

Vétérinaires  
Sans Frontières  
Dierenartsen  
Zonder Grenzen



# Activity report

VSF BELGIUM  
2020

MEMBER OF VSF INTERNATIONAL



Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium is a Belgian NGO and a member of the VSF International network that fights hunger and poverty in Africa. Our objective is to strengthen the capacities of populations of livestock keepers by sustainable means so that they can lead a dignified existence.

Millions of people in Africa make a living from their livestock. Vétérinaires Sans Frontières helps livestock keepers to build a better future. This future starts with healthy animals. But we do far more than just vaccinate and care for the herds.

We work with local populations to improve their livestock breeding techniques and everything associated with them: from microcredits to sales, from the management of water and fodder to training, as well as agricultural equipment, emergency aid, peace talks and political advocacy.

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**Marc Joolen**  
General Director

## PREFACE ↓

2020 will go down in history as a year of trials, doubts and uncertainties. A year in which we became aware of the links and connections that unite us. First and foremost, as human beings all around the world. But also in terms of our connections with animals and the environment, with whom our relationships have proven to be just as close. This is an awareness that we have been insisting upon for a long time at Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium, through the One Health concept. As a symptom of an alarming wake-up call about biodiversity, the coronavirus is forcing us to rethink the status quo and conceive of the health of living beings as one indivisible issue that encompasses human, animal and environmental health. Now we all need to learn to work together to find solutions in the face of impending disaster. What is more, we need to do so in an increasingly uncertain security context, particularly in the Sahel where access to pastures is becoming more and more difficult for livestock keepers.

In spite of the precarious circumstances, our teams have demonstrated all their strength and resilience once again this year. They have worked to serve the most vulnerable, who, as always, are the first to suffer the consequences of a crisis. Although the pandemic put a spanner in the works, we are proud that we have been able to complete the great majority of our activities successfully. We have even started working in two new countries, Benin and Mauritania. And we are continuing to make progress towards our humanitarian goals.

Our activities everywhere have one thing in common. They reaffirm the close link between the health of livestock keepers, their herds and ecosystems, whether in Belgium, where we are trying to raise awareness of this reality, or in the field, where we apply the principles. Healthy animals allow African livestock keepers to eat their fill and live in greater dignity, in harmony with the environment around them. Whether in Mali, the Democratic Republic of Congo or Burundi, stimulating the keeping of dairy herds and poultry makes it possible to develop value chains that benefit the local economy. The revenue generated has a direct effect on the food security of the livestock keepers' families, very often due to the involvement of women. Likewise, in Burkina Faso, we realise each day how closely the health of refugees and displaced people is linked to the health of the goats we distribute among them. Last but not least, livestock can also play a positive role in the fight against climate change and the preservation of the environment, as the success of our biogas plants in Rwanda is proving.

None of this would be possible without the ongoing support of our backers, donors and allies. That we have been able to achieve such great work together fills me with joy, and also with hope. As you are reading this report, I hope you share my certainty: more than ever, change is happening in Africa. And it is certain to continue.

*Brussels, May 2021*

# Healthy animals, healthy people

Our mission is to empower disadvantaged livestock dependent communities in the South to improve their well-being.

## A solid international network

We are a member of the Vétérinaires Sans Frontières International network, made up of 12 national NGOs in Europe and Canada. Together we work in more than 40 countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia, serving the most vulnerable rural populations. Our aim is to support family-run livestock keeping and farming. We believe in the importance of a healthy relationship between humans, animals and their environment. Through our veterinary services and our work with local populations, we help to improve food security and food sovereignty around the world.

The network enables us to better co-ordinate the location of our work and makes it possible to pool our resources. It also encourages members to share their experiences and their expertise; this helps to develop our skills and those of our partners.

[www.vsf-international.org](http://www.vsf-international.org)

## FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY ↓

Would you like to know more about where our funds come from and how we manage our expenses? Our financial report is available on our website [www.vsf-belgium.org](http://www.vsf-belgium.org) and can be obtained on request from [info@vsf-belgium.org](mailto:info@vsf-belgium.org) or +32 (0)2 539 09 89.

Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium subscribes to the ethical code of the AERF/VEF. You have a right to information. This implies that donors, partners and staff are informed at least once a year of the use of funds received.



IN 2020:



**69,980**

FAMILIES  
RECEIVED OUR HELP



**19,194**

ANIMALS  
WERE DISTRIBUTED

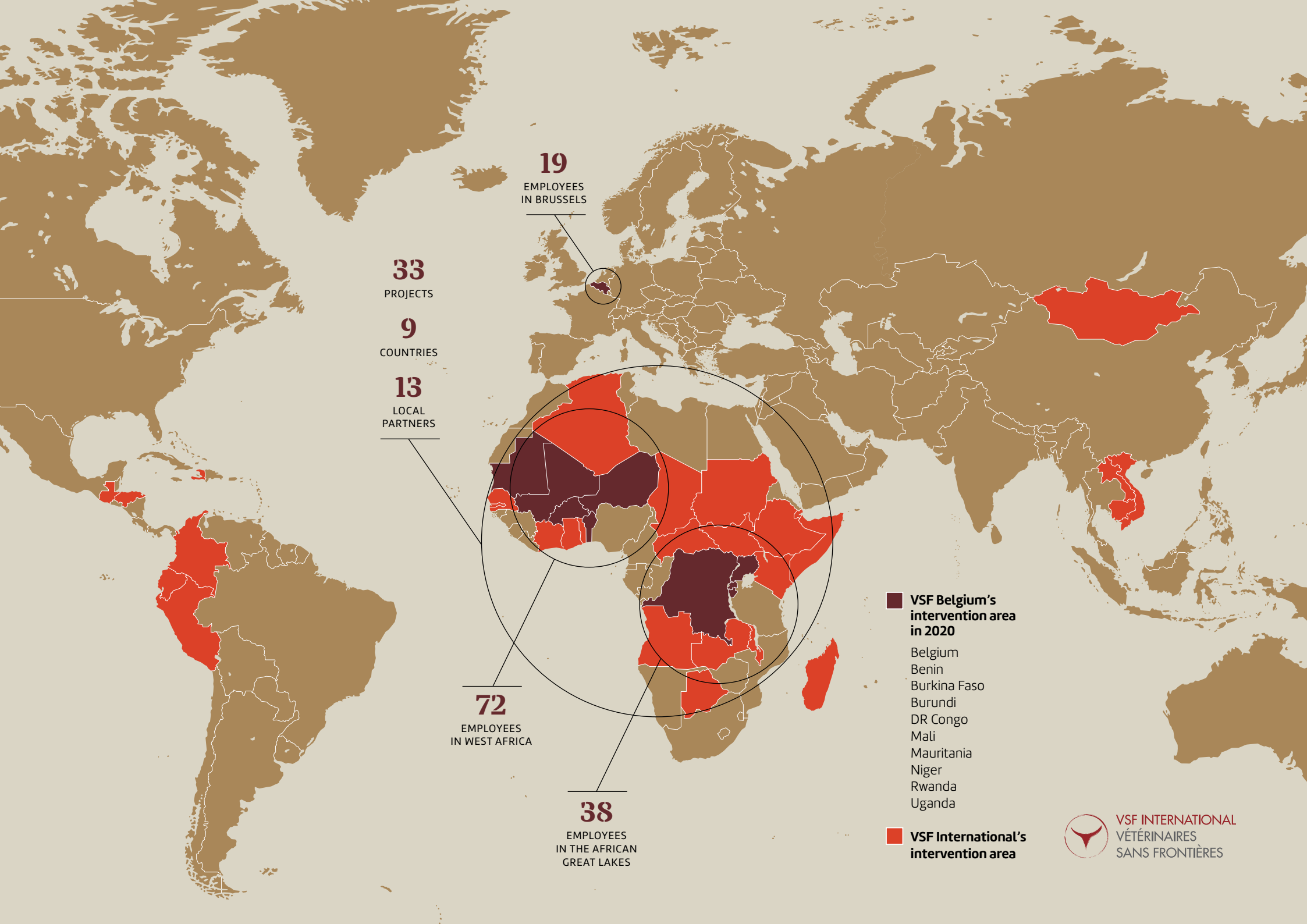
**1,252**

ANIMAL HEALTH  
WORKERS RECEIVED  
OUR SUPPORT

**99**

PRIVATE  
VETERINARIANS  
WERE ASSISTED





## Hope in times of pandemic

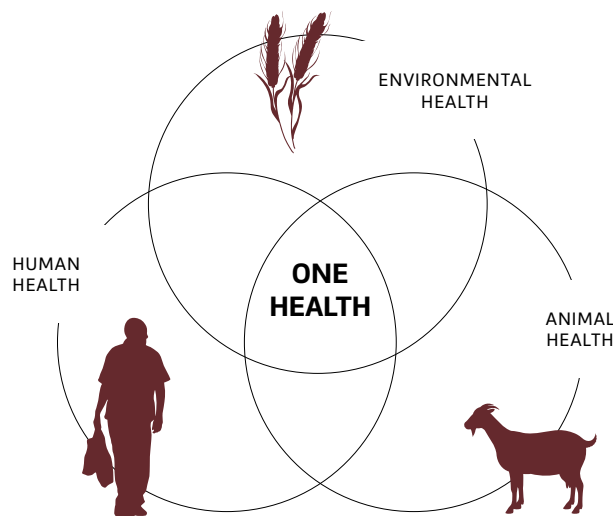
# One Health

More than 3 million deaths and almost 150 million people infected.<sup>1</sup> 132 million more people suffering from hunger. 3.3 million workers at risk of losing their livelihoods.<sup>2</sup> All because of one virus. These figures may seem to come straight out of a science fiction film by Steven Soderbergh, but these figures are decidedly real. They are the provisional figures and scientific predictions for the coronavirus pandemic that has had the planet in its grip for more than a year.

Who would have believed all this could happen? Nonetheless, the signs were there for anyone who knew where to look. Today we can no longer allow ourselves to dismiss nature's warnings. Whether the climate sceptics like it or not, the pandemic appears to be confirming that climate change caused by human activity is speeding up the collapse of biodiversity and sounding the death knell for human existence on Earth. Although the situation is critical, we want to believe that there is still hope. We call this hope *One Health*.



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### Zoonoses, a threat that should not be underestimated

Since the early 2000s, we have been confronted with at least one new infectious human disease of animal origin per year. These diseases are known as zoonoses, i.e. diseases transmitted from animals to humans. According to the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), 13 of these zoonoses are responsible for 2.2 million deaths each year. At global scale, around 60% of known infectious human diseases are of animal origin, as are 75% of emerging diseases.

Eddy Timmermans, a vet and programme expert working for Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium in Brussels, adds a proviso: *“There is a lot of talk about Covid-19 at the moment, but there are dozens of other zoonoses such as avian flu, Ebola or Lassa fever, all of which are equally dangerous to public health. And there will be others. Incidentally, the eight priority diseases recognised by the World Health Organisation are all zoonoses.”*

### Pointing the finger at human activity

It now seems increasingly clear that human activity, which is the cause of climate change and the loss of biodiversity, is also the reason for the emergence of these diseases.

*“To give just one example, deforestation contributes to climate change and the loss of biodiversity. Because of this, wild animals come into close contact with livestock and humans, which increases the risk of transmission”,* Eddy Timmermans continues.

This risk is particularly high in Africa, where populations are growing exponentially and housing is impinging on nature more and more. With globalisation and the acceleration of trade, what happens in a remote corner of the globe can quickly develop into a threat to humanity.

### One Health, a key concept in the fight against future pandemics

To face up to the coronavirus and the serious risks of new pandemics, it seems clearer than ever that a response must be sought in collaborative and transdisciplinary approaches. This is what the *One Health* concept proposes in pleading for a holistic and systemic approach to health, whether it is human, animal or environmental. This is to be achieved through partnerships between experts and scientists of every ilk: doctors and vets, but also agronomists, ecologists, epidemiologists and even anthropologists, zoologists and entomologists.

*“For Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium”, explains Eddy Timmermans, who is also one of the founders of our NGO, “this perception of human, animal and environmental health as a single whole has been patently obvious from the outset. Everything that is good for one of these three aspects must be good for the others, and vice versa. We have always acknowledged the links between the three aspects of health and taken a holistic approach, surrounding ourselves with partners who are specialists in their field.”*

### Healthy animals for healthy people in a healthy environment

Even if we are all counting the cost today, poor and marginalised communities in countries in the South still bear the brunt of the threat of zoonoses. Approximately 70% of people who live in extreme poverty live in close proximity to animals or markets where disease spreads rapidly.

*“This is also true of the livestock keepers we work with in Africa. They are often deprived of access to drinking water and healthcare services, whether for themselves or for their animals, and they are particularly vulnerable to zoonotic diseases. This is exacerbated by the fact that, given their lack of resources, some resort to poaching now and then, because bush meat brings in big profits on urban markets”, Eddy Timmermans observes.*

In this context, family livestock keeping represents an accessible, stable source of income. And it does not damage the environment, because it uses little fossil fuel. Moreover, almost all the manure produced is used as fertiliser for agricultural production and the upkeep of grassland and pastures. This makes this type of livestock keeping a genuine lever for sustainable development in the regions of Africa where we work, and this is why we promote it.

### Our fight against zoonoses

To combat the emergence and spread of diseases among livestock, we are committed above all to monitoring and vaccination. In West Africa and the region of the Great Lakes,

we supported 99 vets and 1252 animal health workers in 2020. In close proximity to the herds, they keep a close eye on them to detect diseases and keep the animals in good health. The data they collect is subsequently reported and checked by experts. In this way, we can contain possible outbreaks of epidemics and avoid major losses for the livestock keepers.

However, our activities are not limited to the animals. Our main target is still the livestock keepers, and to support them better, we have been able to surround ourselves with excellent partners, as Eddy Timmermans emphasises: *“In Niger, for example, we worked with Médecins du Monde for two years in the communities of Sakoiria and Ingall. Our vaccination caravans have brought health care to more than 90,000 people and their animals.”*

To avoid the transmission of diseases through milk consumption, we also raise awareness among livestock keepers and dairy workers about the importance of hygiene when processing and handling milk. In 2020, 98% of the milk processed by the five dairies we support in Mali passed the quality control. That meant that approximately 700 litres of fresh milk per day could be sold at the markets in the Koulikoro region.

Finally, we pay very particular attention to the environment in which the livestock keepers develop with their herds. Nature plays host to pathogens that are potentially dangerous to humans, so it is in our interest to preserve as much of it as possible to avoid epidemics. In Rwanda, for example, we are contributing to slowing down the deforestation of hillsides by promoting the use of biogas (find more information on page 24) or beekeeping.



#### IDENTIFIED ISSUES



**Zoonoses are only one of the factors that make it necessary to apply the *One Health* approach in the countries where we work. We have identified six other issues that would benefit just as much from a multidisciplinary, multi-sectoral response: food safety, antimicrobial resistance, nutrition and food security, water, sanitation and hygiene, economic well-being and, last but not least, the disruption of ecosystems.**

**You will find a detailed analysis of these issues in the VSF International Policy Brief, available at: [vsf-international.org](https://vsf-international.org).**

<sup>1</sup> United Nations, 21 April 2021

<sup>2</sup> Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, 13 October 2020

# Belgium

Once again, 2020 was a year that confirmed the pertinence of our awareness-raising and advocacy activities in Belgium. Throughout the year, we continued to make the Belgian public aware of the global challenges relating to health and the environment. We organised various educational events for veterinary and agricultural science students, professionals and the general public. Our objective was to make them aware of the impact of their individual choices on the rest of the world and promote the *One Health* approach as an effective response to the challenges facing our society.

These activities were closely linked to our advocacy work in Brussels, which aims to achieve a favourable legal context for family livestock keepers in Africa (especially pastoralists) and have them recognised as key players in facing global challenges.



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## A successful digital transition

Obviously, the Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on the running of our activities. To continue our mission of development education and advocacy, our team had to redouble their creative efforts. We changed tack very quickly, focusing on digital tools. From May onwards, we organised the two finals of our student competition online. Encouraged by this initial success, we then organised a series of webinars on different topics linked to the promotion of small livestock farming according to a *One Health* approach. This enabled us to reach all our advocacy targets simultaneously: journalists, livestock keeping and animal health professionals, international political decision-makers and the civil society organisations that we work with in Africa and Europe. We also organised or participated in many online conferences and virtual filmed debates.

The digital platforms and technology enabled us to reach a wider and more diverse audience. All of this was done with the direct involvement of our partners and local stakeholders in the field. We were proud of our successful digital transition and resolved to continue along these lines after the pandemic.



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# Looking back at key moments in 2020

## Hearing at the European Parliament

At the beginning of December, we were invited to participate in the European Parliament's Development Commission. As the focal point of the Coalition of European Lobbies for Eastern African Pastoralism (CELEP), we shed our light on the repercussions of the pandemic for livestock keepers in East Africa. For weeks, these livestock keepers were subjected to restrictions of movement, imposed by their governments in an attempt to slow down the spread of the virus. This decision had serious consequences for their livelihoods and food security, which demand almost constant mobility.

During our talk, we insisted that the European Union must consider their fate in its pandemic response plan. We also suggested making use of the current crisis to reconfigure development aid in favour of small farmers, including these livestock keepers. Last but not least, we emphasised the importance of applying the One Health approach to health systems in Africa, in order to avoid future pandemics.

## Webinar – Intensification of the milk crisis in West Africa due to Covid-19

On World Milk Day, we drew attention to the impact of the coronavirus on local milk production in West Africa. Our webinar attracted 89 people, including members of civil society, the European Parliament and the FAO. Along with our partners in the campaigns 'Mon lait est local' (My Milk is Local) and 'N'exportons pas nos problèmes!' (Don't Export our Problems!), we invited five European and African speakers to explain the issues at stake: a disrupted supply chain in Africa, destabilised markets, price collapses and increasing stocks of milk surpluses in Europe. In the face of these observations and given the potential for milk production in West Africa, changes are vital. In particular, we advocate imposing coherent commercial and fiscal policies with the objective of promoting development in Africa and the European Union.

## Webinar on the crisis in the Sahel and pastoralism

In November, we examined the role that pastoralism can play in the security crisis in the Sahel. In recent years, the region has become mired in conflict, sparked among other things by extreme inequalities in access to essential services and natural resources. The situation has been worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic and climate change. In the company of experts and representatives of civil society in the Sahel, we returned to the specific features of pastoralism, the key role of pastoralist communities in mitigating the crisis and the place to be given to this important topic in Belgian policy.

## 5<sup>th</sup> edition of Jagros Day

February was marked by our day of raising awareness about food sovereignty, which is now something of a tradition. With our partners Eclasio and SOS Faim, we brought together 570 agricultural science and bioengineering students from all over Wallonia to reflect on the challenges and alternatives in agriculture and livestock keeping.

We invited a variety of speakers to inspire the young agricultural scientists: stakeholders in the rural world, NGOs and experts. Together, they discussed the various existing agricultural models and the importance of coherence in agricultural and commercial policies. To involve the audience as much as possible, we focused on interactivity, sharing and exchanges: an escape game, role plays, board games, training and encounters. Neither did we forget to mention inspiring initiatives in nutrition to add a touch of hope. The aim was to sow the seeds of change in the agricultural scientists of tomorrow.

## Eight students heading for Uganda and Rwanda

Throughout the academic year, we organised a competition to offer eight French and Dutch-speaking young people the chance to find out first-hand about our projects in Uganda and Rwanda. To qualify, 19 students designed a poster and video on a dietary problem of their choice and ways of solving it. In the virtual finals, they explained the role that development cooperation might play in resolving these problems.

After weeks of competition, Aram, Casper, Heike, Jennifer, Julie, Maïté, Marie and Victoria were the ones who were finally awarded a ticket to Uganda and Rwanda. They will accompany us on a two-week educational trip in 2021.



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**WATCH OUR WEBINARS**

**Want to watch our webinars  
(or watch them again)?  
Both recordings are available  
on our website and on our  
YouTube channel,  
DZG-VSF Belgium.**



# West Africa

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More than 20 years after starting our work in the central Sahel, we are excited to be extending our intervention area to not one but two new countries. Benin and Mauritania represent great potential for development in livestock keeping, making them the logical next step in our expansion in the region. This way, 2020 has come to represent renewal and optimism.





## Growing insecurity

However, West Africa has been far from an oasis of peace and tranquillity for the past few years, and our teams pay the price for that every day. Insecurity affects a large proportion of our intervention areas, directly threatening the livestock keepers' livelihoods. Among the 150 million inhabitants of the Sahel, four in ten live below the poverty line. With a majority of them working in the informal economy, the population is particularly vulnerable to human and climate crises.

The insecurity is at its most severe in the Liptako-Gourma triangle, where Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso meet. This region, where we have been active since our very beginnings, is particularly unstable and incidents are steadily increasing. To date, military responses to stabilise the region do not seem to have taken effect. Furthermore, 2020 saw a putsch in Mali and the Covid-19 pandemic, both of which have increased fragility in the Sahel. The total extent of repercussions is as yet unclear.

## Serious consequences for livestock keepers

Over the last two decades, we have witnessed the situation deteriorating from year to year, especially for the livestock-keeping communities we work with. Pastoralism, a way of life shared by tens of millions of citizens of the Sahel, is under a greater threat than ever before. This form of livestock keeping is characterised by almost constant mobility of the herders and their animals, depending on what the pastures have to offer them. However, the natural resources they rely on to survive are now subject to growing pressure, partly due to climate change but also to insecurity. Since this reduces mobility, it also has the effect of strongly concentrating populations and herds in certain places, which increases the likelihood of conflicts.

Furthermore, political insecurity often leads to another, more insidious risk. Uprooted and left without resources, thousands of people fleeing from violence in their home regions every day soon find themselves struck by food insecurity. In the central Sahel alone, where 1.6 million people are exiled from their own country and around 300,000 people have crossed the border to seek refuge elsewhere, there are 7.4 million people suffering from acute food insecurity. More than ever, in this difficult context that we have learned to deal with, our objective is to offer people food and economic security through livestock keeping. We also make every effort to create the conditions that are most favourable to the mobility of herds in the Sahel.

## TESTIMONIAL ↓

Like many Malians, Ag Aklin Mohammed fled the growing insecurity in his country to seek refuge in Burkina Faso with his family. When they arrived, they hardly had anything left. We gave them goats, food and training in livestock keeping. That enabled Ag to learn to feed his animals properly and prevent and treat various diseases. Today, livestock keeping allows him to meet his family's needs again and send his children to school.

**Ag Aklin Mohammed**

32 years old, originally from Timbuktu



© Martin Demay / VSF

# Burkina Faso

The countries of the Sahel have always been afflicted by recurrent droughts. In this difficult climate, livestock keepers have developed resilience that was believed to be unbreakable. Today, however, their lifestyle is faced by a double threat: on the one hand there is climate change, which is making the climate increasingly hostile to life, and on the other there is insecurity that is paralysing the herds and access to animal health care for transhumant populations.

For almost ten years now, instability has been causing a massive influx of Malian refugees, and more recently internally displaced people, that affects all thirteen regions of Burkina Faso. Fleeing from the violence in their region of origin, most of these people have had to leave everything behind. Today, although they have regained relative safety, their situation is nonetheless precarious. Living in informal camps or rehoused among the local population, they have lost everything they had. Without external aid it is practically impossible for them to return to a normal life.

To help them live in dignity and to progressively reconstitute ways of meeting their needs, we have been contributing to the humanitarian efforts in Burkina Faso since 2013. Over the course of 2020, more than 25,000 refugees and some 900,000 internally displaced persons have been assisted thanks to the partnership between local and international players.



**Hamado Ouedraogo**  
Country Director for Burkina Faso,  
based in Ouagadougou



**2,400**

PEOPLE TRAINED IN  
LIVESTOCK KEEPING AND  
AGRICULTURAL WORK

**2,050**

YOUNG PEOPLE RECEIVED  
SUPPORT TO SET UP THEIR  
OWN SMALL BUSINESS

## TESTIMONIAL ↓

“Covid-19 and insecurity sorely tried us in Burkina Faso in 2020. We find ourselves at a turning point between our traditional development activities and emergency aid.

Insecurity is growing all over the country. Our teams are no longer able to get to certain places, despite our neutrality as an NGO and the fact that our staff are Burkinabé people. In the difficult areas, livestock keeping is the only sector where people can continue to work without too many problems. Our activities are thoroughly accepted by the population. More than market gardening, in fact, because the pressure on land suitable for farming has increased with the arrival of refugees and displaced persons. Conversely, livestock keeping does not require land and does not stop people from moving.

At present, the lion's share of resources is dedicated to humanitarian activities. Without development activities, however, we cannot develop the region in the long term. This is why we are trying to combine the two. To continue our work among the most vulnerable people, we have been able to rely on our local partners. Their help has enabled us to bounce back. Once again, that demonstrates the importance of their local roots and our partnership with them.”



# Giving new opportunities to refugees... and local populations



## OUR ACTIVITY ↓

**Our presence in Burkina Faso goes back to 2005. In nine of the thirteen regions of the country, our teams cooperate with local partners, A2N and DAKUPA. As it is elsewhere in the Sahel, our intervention in Burkina Faso is based on three main principles. We facilitate livestock mobility. We boost livestock keeping and the economy by developing the value chains of milk, poultry and meat. We also reinforce small farmers' techniques and help them to diversify their livelihoods to increase their resilience. With these objectives in mind, we also work with displaced and refugee populations so that they can rebuild dignified lives protected from violence (see opposite).**

Our action plan is simple but effective, and it has proved its worth. By facilitating their inclusion in programmes provided by other development schemes, we help refugees on their way to autonomy. We do this either by strengthening their livelihoods or helping them to create innovative microbusinesses. In both cases, we offer them close monitoring and technical advice to improve their profitability. Given our expertise, we naturally focus on livestock keeping.

Social cohesion is crucial to meet the challenge of their integration. Agro-pastoralist activities encourage communities to intermingle. This proximity helps to strengthen the position of the most vulnerable refugee households in the long term. That is why all our activities are aimed at populations who welcome refugees as well. On average, our beneficiaries include 70% refugees or displaced persons and 30% local people. Altogether, almost 4,300 families were impacted by our activities in 2020.

## Rebuilding lives with livestock keeping

A majority of the targeted population are livestock keepers whose animals represent their main livelihood. To rebuild a herd sustainably, it is crucial to be able to ensure a good diet and good animal health monitoring. In 2020, we trained 2,400 people in livestock keeping or market gardening and supported the agricultural activities of 320 families. Good harvests enable them to improve both their own diets and those of their animals. 900 families also received about ten goats each, along with sufficient training.

Alongside these subsistence activities, we encourage refugees to set up businesses, whether in breeding animals for food, livestock trading, manufacturing livestock-keeping products or starting craft businesses. This is a way for them to generate income and participate in the local economy. 304 refugees, two thirds of whom are women, have benefited from almost 800 euros each to start up an activity of their choice. Three microbusinesses set up in 2019 have even signed contracts with our NGO to provide the goats we distribute to the most vulnerable households.

## Helping deprived young people achieve their dreams

The situation for young people, especially women, is particularly worrying. Many of them have had to interrupt their education, sometimes for many months or even years at a time. Finding themselves too old to go back to school, with few qualifications and no experience, they are economically, socially and psychologically vulnerable. That makes them easy prey for the armed groups that are rife in the region. Young women often lack the means to support themselves, making them even more vulnerable to gender-based violence.

Our approach, based on increasing professional skills, enables these young people to gain skills that are useful to them on the local job market. In particular, we offer training for qualifications in plumbing or masonry, including a four-month traineeship to perfect their skills. Of the 149 refugees who benefited from this scheme in 2020, 10 have already managed to strike out on their own and 24 young people have received funding to set up a small business.

Furthermore, our teams have mentored 2,050 young entrepreneurs, helping them create their business plans. In groups of 5 to 10 people, they came up with 240 ambitious projects. Some of them would like to create a small milk processing plant or soap factory, while others dream of opening a restaurant. These projects are currently awaiting evaluation in the hope of receiving financing, which is reserved for the 100 best plans. Thanks to our training, 600 displaced women were also able to develop an income-generating activity in 2020. These are essential activities that need to continue in 2021 to be able to guarantee a better future for other young people in exile.



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# Mali

Since 2012, the Malian population has been developing in a very uncertain socio-political context. The political crises have been compounded by armed conflicts and almost permanent insecurity, especially in the central and northern regions.

Moreover, the country is undergoing almost constant demographic growth. There are nearly 20 million Malians today; national agricultural production, impacted by climate change, is not sufficient to feed them. Four in ten inhabitants live in extreme poverty. The situation is particularly worrying in the densely populated rural regions in the south of the country.

© Michele Cattani / VSF



## OUR ACTIVITY ↓

**Our story in Mali began in 1997, in the south of the country. More than twenty years later, we are still working with livestock keepers in the regions of Koulikoro, Kayes and Mopti. Our team there works with our local partner, Initiatives Conseils Développement. Our shared objective is to improve food security among livestock keepers and their families. We help the most vulnerable people, particularly women, to join forces and undertake activities that complement livestock keeping, in order to guarantee them an income. In addition, we help livestock keepers access animal health services, livestock**

**markets and livestock food banks more easily. In 2020, we assisted 2,200 families who are currently generating income with their livestock-keeping activities. To care for their animals, we have helped 15 private vets set up practices in rural areas. We have also built a livestock market and set up four food banks to feed their animals. All these activities contribute to making livestock keeping a profitable activity for local communities. With the same goals in mind, we are developing milk production and we supported five mini-dairies in 2020 (see opposite).**

## Milk, a bringer of value to the rural economy

Like everywhere we work, our challenge is not merely to boost the most vulnerable communities, but above all to create favourable conditions in which they can flourish economically. In a livestock-keeping region like Koulikoro, the development of the milk industry is a natural solution to help achieve this.

Since our arrival in Mali, we have set up five mini-dairies in south-western Mali. Our intervention simultaneously targets the collection, storage, processing and distribution of milk and milk products. By setting up these mini-dairies, we have been able to focus on products with a high added value. In the light of our past experiences, we decided to continue this work in four areas of the Koulikoro region near the capital, Bamako. By the end of 2021, we hope to get around 800 milk producers involved.

Before taking action, we identified the region's main milk pools and mapped the existing collection and processing units. This work enabled us to determine eight priority areas, based on their high potential for milk production and the level of their needs. A common factor at these sites is that they have a primary milk collection system that is then channelled into the mini-dairies for processing. Butter, yoghurt and curd really do offer significant added value, yielding higher returns than milk itself.

## Guiding the milk from the producer to the consumer

In 2020, we were already able to support three mini-dairies and set up two new ones. Each of them was equipped with containers, pasteurisers, coolers or freezers. Of their 18 employees, almost two thirds are women. As the people in charge of milk processing, they have learned to make butter, yoghurt, curd and even cheese. In order to guarantee the quality of these products, they have also been made aware of good hygiene practices. Their work at the mini-dairy offers them emancipation within their household and community.

Obviously, our support is not restricted to the final link in the chain. Upstream, we also work with dairy farmers and their cooperatives. Our team targeted 127 producers who have benefited from our training and the services of five vets whom we recently established in the region. In 2020, these farmers regularly brought their milk to one of the five mini-dairies, which processed just over 700 litres of milk per day in total. The great majority of the milk supplied meets hygiene standards; only 2% of the milk collected was rejected in 2020. On average, each farmer earned 68 euros per month for the sale of their milk. Their income increased by 18% compared with 2019.

We are currently working with six cooperatives of producers, collectors and processors in the Koulikoro region. Together, we hope to set up a federation to bring together and structure the different types of stakeholders.



# 127

PRODUCERS TRAINED

# 5

MINI-DAIRIES

# 700

LITRES OF MILK  
PROCESSED PER DAY

“In the past, many livestock keepers experienced losses. They produced a lot of milk, but they couldn’t find customers to sell it to. To solve this problem, we have been given the task of turning milk into different products. Specifically, we make cheese, yoghurt, pots of cream and butter. Later on, we would like to diversify and offer different kinds of cheese.”

**Ibrahim Diakité**  
Manager of the Toubacoura  
dairy cooperative





# Niger

With more than 42 million heads of livestock for 21 million inhabitants, Niger is incontrovertibly a country of livestock keepers. Furthermore, this sector, which employs eight out of ten Nigeriens, represents an important share of the country's economy. In fact, livestock keeping is the principal livelihood of almost one in five people. Animals are therefore vital for the food security and socio-economic security of millions of people.

In the countryside, however, animal health care is often insufficient. Successive droughts have led to a chronic shortage of grain and pastures, culminating in food and farming crises. The livestock keepers have to adapt constantly to the shocks of climate hazards, not to mention the armed conflicts between communities that endanger their safety and obstruct the mobility of their livestock.



81

INFORMATION  
COLLECTORS

550,000

LIVESTOCK KEEPERS  
HAVE HAD ACCESS TO  
FIRST-HAND INFORMATION

© Tim Dirven / VSF





# Better information for transhumant livestock keepers



## OUR ACTIVITY ↓

**This year, we are celebrating twenty years of activity in south-western Niger. Over the course of those twenty years, we have developed an immense range of activities linked to livestock keeping with our local partners Karkara and CEASO-PRN. Our expertise now extends beyond animal health and food security to include the development of value chains linked to livestock keeping, the management of natural resources and the risk of disaster, and conflict prevention. Neither do we neglect the empowerment of women and political advocacy, which are important levers of change for livestock-keeping communities in Niger.**

In the Sahel, information is a valuable tool to support livestock keepers' decisions, in particular those who practise transhumance. In order to respond to their needs, we developed an innovative information system in 2016 intended for herders in the Dosso, Tahoua and Tillabéry regions.

Before it was set up, the livestock keepers explained the difficulty they had obtaining reliable information about the pastures. They used scouts to decide where to lead their herds. The scouts went out to observe the quality of the pastures and safety of the routes, then returned to advise the livestock keepers on the route their transhumance should take. On market days, conversations between livestock keepers were also an important source of information.

However, these details were often incomplete and sometimes turned out to be outdated. Thus it was not unusual for livestock keepers to have to backtrack during their transhumance, losing precious time. This meant there was a need to speed up the collection, processing and distribution of information.

### Collectors providing input for a voice server

To fill the gaps in traditional practices, we came up with a modern system based on a network of information collectors. It was a role ideally suited to government officials, private vets and certain livestock keepers who were used to collecting data and located in key geographic areas.

To facilitate their work and real-time data transmission, we gave them smartphones and solar chargers. Thanks to good network coverage, they are able to send the information they had gathered every 10 days. The data is sent to a server that our teams and the Ministry of Livestock can access. Once the data has been validated, we draw up a summary report that is distributed to the livestock keepers.

Since most of the livestock keepers are illiterate, the information is translated into the three local languages (Fulfulde, Zerma and Hausa) and transmitted on two channels. Firstly, the data is relayed by five community radio stations intended for livestock keepers. Secondly, it is also accessible on an interactive voice server that the livestock keepers can call at any time.

### A system adopted by the livestock keepers

Contrary to what we might think, more than two thirds of livestock keepers in the Sahel have a mobile phone. So all they need to do is access the number for the information they want. The data available in the voice menu includes localisation of the pastures and water sources and the concentration of herds around them. The livestock keepers can also find out about any areas affected by an epidemic, security and the value of livestock at the markets (estimated on the basis of the difference between the price of a billy goat and a bag of millet).

At present, our network in Niger already has 81 collectors whose task it is to monitor 120 grazing sites. 47 collectors were trained

and equipped in 2020, including the first two women in the network. Thanks to their work, almost 550,000 Nigerien livestock keepers have had access to first-hand information in the past year. What is more, our system is also expanding to other countries in the Sahel, specifically Mali and Burkina Faso.

The need for information seems to be most acute in the dry season (between January and June). During this period, which is becoming increasingly uncertain for the livestock keepers, we received 70% of calls to the voice server in Niger. One in three calls had to do with localising pastures. Approximately a quarter of the livestock keepers were also interested in the concentration of herds around the pastures and water sources.

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# Benin



88 %

OF THE FARMING  
POPULATION LIVES FROM  
LIVESTOCK KEEPING

Situated on the Gulf of Guinea, Benin has a variety of ecosystems suitable for different forms of livestock keeping. In the north of the country, which has a Sahelian climate, transhumance is dominant. In the south, the milder climate allows a sedentary lifestyle. Many family businesses can be found there that combine agriculture with poultry, sheep, goat or pig farming. Thus livestock keeping is an important way of life throughout the country, practised by 88% of Benin's farming population. However, the sector is experiencing difficulty developing its full potential. A lack of vets, the livestock keepers' limited technical capacity and unfavourable commercial conditions are the main reasons.

# Mauritania



70 %

OF THE POPULATION  
LIVES FROM  
LIVESTOCK KEEPING

With 4.5 million inhabitants in an area more than 33 times the size of Belgium, the Islamic Republic of Mauritania is something of an exception in the region. In fact, it is the least densely populated country in the Sahel, explained by the fact that most of its vast territory is located in the Sahara Desert. However, the country also has wide expanses of grassland, which is ideal terrain for livestock keepers. Incidentally, more than 70% of the population make a living from livestock keeping.



## OUR ACTIVITY ↓

In partnership with the Beninese Ministry of Livestock, we have embarked upon a thorough diagnostic of the veterinary services available along the borders with Nigeria, Togo and Burkina Faso. Specifically, we intend to strengthen and set up various veterinary stations at certain key locations such as Igbodja, a few miles from the Nigerian border. In this way, we hope to facilitate cross-border consultation on animal health. In parallel, we will train vets and technicians at these border stations in cartography and georeferencing of natural resources. In the future, we also intend to develop local veterinary services, promote small livestock keeping and develop cattle production businesses throughout the country.



## OUR ACTIVITY ↓

Mauritania is a country we know well, because we worked in the south-west of the country between 2004 and 2007. We returned in September 2020 with a new programme, this time in the Wilaya de l'Assaba, in the south of the country. With our local partner, the Groupement National des Associations Pastorales (National Group of Pastoral Associations), we have committed ourselves to developing agro-pastoral competitiveness in the rural areas of this region.

To start with, we will be focusing on soil management and restoration, specifically by building firebreaks, stone barriers and half-moons to protect and regenerate the pastures. These are activities that will provide work for the population and should benefit around 85,000 vulnerable agro-pastoralists over time. In the years to come, along with what we are already doing in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, we plan to develop the milk sector and local animal health.





# Great Lakes

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In the Great Lakes region, 2020 marked the end of our activities in Tanzania after five years of work with the Maasai and Datoga communities in the north of the country. In the rest of the region, our teams continued our activities, which are still vital for thousands of families. From the eastern Congo to the borders of Karamoja, we fight every day to give them prospects of a better future based on livestock keeping. And if there is one thing our long experience has taught us, it is that the involvement of women is essential for success.



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### Being born a girl is still a handicap

In Burundi, DRC, Uganda or even Rwanda, the inevitable conclusion is that the outlook for girls and women is still far from rosy. Although Rwanda has made considerable progress, the other three countries are still trailing at the bottom of world rankings for gender inequality. Even today, being born a girl is a handicap in these African countries, specifically when it comes to autonomy and access to the job market. To give just one example, approximately one in two women has no access to financial services in Rwanda or Uganda. In Burundi, this reality affects more than nine women in ten. A majority of women work in the informal economy, making them that much more vulnerable to crises.

### Family livestock keeping, the vector for the emancipation of women

How can family livestock keeping make a difference for them? In rural regions of Africa, keeping chickens, goats or rabbits allows them to access sources of income to meet their family's needs. These animals represent capital of their own to invest in an economic activity where they are the only decision-makers. In moving from the domestic sphere to the economic arena, they gain self-confidence and gradually break free from male control. Their success lends more weight to their decisions in the household and within their community.

Looking beyond the inequalities, women represent untapped potential in the fight against hunger and poverty. If they had access to livestock, equipment, credit and all the other agricultural resources to the same extent as men, it is estimated that they would produce 20 to 30 % more. The number of people in the world suffering from hunger would then decrease by 12 to 17 %. Within their families, women also play a key role in food security and malnutrition. This is because when their income increases, they are more inclined than men to use their money to take care for, clothe, educate and – above all – feed their children.

Our observations in the field tend to confirm this. Wherever we look, livestock keeping appears to be a tremendous vector of female emancipation. Whether they are vets, goat farmers, poultry vaccinators or dairy workers, all the women who cross our path demonstrate greater autonomy, which benefits their entire family. In 2020, we supported 10,216 women in the Great Lakes, amounting to one in four beneficiaries in the region.





© Amani Papy / VSF



**Patient Burume**  
Country Director for Burundi,  
based in Bujumbura



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**10,216**  
WOMEN  
SUPPORTED IN THE  
GREAT LAKES REGION

## TESTIMONIAL ↓

“Every time I go out into the field, I am moved by the changes in status of vulnerable households. Some of them are becoming potential entrepreneurs.

I remember a woman who had taken our training courses and received four goats. Later on, we coached her for a few months, giving advice on veterinary care, hygiene and animal nutrition. When we went back to see her, less than two years later, I was struck by her confidence. We sensed how proud she was of the work she had accomplished thanks to our support. She had bought more animals, improved her living conditions and increased the size of her land. At last she was able to pay her children’s school fees and afford medical care for them. She said the change had made her happy and fulfilled.

I have observed the same thing with other women on several occasions. Today they are no longer vulnerable, and that is a great victory for both them and us. However, the work is never done, and I’m convinced that we will be able to continue helping them to develop their livestock keeping activity more so that they can get the best out of it for the future.”

# Burundi

In Burundi, almost one household in two lives in poverty and food insecurity. Despite great potential, the productivity of livestock keeping is insufficient to meet the country's needs. Consequently, the population has limited access to animal products rich in protein, especially in the countryside.

Increasingly, family livestock keeping is becoming a crucial tool in the fight against food insecurity and malnutrition. This conclusion is shared by both the political decision-makers and the population. Keeping goats, rabbits and poultry are activities particularly well suited to the local constraints, since Burundi is among the most densely populated countries in Africa.



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**Daphrose Nibaruta**  
Kabataha, Mwumba

## TESTIMONIAL ↓

Daphrose Nibaruta is 36 years old and keeps poultry on Kabataha hill in northern Burundi. In February 2020, she took our poultry farming training. With a breed rooster and a chicken coop, she started a small poultry farm. Within a few months, she had a flock of 36 hens that give her eggs every day. That is enough to satisfy her customers and, above all, improve her four children's diet:

“Until recently, my son was ill all the time. The doctor advised me to vary his diet as much as possible, especially by giving him protein, but I didn't always have enough eggs and even less meat. Since my chickens started reproducing, eggs have become an integral part of our diet. The ones I sell bring in 10,000 francs a day (*about 4.30 euros, ed.*) which I use to buy food for my poultry and my family. When I look at my children now, they are in great health, and I think they are magnificent. Even my husband and I are in great shape!”



**6,000**  
ANIMALS SOLD

**300**  
FEMALE LEADERS  
TRAINED

**52**  
ASSOCIATIONS  
SUPPORTED



# Poultry farming, a means of emancipation for young people and women in Burundi



## OUR ACTIVITY ↓

**We have been working in northern Burundi since 2014. In the provinces of Ngozi and Kayanza, our team ran three projects in 2020 with our local partner UCODE-AMR. Our objective is to improve the living conditions of livestock keepers in these rural regions. Because their well-being depends directly on that of their herds, we are strengthening local veterinary services. We also apply a holistic approach to support for the most vulnerable. The targeted families receive goats and various training (in livestock-keeping techniques, literacy, nutrition and hygiene, among other things). To diversify their sources of income, we also offer them the opportunity to develop various activities linked to livestock keeping. Microloans enable them to start keeping goats, cows or poultry (see opposite).**

Although it was considered unprofitable in Burundi for many years, the image of poultry farming is improving again. In both rural and urban areas, it offers women and young people an opportunity to participate in the economic and social development of the country.

However, there is a long way to go before poultry farming becomes a flagship of the Burundian economy. The productivity of poultry-breeding businesses suffers from a lack of technical knowledge and resources (equipment, veterinary products etc.). With poor connections to the markets, breeders have difficulty selling their produce. Furthermore, there is little or no infrastructure to process their products (poultry meat and eggs).

This is the context in which we decided to intervene with breeders in four municipalities in Ngozi Province, in the north of the country. We offer them new techniques to modernise their traditional poultry-farming practices. In order to ensure they have maximum access to markets, we have adopted a 'value chain' approach. This provides specific forms of support for all stakeholders involved in poultry farming. Besides the producers, we therefore also support veterinary staff and poultry sellers. These are equally essential links in the chain, ensuring it is as profitable as possible.

## When women set the example

The four municipalities targeted have around 8,000 poultry farmers. In 2018, we started working with a thousand of them, organised into 52 associations. We asked them to elect a 'leader' on each hill from among the most experienced and motivated volunteers. In just three years, no fewer than 500 poultry farmers, both male and female, have taken on this role.

Our only condition was that they had to own more than three chickens so that they could achieve convincing results. We offered them training in poultry-breeding techniques and various resources: a rooster of an exotic breed known for its productivity, a hatchery to protect chicks from predators and chicken wire to build coops.

In 2020, we trained and equipped almost 300 leaders, all of whom were women. When their hens were crossed with exotic breed roosters, their respective flocks grew from an average of 4 to 28 hens. In total, the 52 associations sold more than 6,000 animals for a market value of approximately 39,000 euros. On average, therefore, each female leader gained about 130 euros from her poultry-keeping activity in 2020.

This increase in income is reflected mainly in their households' diet, since they can grow more crops and buy more varied food. The families also eat more eggs (almost 40% of their production, or 10% more than in 2018), and occasionally meat from their poultry.

These are promising results whose continuation depends on the good health of the livestock. To remedy the lack of vets in the hills, we are training poultry health workers from among the local poultry farmers. A total of 50 agents currently cover the area. Half of them are women, 12 of whom were trained and equipped in 2020. Their role is to treat and prevent the appearance of diseases, especially during our quarterly vaccination campaigns. To do this, they have learned to recognise the most common pathologies (Newcastle and Gumboro disease, infectious bronchitis etc.). They also ensure there is a local stock of vaccines, medicines and feed for poultry at our four agro-veterinary stores.



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# Democratic Republic of Congo

For more than two decades, the eastern Congo has been developing in a state of almost permanent insecurity. Left to their fate, the population both witness and fall victim to regular episodes of violence perpetrated by the many armed groups camped in the forests along the border with Rwanda. The result is a very precarious humanitarian situation, especially in South Kivu and Tanganyika.

In those regions, the importance of agriculture and livestock keeping is beyond all doubt. Livestock are a source of meat and milk, and also of organic manure that increases agricultural production. When combined, the two activities provide farmers with the nutrients they need for a balanced diet that would otherwise be inaccessible. Besides their nutritional qualities, meat and milk also have strong potential for the socio-economic development of rural areas. Their production and sale create many jobs, leading to an improvement in income levels.

This is hardly a new finding, but the agricultural sector is still not high on the political agenda. The amounts allocated to agriculture and livestock keeping are hardly 3% of the national budget. Consequently, the sector's development is regrettably restricted. It is expensive for livestock keepers to feed their animals, and caring for them is complicated given the scarcity of animal health services.

© Arlette Bashizi / VSF



## OUR ACTIVITY ↓

**Our presence in the eastern Congo dates back to 2007. After about a decade of intervention in North Kivu, we are now working in South Kivu and Tanganyika. In 2020, our team launched two projects to support livestock keepers, in collaboration with our local partner APDIK. The goal of the first was to improve food security among arable and livestock farmers in South Kivu by providing them with technical support. The second project, which is more extensive, aims to increase the production and marketing of rice, manioc and milk in South Kivu and Tanganyika. Our role is to reinforce the livestock keepers' technical skills and improve dairy herd health whilst developing a profitable local industry for the production and marketing of milk (see opposite).**

## Milk, the promise of development in the eastern Congo

Since 2018, our team has supported dairy farmers in South Kivu and Tanganyika to help them increase local production. Until then, they raised their cattle by traditional methods and gained a little income from the sale of their milk. Due to a lack of hygiene and equipment, they were unable to store the milk and so a significant proportion of their production was lost. Without strong farmers' organisations, they had difficulty developing a profitable industry.

Confronted with these facts, we decided to offer them a combination of technical, material and financial support. To have a real impact, however, our support could not be limited to livestock keepers. In fact, it is crucial to support all the stakeholders in the sector, both upstream and downstream. That is why we also target vets, collectors, transformers and milk sellers in the region.

### The key to good milk production is the cows' diet

When we arrived, most of the targeted livestock keepers did not have the resources to give their animals a sufficiently rich diet throughout the year. Once fodder stocks were exhausted, the cows' milk production rapidly declined, depriving the families of animal protein and income.

To solve this problem, we trained almost 4,000 fodder planters and set up 45 'field schools'. The farmers went there to learn modern techniques for growing the fodder

crops that are most suitable for feeding cattle. The leguminous plants and grasses planted on 138 hectares of pasture enabled the livestock keepers to harvest 54 tons of fodder in 2020. We also taught them to store it so that the cattle would have ongoing access to a diet rich in protein and nutrients throughout the year. Between March 2019 and December 2020, milk production rose from 0.5 to 1.7 litres per day.

### Animal health and genetic improvement

However, good milk production is also linked to the breed of cattle and the quality of care the animals receive. This is why we provide a genetic improvement programme as well, and strengthen the capacities of private vets and local inseminators.

In 2020, we established fifteen private vets in South Kivu and Tanganyika. Kitted out with a motorbike, veterinary products and equipment, they provide a local service for livestock keepers far from the large conurbations. Of those fifteen, eleven have also been trained in artificial insemination. Of the 261 cows inseminated in late 2020, 178 are pregnant, which means a success rate of 68 %. Three years from now, the females born from this round of insemination should be capable of producing milk in greater quantities than the local breeds. The males will make it possible to continue genetic improvement in the region, in order to increase local milk production in the long term.



## Developing the collection and processing of milk

If production increases, there also needs to be a way to sell it. To facilitate the sale of milk, we trained and equipped 225 people in 2020, most of whom were women. They received coolers and stainless steel recipients to store the milk better. We also coached six mini-dairies to improve their hygiene, quality, collection and processing practices. Among other things, we equipped them with solar freezers for storage, collection jugs and gas stoves for pasteurisation. The employees also learned to turn the milk into curd and yoghurt. This is an efficient way of improving the local population's access to a healthy, nutritious and high-quality product in a lasting manner.



TESTIMONIAL ↓

↑

**Noëlla Shabani**  
Luvungi, au Sud-Kivu

Noëlla Shabani is 30 years old and has many years of experience in marketing local milk. Since she was 16, she has been selling her cows' milk in the Luvungi region in South Kivu. She has learned to combine this activity with bringing up her seven children. Noëlla has been one of the 40 sellers in the local cooperative COOPALU right from the outset. In 2018, they received equipment to help them store and process their milk better. They also took our training in finance, hygiene and management. That opportunity marked a turning point in Noëlla's life:



**4,000**

FODDER PLANTERS  
TRAINED

**68 %**

SUCCESS RATE IN  
ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATIONS

**225**

PEOPLE TRAINED  
AND EQUIPPED

“Before that training in managing our income, the business only provided enough to feed us. Now I can contemplate a more comfortable future for my family. I divide up the money I earn: I save some of it and the rest is used for the children's education. If I can keep up my current sales in the next five years, I will be able to buy cows, build a house and send my children to the best schools.”



# Rwanda

In Rwanda, wood and charcoal account for approximately 85 % of the total primary energy consumption. More than 90 % of households use these fuels for cooking, which leads to systematic deforestation of the hills.

In order to tackle the problem, the government set up a national programme in 2007 aiming to equip some 110,000 farmers with biodigesters. This is because biogas is considered one of the most ecological fuels. Nevertheless, it has taken time for farmers to adopt this technology, due to a lack of information, income or simply because they had other priorities. Moreover, few local stakeholders have the expertise required in this area.

To support the initiative, we decided to develop our own projects based on green energy and livestock keeping. This has led to the installation of no fewer than 542 biodigesters for small dairy farmers in the districts of Huye, Nyanza, Ruhango and Nyamagabe since 2014. These installations allow them to convert their cows' dung into gas for cooking.



**83,2 %**

DECREASE IN  
WOOD CONSUMPTION  
FOR HEATING

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# Green energy to conquer a thousand hills



## OUR ACTIVITY ↓

**Our activities in Rwanda are concentrated in the Southern Province, one of the poorest in the country. We have been working there since 2001, in partnership with two of the biggest livestock keepers' associations in the country, IMBARAGA and ARDI.**

**Although biogas is one of our flagship activities, our team also develops many other activities to support Rwandan livestock keepers. As is the case in all our areas of intervention, we improve animal health by helping private vets to set up local practices in remote regions. We also strengthen the food security of hundreds of vulnerable families by distributing livestock animals among them and giving them access to microcredit.**

If human health depends directly on a healthy environment, the same applies to animal health. Fighting deforestation by promoting biogas thus takes on a whole new level of meaning for an organisation like ours.

In cooperation with our local partner Imbarga and local government, we have developed an approach based on raising awareness and training. Our team goes to meet villagers to explain the issues involved in climate change and the benefits of biogas. Then we check that the farmers who are interested meet the conditions required to join the programme.

This is because having at least two cows kept permanently in stalls and having continuous access to water are crucial for optimal use of the biodigester. However, the livestock keepers must also be able to provide some of the materials and make a financial contribution to the construction of the installation. Last but not least, they commit to taking training to ensure the ongoing maintenance of the biodigester.

To gather the funds they need for their own contribution, those who wish to do so can benefit from a microloan. In exchange for a guarantee fund, we have negotiated reduced-rate loans with a local microfinancing institution. We have also taken on the purchase of cement and the masons' wages.

## Energy based on cow dung

The production of biogas requires an ongoing supply of cow dung mixed with water. Since the latter is particularly precious in the hills, cow urine has turned out to be a perfect substitute. To facilitate efficient and hygienic collection of the dung and urine, we offer to refit the livestock keepers' stalls. We teach them to use the

gas produced in the kitchen and also to use the digestate, the cow dung residue left behind by the biodigester. This product can be spread on the fields as a top quality natural fertiliser that improves crop yields.

Although it has huge benefits, this green technology is a privilege reserved for the wealthiest farmers. In rural areas, there are many people who have neither a cow nor an income, which makes biogas inaccessible to them. To include the most vulnerable people in efforts to protect the environment, we offer to build them better stoves. These stoves also allow them to limit their wood consumption without requiring major financial input.

After our information sessions, 124 livestock keepers in Southern Province opted for biogas in 2020. Our team also refitted 176 stalls and repaired 63 biodigesters built previously under the national programme, bringing our annual total to 187 functioning installations. We also financed the manufacture of 521 improved stoves that were fitted in the homes of vulnerable families.

## A positive report for the environment and families

The benefits to the environment are clear: the consumption of wood for heating by households has dropped by 83.2 %. However, the benefits of green gas for cooking do not end there: all the users reported a considerable decrease in respiratory and eye diseases. Families are also noticing a major improvement in hygiene. What is even better is that biogas even improves equality between men and women: following the installation of biodigesters, six out of ten men stated that they had started cooking. Released from the task of

collecting wood, the women have more time to spend on an economic activity, whilst the children can spend their time on schoolwork.

On the financial side, the owners of biodigesters save about € 12.50 per month, or € 150 per year. That is due to the savings on fuel and chemical fertilisers that are replaced by the digestate. When used as a fertiliser, moreover, the latter considerably increases agricultural production. This gives the families access to a more varied diet, improving the food security and health of the whole family.

# 124

LIVESTOCK KEEPERS  
SUPPORTED

# 187

FUNCTIONING  
INSTALLATIONS

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# Uganda

Of all the regions in Uganda, Karamoja is surely the least typical. The region has experienced more than three decades of unrest, which have contributed to the social, political and cultural marginalisation of its approximately 1.2 million inhabitants.

Although the state strongly encourages agriculture, it has hardly developed in the region because of the semi-arid climate. Thus four in five inhabitants mainly make a living from livestock keeping, although this sector does not benefit from significant state support. In general, educational and health services are underdeveloped in the region. Unsurprisingly, development indicators there are still weak: the level of multidimensional poverty<sup>1</sup> is close to 96 % and two thirds of the adult population can neither read nor write.

Aside from the statistics, however, Karamoja is characterised above all by an ancestral way of life: pastoralism. As the seasons change, the Karamojong move with their herds in search of water and good quality pastures. Accustomed to adapting to the difficult climate since the dawn of time, they are now under severe pressure from climate change that is causing periods of extreme drought. Although their herds are not decreasing, water sources are drying up faster than ever, given the lack of human and financial resources to maintain them.

<sup>1</sup> The multidimensional poverty index (MPI) identifies the different forms of deprivation suffered by an individual or a household in terms of health, education and standard of living.







## OUR ACTIVITY ↓

**We have been working in north-eastern Uganda with Karamojong livestock keepers for almost fifteen years. Over time, we have developed a strong cooperation with three local partners: DADO, MADEFO and KDF. We are currently active in the districts of Moroto, Karenga and Kaabong. To ensure that marginalised livestock keepers can live there in dignity, we are making every effort to improve the health and productivity of their livestock. In parallel, we are also helping communities to develop other income-generating activities linked to livestock keeping and to gain access to credit and markets. Furthermore, we contribute to the preservation and sharing of natural resources. This is because water and pastures are so crucial to the herders that they are often the subject of clashes between neighbouring communities. We help livestock keepers to manage these conflicts peacefully as well as making their voices heard and defending their interests.**

## Severe blow to animal health

When it comes to veterinary care, the situation in Karamoja is far from enviable. Because of the long distances to travel, the cost of veterinary services is high, which impedes the development of the private sector. Consequently, it is the region with the poorest coverage in terms of veterinary services. For an area almost the size of Belgium and an estimated number of livestock exceeding 3.5 million animals, Karamoja only has about 20 vets.

These are exactly the reasons why our activity there is so vital. Having been unable to establish private vets in the region up to now, we are proud of having developed strong animal health services. These are based on a network of community animal health workers selected and trained from within pastoralist communities.

### Livestock keepers trained in animal care

In the districts of Kaabong, Karenga and Moroto, no fewer than 178 animal health workers currently work for local livestock keepers. Together, they contribute to the prevention and treatment of the most common diseases. Once they have completed their training, each of them receives the essential equipment to provide basic animal care. Every year, they take part in our vaccination and anti-tick spraying campaigns, and they also intervene when epidemics strike.

The local population is aware of the importance of disease prevention and reacts positively to their presence. Throughout the year, their services are in high demand, even though they have to be paid for. In one year, each of our animal health workers cares for an average of 112 livestock keepers' animals, representing a total of more than 20,000 families assisted by the entire network.

Organised into eight associations, the animal health workers meet up to exchange good practices and discuss their difficulties. We also offer them regular training in order to keep their knowledge and skills up to date. Certain associations have also received a motorbike. The members use it in turn to reach the remotest herds or stock up on medicines in the city.

In addition, we have built a veterinary pharmacy for each association. The animal health workers take turns working there to give local livestock keepers advice and provide them with animal care products. The profits from their sales are reinvested in the association.

In spite of the pandemic, 70 % of the targeted communities appreciated the animal health services offered in 2020, which is 20 % more than at the start of the project. Despite severe restrictions of movement and transport due to the pandemic, which limited sales and opportunities to restock, five of the eight veterinary points of sale were profitable in 2020.



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178

ANIMAL HEALTH WORKERS  
WORKING FOR LOCAL  
LIVESTOCK KEEPERS

20,000

FAMILIES ASSISTED

70 %

OF THE TARGETED  
COMMUNITIES SATISFIED

# They support us

We carried out our activities in 2020 with the support of many donors. In particular, we worked with:

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- CNCD–11.11.11
- Enabel
- European Union
- Flemish Government
- International Organization for Migration
- Millenium Challenge Corporation
- Province of Flemish Brabant
- Province of East Flanders
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