizes that improving urban nutrition requires more than temporary treatment; it required transforming how nutritious food is produced, sold, regulated, and consumed in low-income urban environments.

Building on evidence from the [Lishe Poa Project](#), which successfully improved nutrition by integrating orange-fleshed sweet potato into local diets, Concern developed the Advancing Food Security in Nairobi (AFSN) project. AFSN was designed to **strengthen urban food security from the ground up** by seeing informal food vendors — primarily women — not as “risks”, but as **economic actors central to nutrition, employment, and resilience**.

AFSN was created around one central insight: **Urban nutrition improves fastest when markets, households, and policies are strengthened together**. Rather than bypassing informal food systems, AFSN worked through them — supporting vendors, mother-led enterprises, and local institutions to increase access to affordable, safe, and nutritious foods. Nutrition education was embedded in income-generating activities, while public–private partnerships aligned government leadership, private-sector capabilities, and sustainable financing. As Country Director Alessandro Bini noted at the project close-out:



“The AFSN project has demonstrated that when economic empowerment is fused with nutritional necessity, we create resilient food systems that truly leave no one behind.”

AFSN FOCUSED ON THREE MUTUALLY REINFORCING OBJECTIVES:



INCREASE ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE, HEALTHY FOOD

By strengthening small food vendors and mother-led enterprises through business training, peer learning, and market linkages.



IMPROVE HOUSEHOLD NUTRITION PRACTICES

By promoting optimal feeding, dietary diversity, hygiene, and urban food production through community-based platforms.



ADVOCATE FOR A PRO-POOR POLICY FRAMEWORK

By influencing food safety and nutrition regulations to reduce barriers for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

Spotlight on Key Program Elements



THE SMALL BUSINESS ACCELERATOR

Concern established the AFSN Business Accelerator to strengthen food security in Nairobi’s informal settlements by supporting the businesses that feed them. The accelerator equips informal vendors and mother-led enterprises across the food value chain with training in circular economy practices, tailored mentorship, and access to supplier linkages — enabling them to build capacity and scale sustainably through Concern’s GROW coaching model. By pairing small vendors with more established enterprises, the accelerator fostered peer learning, local sourcing, and inclusive food ecosystems. As participating businesses increased their income and financial stability, residents gained improved access to affordable, safe, hygienic, and nutritious food. Advancing gender-transformative outcomes was a core priority, with women-led enterprises comprising 60% of supported businesses.

John Kipkurui talking with an AFSN participant, Nairobi. **Photo:** Shaloam Strooper/Concern Worldwide

“ SMEs were able to identify their gaps through their new business plans and close them through peer learning and targeted support.”

JOHN KIPKURUI
Nutrition Coordinator, Concern Worldwide Kenya

How Does it Work?

1. SOLICITATION OF APPLICATIONS:

Calls with clear guidelines shared via Facebook, WhatsApp, and CHPs, who also assisted applicants as needed.

2. SCREENING AND EVALUATION:

Applications assessed using a publicly available framework by the Business Accelerator management team, comprising Concern staff and community representatives.

3. ONBOARDING, ORIENTATION AND ASSESSMENT:

Selected mentees assigned a dedicated client lead who conducted orientation sessions covering program timelines, mentorship, trainings, workshops, and goal setting.

4. EDUCATIONS WORKSHOPS AND TRAININGS:

Based on onboarding assessments, participants received targeted trainings: Business Basics 101, Financial Basics 101, and Nutrition and Hygiene Basics 101.

5. COACHING AND MENTORSHIP:

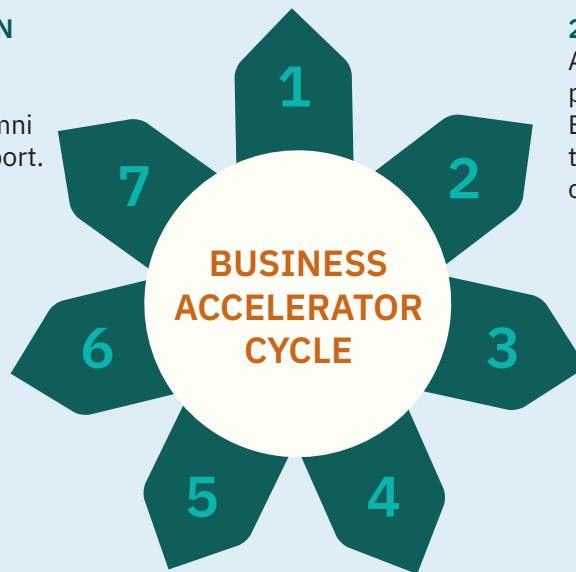
Mentees received six months of ongoing support using Concern’s GROW coaching model (Goal – Reality – Options – Way forward), delivered by vetted local mentors.

6. PREPARING FOR INVESTORS:

Workshops and one-on-one sessions supported mentees in the finalization of their business plans and pitch documents for investor engagement.

7. GRADUATION AND TRANSITION

Post-graduation support included investor and partner introductions, access to business grants, and alumni network membership for peer support.



COMMUNITY-BASED NUTRITION MODEL

AFSN placed behavior change at the heart of its work, using trusted community platforms to address the behavior and attitudes that contribute to malnutrition both at home and in the community. This community-based nutrition model prioritized peer learning, regular dialogue, and practical demonstrations, focusing on optimal breastfeeding practices, appropriate complementary feeding, dietary diversity, hygiene practices, and urban gardening of nutrient-rich foods.



Photo Caption: Anne Kadogo Ndenga in front of her vegetable stall. Photo: Shaloam Strooper/Concern Worldwide

Mother to Mother Support Groups

As primary caregivers, mothers shoulder immense responsibilities yet often receive limited support and recognition. Deeply rooted gender norms further restrict women's access to resources, financial independence, and decision-making power, hindering their entrepreneurial potential.

Anne, a mother of five, shared her experience before having her business:

“ I'd wait on my husband for food and provisions, he works in the informal sector. If he came home with no money, we'd have to sleep hungry.”

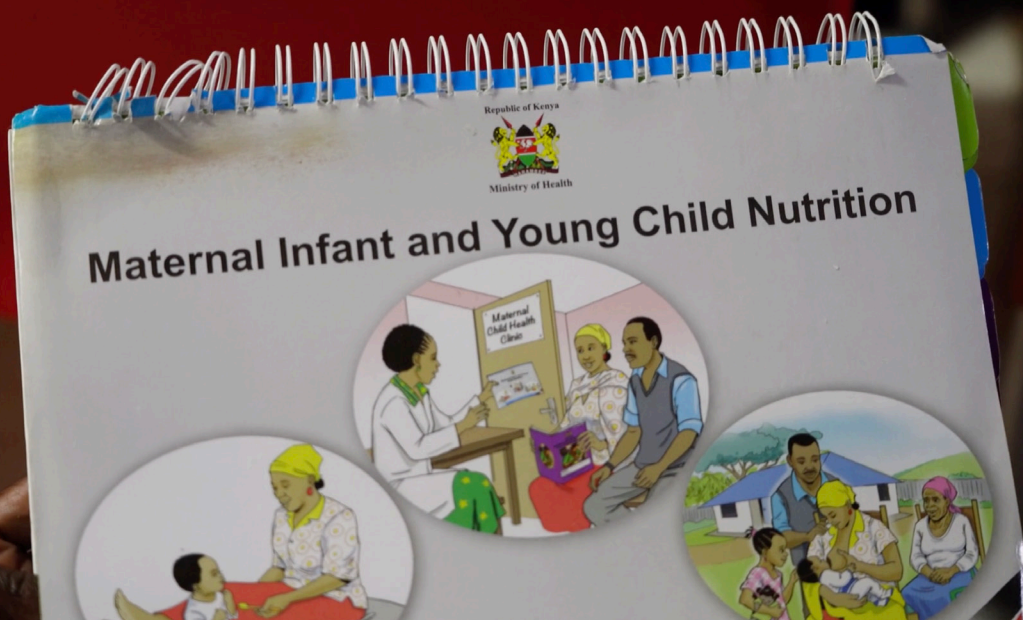
To address these challenges, Concern established a network of mothers through 40 Mother-to-Mother Support Groups (M2MSGs). These groups, each counting 20 to 25 members, meet regularly, offering a safe and supportive space where mothers can share experiences — both successes and challenges — learn from one another, and participate in targeted trainings.



Community Health Promoters (CHPs)

Trained CHPs play a crucial role in addressing health inequalities by bringing essential health services closer to the people living in underserved areas. As trusted members of the communities they serve, CHPs have a deep understanding of local realities and challenges. Concern trained 400 CHPs to implement AFSN, equipping them with training on the Baby Friendly Community Initiative (BFCI) and partnering with them to ensure ongoing support for participating mothers and small vendors.

Photo Caption: Sub-County Nutrition Coordinator Pamela Nyongesa leads discussions at BFCI (Baby Friendly Community Initiative) training session at the Reuben Centre with Community Health Promoters. Photo: Shaloam Strooper/Concern Worldwide



What is the baby friendly community initiative?

The BFCI aims to improve the health and nutrition of mothers, infants, and young children through household visits undertaken by CHPs.

AFSN In Action: A Two-Year Journey of Change

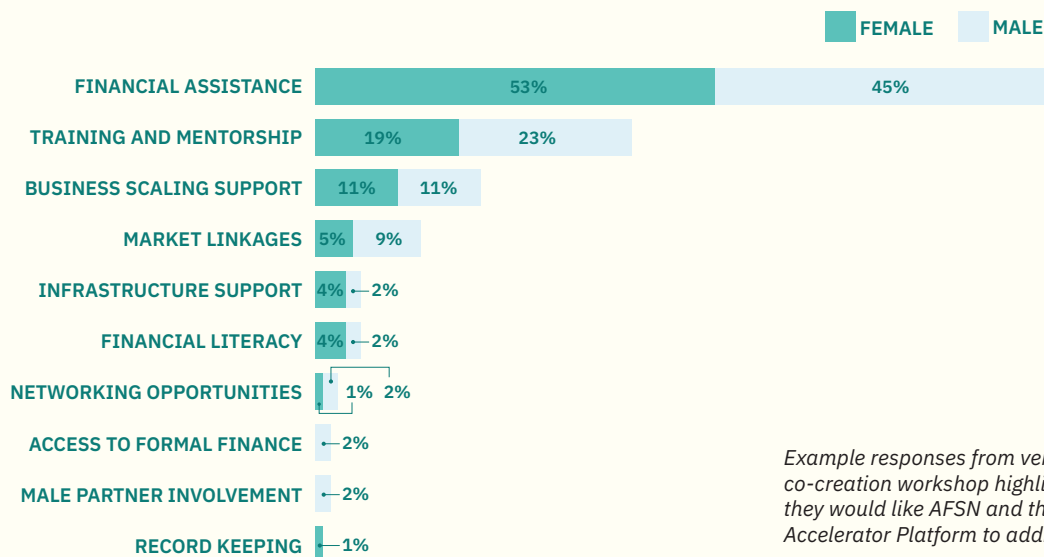
LAYING THE FOUNDATION – ACTIVATING SYSTEMS –
DEEPENING IMPACT – ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY

YEAR 1

AFSN began with prioritizing rigorous evidence generation to ensure interventions addressed real needs, alongside strengthening local systems and knowledge to support AFSN's success.

INCEPTION AND EVIDENCE GENERATION

- Baseline Surveys, Ecosystem Mapping and Market Studies
- Signature of a MoU with the Nairobi City County Government and beginning of policy review
- Co-creation workshops with vendors and Nairobi City County



Example responses from vendors during a co-creation workshop highlighting the areas they would like AFSN and the Business Accelerator Platform to address.

ACTIVATION & CAPACITY BUILDING

- Launch of AFSN and Business Accelerator
- CHPs Training: Baby Friendly Community Initiative
- Nairobi County Staff Training of Trainers: **Concern's 17-Point Rule Book for Income Generating Activities**
- Establishment of M2MSGs
- Start of Nutrition and Hygiene Communication Campaign to spread best practices

Photo Caption: Martin Bunyali, one of the presenters from the local radio station Ruben FM – Mukuru's community radio station that aims to empower and unite Mukuru Community – talks about best practices around food preparation and child feeding during a live stream. Photo: Shaloam Strooper/Concern Worldwide



YEAR 2

AFSN shifted to direct support and quality assurance—to reinforce newly acquired knowledge and skills—and, as enterprises matured, prepared for ownership transition to local authorities.

DIRECT SUPPORT & QUALITY ASSURANCE

- Grants, peer to peer learning, and microfinance institutions linkages for vendors
- Routine CHPs and M2MSGs review to reinforce nutrition behaviors
- Establishment of kitchen and cone gardens for food and income



Photo Caption: Anne Kadogo Ndenga and other members from the AFSN M2MSGs work together to prepare the land for their kitchen gardens. Photo: Shaloam Strooper/Concern Worldwide



Photo Caption: Hawa Akinyi Juma and Anne Kadogo work together on the new kitchen garden they share. Photo: Shaloam Strooper/Concern Worldwide

CONSOLIDATION, FORMALIZATION & EXIT

- Advanced enterprise training for M2MSG members
- Food processing equipment, licensing, and accreditation support for SMEs



Photo Caption: An AFSN-supported vendor receives machines to scale up their production, improve the quality of their products, and increase their revenue. Photo: Shaloam Strooper/Concern Worldwide

- Adoption of Concern's Training Model by Nairobi City County for future vendors training
- Knowledge sharing at the 2025 Africa Food Systems Forum (AFSF) in Dakar, Senegal

“The AFSN project has truly changed the lives of mothers and babies in Nairobi Informal settlements and to be able to amplify their voices and share our learnings here is key to raise awareness on the impact of catalytic investments on nutritional outcomes in urban settings.”

CAROLINE MUGO

Program Coordinator - Health & Nutrition, Concern Worldwide Kenya, regarding her participation in AFSF in Dakar

- Endline Assessment and Handover to County Authorities

AFSN Impact

SOCIAL AND NUTRITIONAL OUTCOMES

To date, the M2MSGs have accompanied more than 600 mothers on their journey toward financial stability and improved nutrition for their children. As their knowledge and confidence have grown, many of these mothers have emerged as community leaders, sharing their skills and insights with other women. This growing ripple effect is strengthening child nutrition and resilience across informal settlements.



“ Having this business was very empowering. Now, even if my husband makes no money, I have food from the shamba (farm) to feed the family. We can both contribute to the household needs.”

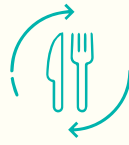
- ANNE KADOGO NDENGA



Exclusive breastfeeding increased from 65% to 86.2%



Minimum Acceptable Diet among children 6–23 months rose from 24% to 49.6%



Households with acceptable Food Consumption Scores increased from 82% to 97.1%



124,858 children and 96,508 pregnant and breastfeeding women reached



400 CHPs trained on the BFCI



Nasra Noor, a mother member of an AFSN M2MSG and small-scale vendor from Mathare, explains how nutrition and income came together:

“ With AFSN, I planted kale in my new cone garden. Now I have sufficient food, sell surplus kale, and save the income.”

“ Through AFSN, we were able to train a lot of CHPs to assist us in passing the message to the households [...]: How do they handle, how do they store and how do they cook [the food], so we can be able to minimize foodborne illnesses.”

SAMUEL KAMWARO
Public Health Officer, Nairobi County City Government



CHPs during a BFCI training session.
Photo: Shaloam Strooper/Concern Worldwide

ECONOMIC RESILIENCE AND LIVELIHOODS

From permanent stalls to animal farming expansion, AFSN helped vendors move from survival to stability.



67 new businesses established; 68 expanded



140 jobs created



106 individuals built or preserved productive assets



73 enterprises reported profitable sales of healthy foods



77 participants improved financial behaviors



With the support of AFSN, Nacasias Amondi, a fish vendor from Mathare, was able to change her business model from being a hawker to a vendor with a permanent stall. She learned new business skills through the Business Accelerator that has allowed her to increase her earnings.

“ Now I am also a member of the SHOFSCO SACCO, where I save money from which I can access loans to help boost my business.”



“Business-wise I can say it [AFSN] has really-helped me because initially, I didn't use to concentrate on processing like doing yogurt making or cheese making, but having been taught how to process the milk, nowadays when I have a surplus of milk because I have more goats, I have clients who like goat cheese and I can sell it at a higher price than selling the raw milk.”

- KEVIN UDUNY
Goat Farmer



“After the AFSN training, I learnt that I needed to expand my business. With the business grant, I went from having ten chickens and five goats to thirty chickens, five guinea fowls, and 10 female goats. The fowls are good because I can sell them and their eggs at four times the price of chickens and their eggs, so I make more profit.”

- FRESHA WAMBOI,
Poultry and Goat Farmer

“Through Concern, with AFSN, I got trained on agriculture and business. My friend Anne and I sought permission to use a portion of public land for our farm and it was granted. I now reap from the farm and it seems surreal. In just 8 months so much has changed, it brings a lot of emotions to me. My family eats fresh food daily. The cone garden is so good, a small little thing with so much capacity.”

- HAWA AKINYI JUMA
Small Scale Vendor and Farmer



“I was looking on how to upscale my egg business into a hatchery. Through the support from Concern, I could purchase ready-to-lay pullets to get more eggs, as well as an incubator, to hatch chickens. Now, I have more eggs to sell, and I can also sell chickens for more money. I have also been able to reach a wider market range.”

- SYLVESTER ONDORO
Poultry Farmer



POLICY AND SYSTEMS IMPACT

Recognizing that informal food vendors operate within a highly restrictive regulatory environment, the project prioritized **policy advocacy as a pathway to sustainable, long-term change**. Over the two-year implementation period, Concern staff partnered closely with the Nairobi City County Government to review and strengthen existing legislative frameworks. This collaboration provided targeted technical assistance grounded in the lived realities of informal settlement residents and small-scale food business owners.

By shaping a more responsive and inclusive policy landscape, **the project helped dismantle long-standing systemic barriers facing informal food vendors**. AFSN contributed to the development and enactment of pro-small business policy instruments, most notably the Nairobi Food Safety and Fortification Act (2024) and the accompanying Food Safety Regulations Policy. For informal vendors, this marked a shift from harassment and exclusion to professionalization and inclusion, fostering a more enabling, equitable, and durable operating environment for MSMEs.



“

Getting a license was hard due to costs and knowing the business and health certificates that I needed. Most of the time, I was harassed by city county officers, which often forced me to close my business. Now I receive training. AFSN taught me proper poultry farming to prevent diseases and adhere to vaccination schedules.”

IMMACULATE AKINYI
Small-scale Trader and Poultry Farmer



Enactment of key county-level food safety and nutrition legislation



Institutional adoption of Concern’s training model



Formal recognition of informal vendors as partners in urban food systems



“

Concern has been very helpful in the drafting of the Nairobi County Food Safety and Fortification Act. As a County, we’ve been pushing [street food vendors] up and down, trying to arrest them, but we have seen that the arrests and prosecutions are not bearing fruit. Concern Worldwide really came in to support, and we are now at an advanced stage with the new regulation [so that] vendors will get knowledge and undergo food safety training before getting a license to operate.”

- SAMUEL KAMWARO,
Public Health Officer,
Nairobi City County Government

Learnings From AFSN To Scale Impact

Over two years of implementation, AFSN generated practical, transferable insights into how inclusive urban food systems can be strengthened at community, market, and policy levels. The experience reinforced Concern's ability to adapt, learn, and deliver results in complex urban informal settings.



CO-CREATION BUILDS OWNERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY.

Structured, participatory engagement with small food vendors, Nairobi City County Government, and other stakeholders enabled the joint development of clear quality standards and performance targets. This approach strengthened trust, improved compliance, and ensured that standards were both practical and locally owned — demonstrating that co-creation is essential for sustainable change in informal markets.

PEER NETWORKS ACCELERATE BEHAVIOR CHANGE AND RESILIENCE.

The integration of vertical gardening within forty Mother-to-Mother Support Groups resulted in full adoption among members. Peer-led learning proved highly effective in improving household dietary diversity while also generating income from surplus produce. AFSN's Community-Based Nutrition Model showed that when nutrition and livelihoods are addressed together through trusted community networks, adoption and impact increase significantly.

TARGETED POLICY ENGAGEMENT CAN UNLOCK SYSTEMIC CHANGE.

Consistent, evidence-based advocacy with Nairobi City County contributed to the review of the County Nutrition Action Plan and informed key policy reforms, including the Nairobi Food Safety and Fortification Act (2024) and the Food Safety Regulations Policy. These efforts reduced structural barriers facing informal vendors and highlighted AFSN's capacity to bridge grassroots realities with policy reform.

ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT IS CRITICAL IN URBAN INFORMAL CONTEXTS.

Implementation delays linked to flooding, political and County staffing transitions, and rising costs underscored the importance of flexible design, adaptive timelines, and contingency planning. AFSN demonstrated Concern's ability to respond effectively to uncertainty while maintaining momentum and outcomes.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTINUITY REQUIRES DELIBERATE PLANNING.

The reassignment of government trainers disrupted some activities, highlighting the need for continuous capacity building, cross-department engagement, and refresher training to preserve institutional memory and sustain partnerships over time.

NUTRITION OUTCOMES DEPEND ON TARGETED, NUANCED MESSAGING.

While exclusive breastfeeding rates were high at the end of AFSN implementation, low consumption of animal-source foods revealed gaps in dietary diversity. This points to the need for more focused nutrition education that emphasizes affordable, culturally acceptable protein sources alongside broader infant and young child feeding messages.

ENTERPRISE GROWTH NEEDS DEEPER AND MORE INCLUSIVE SUPPORT.

Interventions through Concern's Business Accelerator Platform successfully addressed foundational gaps among vendors; however, future programming should expand advanced training in business planning, marketing, cost reduction, and access to affordable inputs. Strengthening financial pathways — through partnerships with diverse financial institutions and flexible loan products — will be key to enabling business formalization, growth, and long-term sustainability.



Caption photo 1: Handover of AFSN to Nairobi County Government representatives at the project close-out event. Photo: Shaloam Strooper/Concern Worldwide

Caption photo 2: Anne Kadogo Ndenga in her garden. Photo: Shaloam Strooper/Concern Worldwide

Caption photo 3: Kevin Uduny holds branded goat milk bottles from his farm. Photo: Shaloam Strooper/Concern Worldwide

What's Next?

Concern Kenya remains deeply committed to enhancing child nutrition, food security, and economic resilience in Nairobi's informal settlements through long-term partnerships with communities, county and national governments, and the private sector.

The AFSN project proves that economic inclusion, nutrition, and policy reform are not parallel efforts — they are mutually reinforcing drivers of lasting change. This model provides a solid foundation to scale up efforts in Nairobi — leveraging an increasingly supportive policy environment, well-established community structures, and growing vendor networks to catalyze additional investment and scale impact.

Building on the proven results and lessons from the Lishe Poa and AFSN programs, **Concern continues to mobilize resources for urban nutrition and livelihoods programming in Nairobi.** At the same time, Concern is launching a complementary KOICA-funded initiative focused on the Orange-Fleshed Sweet Potato (OFSP) value chain in neighboring Machakos County, strengthening rural–urban food system linkages that directly supply Nairobi markets. This initiative aims to enhance nutrition and food security through climate-smart agriculture, expand market access and enterprise development via Concern's Business Accelerator, and increase consumer demand driven by social and behavior change communication, private-sector partnerships, and targeted government investment.

Kevin Uduny feeds his goats. **Photo:** Shaloam Strooper/Concern Worldwide

Looking ahead, Concern Kenya's future programming in Nairobi will prioritize the following strategic directions:



ADAPTIVE URBAN NUTRITION SYSTEMS that can respond to climate, political, and market shocks through integrated, cross-sectoral and cross-departmental delivery models.



DEEPER AND MORE SUSTAINED NUTRITION BEHAVIOR CHANGE with a stronger focus on affordable dietary diversity and access to protein, delivered through scalable, peer-led platforms embedded in communities.



ADVANCED MSME GROWTH PATHWAYS FOR INFORMAL FOOD VENDORS, including enhanced business and financial management training, input cost-reduction strategies, and expanded digital, branding, and marketing capabilities.



SUSTAINED FINANCING AND PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS to strengthen access to capital for community health promoters (CHPs) and informal enterprises, while supporting phased formalization and long-term viability.

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To learn more about Concern Kenya's urban nutrition and food systems agenda in Nairobi, please contact Katie Waller (katie.waller@concern.net), Director of Strategic Partnerships, Concern Worldwide US.