



Supporting Local Private Veterinary Services in Rwanda



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In Rwanda more than 80% of the population rely on agriculture for their livelihoods. The success of agriculture depends on livestock keeping, which is the main source of organic manure. Ownership of livestock is associated with improved household food security.

However, small farmers struggle to fully develop their livestock activities. This is partly due to the lack of quality animal health services. In rural areas, there are few animal health professionals, if any. The available animal health care is expensive and poor quality.

The few veterinary professionals located near livestock keepers are ill-equipped. They have limited technical capacity and are faced with an inadequate supply of veterinary drugs. This results in errors and weighs heavily on the cost of treatment. As a result, the farmers' animals are not properly treated for diseases.

What Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium does

Since 2008, we have been working with the local farmers' organisation IMBARAGA to reduce livestock losses and increase productivity in the rural areas of three districts of Southern Province: Huye, Nyanza and Nyamagabe. To achieve this, **we help private vets and veterinary technicians to set up surgeries and increase their capacity.** To ensure profitability and success, each farmer has to pay for the veterinary services.

Our current method – the result of many years of experience – involves close collaboration with IMBARAGA, the Rwanda Council of Veterinary Doctors (RCVD), the Rwandan Ministry of Agriculture and local authorities.

Identification and selection of suitable private vets

First we launch a call for local private vets and veterinary technicians in areas in need. Candidates (usually at levels A2 or A1) have to provide a business plan, which is analysed by the project team, RCVD and relevant local authorities. The next step of validation involves field visits to candidates' pharmacies and interviews to ascertain their technical and business capacities.

Technical support

The project helps vets and veterinary technicians build capacity through:

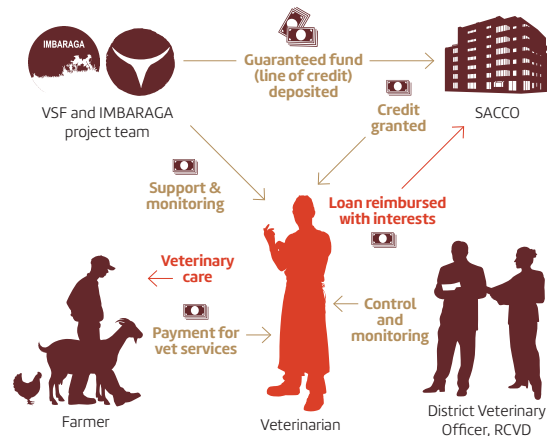
- **Technical training** in specialisations such as bovine artificial insemination and caesarean surgery in large and small ruminants.
- **Training in business management and accountancy skills**, to manage their practice in a professional and profitable manner.

Financial support

In the first phases of the project, private vets borrowed directly from the project. Since 2014, we have developed partnerships with local microfinance institutions (SACCOS – Savings & Credit Cooperatives). These have agreed to grant credits to private vets & veterinary technicians, in exchange for a guarantee fund worth €1,100 (RWF 1.1 million) deposited by Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium. This reduces the financial risk for the SACCO. The vet or veterinary technician pays back the SACCO on a monthly basis and the money from repaid loans is used to finance similar credit demands.

Each vet develops a business plan which has to be validated by the project. Financial support of a total of €3,200 (RWF 3.2 million) is then granted to them, with which they are expected to purchase veterinary equipment, drugs and a motorcycle. This vehicle enables them to improve fast service and to extend their intervention radius. The amount includes a non-repayable subsidy of €1,000 (RWF 1 million) from the project.

Project support to private vets and veterinary technicians



Monitoring and evaluation

The activities' progress is regularly monitored by the project team, RCVD, IMBARAGA and the local authorities. Our surveys focus on loan repayment rate, profitability of the vet's business, client satisfaction and morbidity and mortality rates of livestock treated.

Results

Between 2008 and 2019, the programme assisted 34 private vets and veterinary technicians, five of whom were women. 30 (i.e. 88.23%) are still active in their rural areas as part of our network.

Over the same period, our network contributed significantly to the **reduction of mortality in goats (from 6% to 1.3%) and cattle (from 10% to 2%)**. Our vets and vet technicians also participated in **genetic improvement of local cattle**. From 2016 to 2019, the network created inseminated 17% of the total inseminated cows in the region. **Their rate of success is around 58%**, which is far above the overall average of 40%. Since 2017, the average number of animals treated by the network has increased by 40% per year.

Between 2017 and 2019, the average sales revenue of the private vets and vet technicians set up increased from **€4,222 (RWF 4,222,473) to €7,710 (RWF 7,710,539)**. **93% of these vets have paid back their loan**, which proves that their practice is profitable.



Key figures

€3,200
total financial support,

of which
€1,000
of subsidy

93%
of loans repaid

34
supported vets,

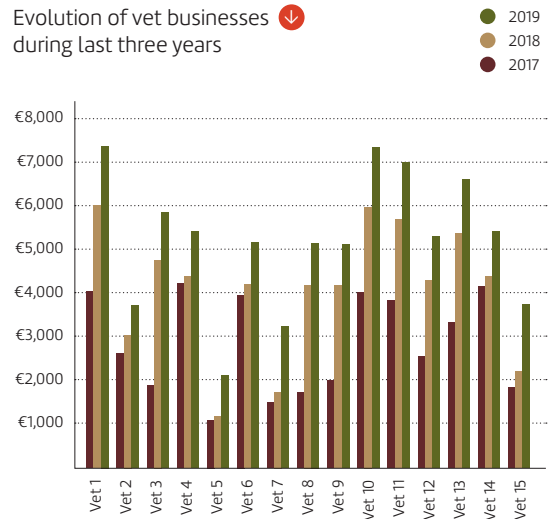
of which
5
women

58%
success rate for
artificial insemination

4,091
calves born
by insemination
between 2016 and 2019

+40%
animals treated
per year since 2017

Evolution of vet businesses during last three years



Lessons learnt

Our approach to reinforcing local private veterinary services in rural areas is based on two elements: **capacity building** among selected vets and vet technicians on the one hand, combined with access to **credit** on the other, in order to help them set up business close to the farmers. The success of this approach depends on the **selection of veterinary stakeholders**, which is the key to ensuring effective use of the support received.

Our approach has produced **many positive results**, not only for the private vets and vet technicians, but also for **livestock farmers living in remote rural areas**. The efficiency of animal health services impacts positively on livestock farmers' **revenues and food security**. It also **reduces the risk of disease transmission from animals to humans** ('One Health' approach).

The **framing of the veterinary profession** by the state provides a good basis for stimulating the intervention and involvement of professionals in promoting animal health in the interest of farmers. However, the animal health subsector still needs stakeholders to help young veterinarians settle in rural areas and extend the promotion of animal health to ensure better animal care across to the whole country.

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