

Vétérinaires
Sans Frontières
Dierenartsen
Zonder Grenzen



Activity report

VSF BELGIUM
2021

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 through humanitarian activities and development campaigns. 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 Belgium helps livestock keepers to build a better future for themselves, in harmony with nature. 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. We also work on the sustainable protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems.

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**Raising awareness:
our mission in Belgium**



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*“The health of humans,
animals and the environment
they live in are
inextricably linked.”*

Guy Hendrickx
Chairman of Vétérinaires
Sans Frontières Belgium

Climate change, the disastrous loss of biodiversity and the increasing spread of zoonoses – infections that pass from animals to humans – have set many alarm bells ringing in recent years. Covid-19 has proved to us all what can happen if a local zoonosis grows into a global pandemic. We were all still experiencing the consequences in 2021, and new pandemics may yet emerge. So this is the crucial time for us to come up with solutions together to the huge challenges facing humanity.

The health of humans, animals and the environment they live in are inextricably linked. That is why Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium is such a great advocate of the principles of “One Health”. This is a multidisciplinary approach that investigates aspects of human, animal and environmental health all together, from different perspectives, to find responses to the most pressing health challenges facing our world and society.

The annual report you are holding reflects this holistic approach. Our motto, “Healthy animals, healthy people, healthy planet” is more relevant today than ever before. In three chapters, we will take you through our efforts to promote the health of animals and people in Africa, and to protect the fragile environment they live in. In our own country, we continued to ramp up our efforts to raise awareness of these vital issues in 2021.

The past year was a very busy one. By training and supporting vets, Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium helped to track and treat diseases swiftly. We invested in livestock and poultry vaccination campaigns and we supported crop-growing programmes that respect animal welfare and the environment. Healthy animals are a prerequisite for food security and a fair income for livestock keepers, so that they can live dignified lives in balance with their surroundings, and with a stronger position in society for women. Soil, grassland and water management were important aspects of our wide-ranging work.

In 2021, various countries in the Sahel and Central Africa were struggling more than ever with the effects of climate change. They experienced a steep increase in natural disasters, failed crops, rising food prices, conflicts and flows of refugees. This put pressure on local communities who rely on livestock farming for a

living, and more and more of them were forced to flee. That is why we set up humanitarian aid campaigns in five countries. You can read more about that new activity in this report. Displaced persons and refugees are assisted as quickly as possible and receive new vocational training. That way, we provide humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable groups where it has the greatest impact. We will be able to support more than 80,000 people through this programme in the next two years.

2022 will be another year full of challenges. The war in Ukraine is hindering the export of grain worldwide, which has a significant impact on food supplies in our project countries. That makes our work in nine African countries more necessary than ever. Furthermore, plans are already in place to set up new activities in Benin.

None of this would have been possible without the untiring efforts and resilience of our teams and donors, and the loyal support of our sympathisers. We can be proud of what we have achieved. Despite the difficult circumstances we often have to work in, we are continuing to commit all our energy to the most vulnerable livestock-keeping communities in Africa.

We thank you for this from the bottom of our hearts.

Brussels, July 2022



Healthy animals, healthy people

OUR MISSION

Empowering 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 13 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.

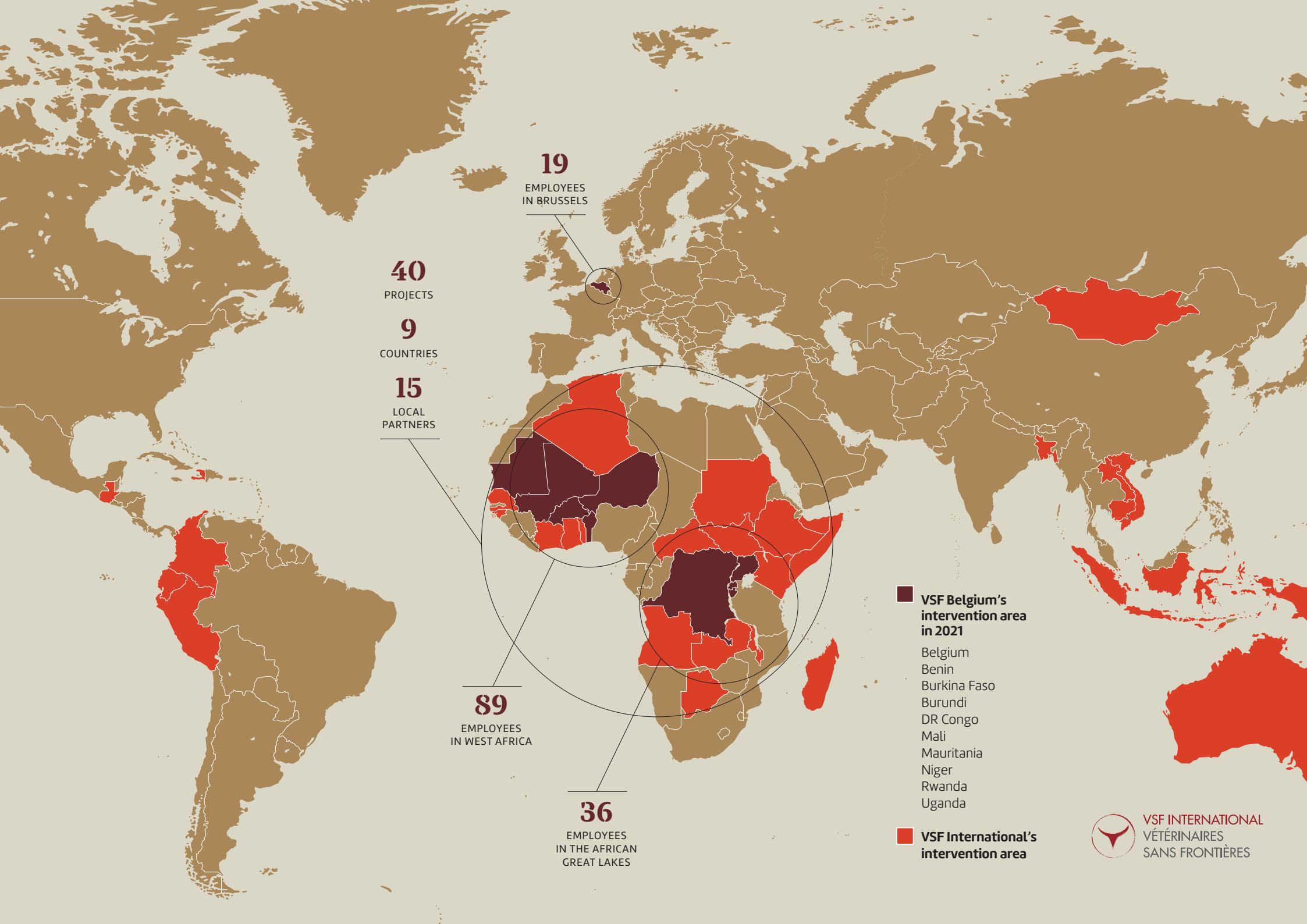
The network enables us to better co-ordinate the location of our work and makes it possible to pool our resources. It also encourages members to share their experiences and their expertise; this helps to develop our skills and those of our partners.

VSF International has been headquartered in the same building in Brussels as Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium since 2014.

www.vsf-international.org



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19

EMPLOYEES
IN BRUSSELS

40

PROJECTS

9

COUNTRIES

15

LOCAL
PARTNERS

89

EMPLOYEES
IN WEST AFRICA

36

EMPLOYEES
IN THE AFRICAN
GREAT LAKES

**VSF Belgium's
intervention area
in 2021**

Belgium
Benin
Burkina Faso
Burundi
DR Congo
Mali
Mauritania
Niger
Rwanda
Uganda

**VSF International's
intervention area**



VSF INTERNATIONAL
VÉTÉRINAIRES
SANS FRONTIÈRES

2021: Return to our humanitarian origins

Every day, the humanitarian situation in the world seems more alarming than the day before.

In 2021, the United Nations agencies identified 235 million people in need and 89.3 million displaced persons in the world. Those numbers are twice as high as they were 10 years ago. Africa alone provides refuge for almost 36 million displaced persons.

Among them are many people fleeing from conflicts. But that is not the only cause of the exodus. Over the last thirty years, the number of natural disasters has increased threefold. Hurricanes, wildfires, flooding, droughts ... the consequences of climate disruption weigh more heavily each day on people fleeing their homes. Making access to resources even more difficult, these climate phenomena tend to intensify conflicts, for example in the Sahel. It is a vicious circle that seems increasingly difficult to break.

This is the case with the crisis that has been unfolding in the Sahel for more than a decade. At the end of 2021, 10.5 million Sahelians were on the brink of famine. This figure has tripled in three years, and is likely to skyrocket due to the effects of the war in Ukraine. Livestock keepers are especially severely affected. With conflicts in the region putting their safety and the movements of their herds at risk, the effects of climate change are increasing the pressure on the water and pastures that are essential to their survival. In 2021, the closure of certain borders to limit the spread of Covid-19 seriously disrupted their activities. Today, they are suffering from a spike in the price of imported grain that is making the price of livestock at market crash.



© Tim Dirven / VSF

“The proliferation of armed conflicts, the upsurge in extreme climate and weather events and the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic have led to the multiplication of humanitarian disasters. Some crises get extensive news coverage, while others are more subtle and have difficulty attracting the attention of the public and political decision-makers.”

Xavier Argoud
Coordinator of our
humanitarian programmes

URGENT ACTION IN THE FACE OF GROWING DISTRESS

Our teams in the Sahel witness this distress every day, and the region of the Great Lakes has not been spared either. Faced with an ever-growing influx of refugees and displaced people on all sides, we cannot simply sit and watch. This is why we have decided to resume our humanitarian campaigns. *“This is not a new field of work for our NGO. Our first emergency campaigns date back to the 1990s, when we brought aid to the pastoralist populations of South Sudan and Kenya struck by drought and floods”*, Xavier Argoud recalls.

A few years ago, our team in Burkina Faso started working with Malian refugees and displaced people in different regions of the country. *“Our activities aim to offer new perspectives to these people, especially to women and young people. To give them the chance to rebuild their lives, we encourage them to take professional training and set up microbusinesses”*, Xavier Argoud adds. (For more info about these activities, see page 11.)

This is an experience we would like as many people as possible to benefit from, beyond Burkina Faso and even the Sahel. With our EU Humanitarian Partnership Certificate in hand, our teams launched a programme on an international scale in autumn 2021. Between now and 2023, this new programme will come to the aid of 80,000 people in five countries in West Africa and the Great Lakes region. However, our activities are not focused exclusively on livestock-keeping communities: *“This is one of the great principles of humanitarian work: assist the most vulnerable, irrespective of their nationality, religion, social status, ethnicity or political affiliations”*, Xavier Argoud continues. *“Whatever the situation, nobody must be left behind. This implies a focus on people’s vulnerability, whether or not they have an activity related to livestock keeping.”*

MAKING A REAL DIFFERENCE THROUGH LIVESTOCK KEEPING

To be able to offer the best possible assistance, we have chosen to prioritise the areas where we are already active in development work. This is a well-considered choice, our coordinator explains: *“We want to act where we can make a real difference. To succeed, we need a thorough understanding of the context, the communities and their needs, and to work with well-established local partners.”*

Whether we work in emergency aid or development, our specific field is the same: *“In the regions where we work, four out of five people on average make a living from livestock keeping. For the people who arrive there as refugees, Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium’s expertise in livestock keeping is genuinely valuable. Few humanitarian players specialise in this area. We want to help improve the quality of support offered through livestock-keeping activities, and we want to raise the humanitarian standards in this field.”*

By concentrating on the areas and issues we understand best, we can guarantee the continuity of our assistance. Our humanitarian interventions help populations to meet their fundamental needs in critical situations. Usually, these interventions take the form of veterinary support, help with food security, nutrition and livelihoods, or strengthening social cohesion. Once the emergency has passed, our development programmes take over to support the populations in the longer term.

PROTECTING LIVESTOCK KEEPERS AND THEIR LIVELIHOODS

Whether in Niger, Mali or Burkina Faso, in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo or in north-eastern Uganda, populations suffer from violence committed by armed militias on a daily basis. In the face of this strong resurgence of insecurity, the stabilisation of the targeted regions is a central tenet of our new programme. In this extremely volatile situation, the first mission of our humanitarian teams is to protect local populations.

This means protecting their livelihoods and their access to natural resources. For example, we offer refugees and displaced people resources to set up livestock-keeping activities and thus generate income, and we repair or build water points for their animals. Throughout all this, we emphasise social cohesion, which is crucial to the integration of newcomers: *“It’s important not to create tensions between displaced people and their hosts. An influx of newcomers puts pressure on local communities. That’s why we always select some of our beneficiaries from among the host communities”*, he adds.

These are principles that we always apply to all our emergency interventions. This programme spanning multiple countries demonstrates our will to reconnect with our roots and to increase the volume of our humanitarian activities. And we want to go further still. Already other emergency projects for 2022 are taking shape, specifically in Mauritania and Niger. All of them have the same goal: to act where human needs are most critical and to provide the best possible assistance, in spite of the constraints imposed by insecurity and the terrain.

“We want to act where we can make a real difference. To succeed, we need a thorough understanding of the context, the communities and their needs, and to work with well-established local partners.”

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Healthy animals



1,283

ANIMAL HEALTH WORKERS
AND VETERINARY ASSISTANTS
SUPPORTED IN 2021

133

PRIVATE VETS
ASSISTED

14.7

MILLION ANIMALS TREATED
AND VACCINATED

VETS ARE OUR FIRST LINE OF DEFENCE AGAINST PANDEMICS

Every year for more than two decades, a new infectious disease has emerged among animals that can be transmitted to humans. A disease like this is called a zoonosis. Rabies, avian flu, Ebola, Lassa or Rift Valley fever, tuberculosis, Covid-19 and, more recently, monkeypox ... although some are unfamiliar, they all have one thing in common: if they are not dealt with, they can evolve rapidly into a global pandemic. And cause countless casualties.

Vets are a first line of defence against this threat. But this line of defence is under constant attack. Here in Belgium, there is an impending shortage of vets in rural areas, and in most African countries the situation is far worse still. Findings are the same in the Sahel as in the region of the Great Lakes: animal health professionals are rare, or even completely absent, in rural areas. The particularly difficult reality of the terrain has something to do with it: rough roads, insecurity, supply problems, a lack of equipment ... the list is long and daunting to many. Livestock keepers and their herds are the first to suffer.

At Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium, we believe that this situation is not inevitable. Our objective is to create a high-quality animal health system that is accessible to all and economically profitable. With this in mind, we set up private, locally-based veterinary services as close as possible to the livestock keepers. To attract vets to regions with poor coverage, we help them to set up their practice and provide a technical and material support package. Depending on the context, we also train a network of community animal health workers from among the livestock keepers to assist them.

Altogether, we currently support around 1,500 vets, veterinary assistants and animal health workers in nine countries, from Mali to the Democratic Republic of Congo. These professionals offer constant advice, care and vaccines to treat and prevent animal diseases before they evolve into pandemics and start to affect us all. In this way, they support the livelihoods of thousands of African livestock keepers.



Our local private
veterinary services
in Rwanda ↓

81

ACTIVE VETS,
OF WHOM

20%

ARE WOMEN

-4%

MORTALITY IN CATTLE
AND

-8%

IN GOATS
OVER 5 YEARS

95%

SATISFACTION AMONG
LIVESTOCK KEEPERS

Discover all the details
of our support to private
vets in Rwanda on our
thematic fact sheet ↓



Rwanda

50 NEW VETS
TO TACKLE ZOONOSSES

In 2021, livestock farmers in the South Province were confronted with two new animal epidemics: swine erysipelas and African swine fever. These two highly contagious diseases require health measures including strict isolation, which have severe economic consequences. The ban on the sale of pigs at market effectively means a direct loss of revenue for the livestock keepers. So for the good of their families, it was vital to contain the two epidemics rapidly. Thanks to the combined efforts of private and state veterinary services to vaccinate the herds and raise awareness among livestock keepers, we were able to reduce the spread and socio-economic impact of the diseases.

This situation demonstrates once again that our animal health activities in Rwanda are necessary. Since 2014, we have been committed to increasing the capacities of locally-based private veterinary services in the country. In 2021, no fewer than 50 technicians and private vets strengthened our animal health network in Rwanda. They joined the other 31 vets and technicians who already work in the South Province thanks to our support. Together, they guarantee access to animal health care for the livestock of some 180,000 livestock farmers in four of the country's provinces.

We took our usual approach, providing the same financial and material support as well as training to all 50 new recruits. This formula has proved its worth, if the results obtained over the last five years are to be believed. After being made aware of the best practices for livestock keeping, livestock farmers call on animal health services much more frequently. In fact, the services provided by vets tripled between 2017 and 2021, along with the vets' revenues. Our surveys among their clients reveal a 95% satisfaction rate and a significant reduction in the mortality rate of livestock: between 2017 and 2021, that rate dropped from 8 to 4% in cattle and 11 to 3% in goats.



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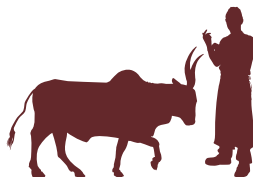
Dr Safi Ngomora
age 29, vet in Katana,
South Kivu (DR Congo)

“South Kivu is a predominantly pastoral province. People here attach particular importance to their animals, sometimes to the point of living with them. So if an animal carries a disease that can be transmitted to humans, the whole family is at great risk. Last year, children died after eating diseased pork meat. Many women also suffer from sterility or lose a child after contracting brucellosis from the milk of sick cows.

As a vet, I have the power to act to prevent that. Prevention is one of my priorities. Livestock keepers need to understand that caring for their animals also means preserving human health.”



Our local private
veterinary services
in South Kivu and
Tanganyika ↓



23

VETS AND

290

COMMUNITY ANIMAL
HEALTH WORKERS

14,387

BENEFICIARY LIVESTOCK
KEEPERS

86,577

ANIMALS CARED FOR

Discover our fact sheet
on animal health
in the Democratic
Republic of Congo ↓



SCAN ME

Democratic Republic of Congo

**SURGERY AND VACCINATION TO REDUCE
THE MORTALITY RATE AMONG CATTLE**

Our team has been active in South Kivu since 2017 and in Tanganyika since 2019, expanding the animal health network, which is poorly developed in eastern Congo. Since 2017, 23 new private vets have come to increase the services on offer to livestock keepers in the two provinces. Supported by a network of ten to fifteen community animal health workers, each of them has a catchment area of almost 3000 square kilometres in total (an area equivalent to West Flanders).

In 2021, these vets and their community workers were able to treat around 87,000 animals belonging to more than 14,000 livestock keepers. As our approach dictates, we also offered them technical training to meet their practical needs. This time, our teams emphasised bovine surgery. The objective was to reduce livestock losses resulting from complications during calving or obstructions in the digestive tract. Specifically, the vets learned how to conduct Caesarean sections and rumenotomies¹. This way, we hope to lower the bovine mortality rate in the area even further, which has already dropped from 5 to 3% over the last five years.

This is an impressive figure, given the regular outbreaks of animal epidemics in the region. In 2021, our teams detected two epidemic outbreaks in the Uvira territory and the Kalehe highlands. Cattle there were struck successively by foot and mouth disease, contagious bovine pleuropneumonia and blackleg. These extremely contagious diseases have disastrous consequences for the livestock and may be fatal. As such, they seriously endanger the delicate economic balance among the population, most of whom depend on livestock breeding in a prevailing context of insecurity. Fortunately, the private veterinary services contributed to containing these outbreaks, in particular by vaccinating the healthy livestock.

¹ Surgical incision of the rumen (one of the stomachs of a ruminant) to extract a foreign body.

© Koen Mutton / VSF



Our work
in Mali ↓



165

ACTIVE
VACCINATORS

40

VILLAGES
SERVED

© Koen Mutton / VSF



Mali

**ALMOST 50,000 POULTRY VACCINATED
AGAINST NEWCASTLE DISEASE**

In 2021, we trained and equipped 90 poultry vaccinators in south-western Mali. Their mission was to protect poultry farms against Newcastle disease in the rural areas of the Nara, Kolokani and Banamba cercles. Although we do have 28 private vets here, there are not enough of them to cover the entire area (which is larger than Belgium!) and treat the hundreds of thousands of animals in the region.

Newcastle disease wreaks havoc among Malian poultry keepers every year. It is a very virulent disease that spreads rapidly among chickens, guinea fowl and other poultry. The disease kills a large proportion of infected animals in record time. This situation can largely be avoided by vaccination. Currently there are 165 vaccinators working in 40 villages, where they organise two vaccination campaigns per year. In 2021, they were able to immunise almost 50,000 birds.

Outside these vaccination periods, however, the animal health workers also have their work cut out for them. During our training module, they also learn about techniques to remove parasites, appropriate care for poultry and measures to prevent the most common diseases. This is the subject of a major awareness-raising campaign throughout the year among the many vulnerable families who practice poultry farming. When necessary, the health workers can also examine the families' poultry. Although their services have to be paid for, animal health workers do not have the expensive travel costs that vets do. This enables them to help make animal health care more widely available and provide better health cover for poultry.

The income from community health work makes a particularly significant contribution to the family income of the 40 female animal health workers. In fact, this extra income allows them to have a greater say in family decisions. Moreover, many studies have shown that women allocate more money to their children's education and to feeding their family than men do.



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Healthy people

LIVESTOCK KEEPING AS A STARTING POINT FOR HUMAN HEALTH

In a time of climate change, livestock keeping has become an essential strategy of resilience in sub-Saharan Africa. Whether in the Sahel or the Great Lakes region, it has been a long time since agriculture alone was enough to feed everyone.

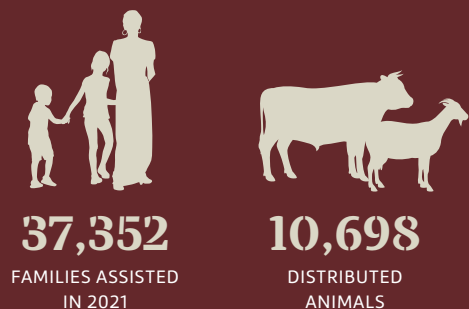
In West Africa, the arid climate is increasingly preventing crops from thriving. In Central Africa, the density of the population in combination with erosion is exhausting the soil. Thus livestock keeping is a way to meet the needs of families in most rural areas.

Cows, goats, camels, sheep and poultry... animals are at the heart of African livestock keepers' lives, whether they are nomadic or sedentary. As a key element in their cultures, determining their social status, cattle simultaneously represent a source of protein and organic manure, a means of transport and source of labour, but above all a way to generate income and savings.

This close relationship also determines the health of the entire family, from the most vulnerable to the most prosperous households. Directly or indirectly, livestock animals contribute to their nutritional and food security. For example, a few chickens or goats are enough to provide a family with a daily ration of eggs or milk, both of which are rich in protein. If a family produces enough, the surplus can be sold to obtain other food and to ensure a more balanced diet. If a family member should fall ill, a sheep or cow can be sold to cover the costs of treatment.

On one condition, of course: that the animals are in good health. To make sure of that, our animal health networks monitor them. But although diseases are a real threat to livestock productivity, they are certainly not the only thing holding it back. Diet, hygiene, habitat and even reproductive cycles are other variables that need to be tackled so that families can earn a decent livelihood from their animals.

Since livestock keeping is not something you can make up as you go along, our teams offer their support to the rural populations of the Sahel and the Great Lakes. Thanks to a combination of the best livestock keeping and management techniques, the animals produce high-quality meat, milk or eggs in greater quantities. And thanks to microloans and better access to markets, many farmers are even discovering they have a talent for entrepreneurship. This way, livestock keeping contributes to the diversification of income and increases the livestock keepers' resilience in the face of setbacks, as well as their buying power. This approach is equally applicable to our development projects and our humanitarian activities, always ensuring that we adapt our strategy to the context and beneficiaries.



Our work
in Burkina Faso ↓



75%

OF MICROBUSINESSES
GENERATE PROFITS
AFTER 6 MONTHS

61%

OF THE PROJECTS
ARE RUN BY WOMEN

Burkina Faso

450 EUROS TO START A NEW LIFE THANKS TO LIVESTOCK KEEPING

Even when you have lost everything, it is possible to rebuild your life quickly as a livestock keeper. Our teams in Burkina Faso have been proving this for several years now in their work with refugees and displaced persons in the Sahel and central regions. With an average budget of 450 euros per beneficiary, they help hundreds of people every year to launch their entrepreneurial livestock-keeping microprojects.

Fattening cattle, setting up a small animal or fodder business or processing and selling dairy products ... there are plenty of options that enable these uprooted people to generate the income they need to start their new lives. These activities also help them integrate themselves into the local economy.

In the great majority of cases, they do not have to wait long for a return on investment. After seven or eight months of support and an initial grant, three out of four entrepreneurs are already drawing an income from their new activity: from 23 euros per month up to 115 for the highest-performing businesses. That is a great success, considering that the average monthly income in Burkina Faso is 183 euros. The money is mainly used to feed the entrepreneur's family, for medical care and for children's education.

Despite these good results, the project is not suitable for every group in the population. In fact, its success requires a good understanding of livestock keeping techniques and a horizontal diversification of a family's means of subsistence. That is why everyone selected to participate in the project has already practised traditional livestock keeping in the past. They also have a commercial activity alongside their microproject that generates an income to meet the family's immediate needs while waiting for their first animals, fodder or milk to be ready for sale.

In 2021, almost two out of three projects were run by women. This is hardly surprising, given that they make up the majority of displaced persons and refugees in the world.



© Amani Papy / VSF

Fabiola Ngendakumana
age 21, Murambi Hill,
Busiga (Burundi)

After her parents' death, Fabiola Ngendakumana found herself caring for her younger brother alone. With no resources, the two orphans faced difficult times and great hardship. But Fabiola is a fighter. Selected to receive four goats, the young woman decided to take on the challenge.

A few months (and a few goats) later, she was producing enough manure to sell some of it. This income enabled her to buy seeds and rent fields where she and her brother grow beans, maize, potatoes, sweet potatoes and rice. The manure means that their harvests are abundant enough to fill their stomachs, and from time to time they share some of their produce with neighbours in need. Today Fabiola has a new project: rabbit breeding. The road is long, but Fabiola is optimistic about the future: *"These goats helped us get back on our feet"*, she explains.

Burundi

KEEPING GOATS TO BREAK THE VICIOUS CIRCLE OF FOOD INSECURITY

In Burundi, food insecurity affects almost one family in two. The country is smaller than Belgium, with a population of twelve million inhabitants, of whom nine out of ten make a living from agriculture. Over the years, constant demographic growth has led to smaller plots of land. These plots are overexploited, making them less and less fertile: harvests are insufficient to feed everyone.

Our team is trying to break this vicious circle in eight communities in the rural provinces of Ngozi and Kayanza, in the north of the country. Since 2016, we have been developing a multidimensional approach based on goat rearing. It is aimed at the most vulnerable families who start out with nothing. The aim is to strengthen their food security and economic security sustainably by means of livestock keeping.

In 2021, 333 new families joined the project. We start by training them in livestock keeping and composting techniques, proper management of their activity, and the creation of a vegetable garden. Then each family builds a goat shed and plants hedges around their land to protect it from erosion. Once these conditions have been fulfilled, the families receive four goats to start a small livestock keeping activity. In parallel, the beneficiaries receive training in literacy, nutrition, health and hygiene. We also help them join a community savings system and health insurance cooperative.

Five years after the distribution of the first goats, this approach has proved its worth. According to a survey of 700 families who received assistance in 2017, 67% are now keeping animals other than the goats they received. 78% have been able to acquire new land to expand their agricultural activity and half have also improved their homes. Two families in five have used some of their income to buy manure, seeds or even solar panels.

This is a positive trend that we are continuing to observe among the majority of supported families after an average of two years. These results show a real improvement in living conditions and empowerment for the families.



**Our holistic
approach
in Burundi** ↓

4,833

FAMILIES SUPPORTED
BETWEEN 2017 AND 2021

POSITIVE RESULTS
AFTER

2 years

© Tim Dirven / VSF



Our work
in Niger ↓

237

FAMILIES TRAINED
IN POULTRY FARMING



3 IN 4 BENEFICIARIES
ARE WOMEN

© Tim Dirven / VSF



Niger

**MAKING POULTRY KEEPING
PROFITABLE**

What should you feed poultry? What are the most common diseases, how do you avoid them and how do you treat them? Are there specific sanitary measures to observe when keeping chickens? How do you keep a chicken coop hygienic? There are so many essential aspects to consider for anyone who wants to keep poultry profitably. But the 237 families we have trained in poultry farming in the Dosso and Boboye regions in south-western Niger are well-versed in all of them.

Many people in the Sahel keep chickens, but it is rarely a profitable activity due to a lack of necessary precautions. So in the Dosso and Boboye regions, most beneficiaries already had chickens before receiving any training. However, they also encountered major problems with productivity and mortality. They had to wait at least a year for the birds to reach a saleable size. During that time, however, a large proportion of their livestock succumbed to epidemics.

That situation is changing now, thanks to both our training and the support we offer. To be able to feed the poultry more easily, each participant received mangers and troughs suitable for both chicks and adult birds. And for their numbers to grow more quickly, each participant also received a purebred rooster. Last but not least, we distributed guinea fowl eggs. The market value of these birds is twice that of a chicken when the holiday period is approaching. This is the starting point for a small livestock farm to generate precious income for these families and improve health.

Since our intervention, each family has sold an average of seven chickens. The income has mainly been used to pay for health costs and for children's schooling. Soon other families will be able to benefit from similar progress, because as soon as the first eggs hatch, each poultry keeper has committed to giving one or two chicks to a vulnerable family in their village. More than 382 chicks have already found new homes. This strategy enables us to double our impact in just a few months.



Healthy planet

A HOLISTIC VISION OF LIVESTOCK KEEPING

Many of us associate livestock with high greenhouse gas emissions and drastic deforestation. But not all forms of livestock keeping are harmful to the planet. The current figures are mainly based on intensive animal farming in industrialised countries. Extensive livestock keeping, however, only has a limited impact on the environment, and may even have a positive impact.

Extensive livestock keeping is a form of animal farming in which the herds are kept on large areas of land. These are often dry or mountainous areas poorly suited to other types of farming. One might say this form of livestock keeping is diametrically opposed to intensive animal farming.

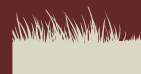
Extensive livestock keeping is practised almost everywhere in the world, from sub-Saharan Africa to the Arctic Circle. An estimated one billion people worldwide are directly dependent on this form of livestock keeping for their livelihoods. These farmers make sustainable use of the vast grasslands that cover more than half of the earth's surface and are home to 28% of the world's endangered species. That makes extensive livestock keeping an important factor in the fight against climate change and the preservation of biodiversity.

Extensive livestock keepers are often described as 'masters of resilience', but even their capacity for resilience is being seriously tested today. In Africa, too, climate change is leading to extreme weather conditions increasingly often, such as flooding and long periods of drought. Failed harvests, livestock deaths and increased conflicts over land and water are the sad result. Diseases transmitted by vectors such as insects can also spread more easily as a result of the changes in humidity and temperature.

That is why, in the interest of both human and animal health, we are more committed than ever to the protection of the environment the livestock keepers live in and its rich biodiversity. We are investing in infrastructure and action plans to protect land from erosion, to stimulate water retention and to ensure balanced grazing patterns. The local communities are key to this, from making and implementing plans to maintaining the infrastructure. A better understanding of sustainable land management protects them from a future in which the climate will be less and less predictable.

Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium was able to add 9,197 hectares of grassland, agricultural land and forest to the sustainably managed lands of local communities in 2021. We help to prevent conflicts over land and water by bringing different communities to the table and designing participative management plans. This is our way of working towards a future without conflict and with guaranteed access to food and clean water in the long term, which benefits both humans, animals and our planet.

9,197
HECTARES PROTECTED
IN 2021



63%
GRASSLAND



32%
AGRICULTURAL
LAND



5%
FOREST

Uganda

INTEGRATED WATER MANAGEMENT WITH AND FOR THE LOCAL POPULATION

Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium has been active for almost 15 years in Karamoja, a region roughly the size of Belgium in the northeast of Uganda. In the Kaabong and Karenga districts, we are working on integrated water management for the river area in the Kapeta Valley. Rainfall varies enormously here, making the area extremely vulnerable to natural disasters such as long-lasting droughts and flooding. The population growth in the area is increasing the pressure on the environment, while deforestation, brush-burning and poor agricultural practices are making the soil particularly susceptible to erosion. This is leading to many dams silting up, and the river water is also becoming severely polluted. Frequent outbreaks of waterborne diseases, such as anthrax and cholera, are therefore no surprise. They affect both humans and animals.

Integrated water management is crucial here for human, animal and environmental health. That is why we are setting up specific action plans in each sub-county to manage the river area sustainably. Local communities are the key to the project, and we support them throughout the process. The communities themselves are responsible for developing a shared vision, drawing up the action plans with specific goals and ultimately implementing them.

To guarantee that the action plans are well integrated into existing government programmes, Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium has trained local officials in planning, managing and protecting waterways. For this, the entire river basin was mapped using satellite images. Five action plans have already been presented to the local authorities and approved for implementation.

The action plans are based on an integrated approach. They include both training for the local committees responsible for the plans and tree-planting campaigns, as well as efforts to delineate and fence off vulnerable zones such as riverbanks. To help the water soak into the soil and thus fight erosion, we provide for the creation of ditches and the building of stone barriers, sand dams and gabions. Awareness-raising in the community is also on the agenda. For example, ploughing along contour lines reduces the likelihood of soil erosion.

Investments in water infrastructure are still necessary. This year, we have installed 15 rainwater tanks and repaired 11 wells. The local committees responsible were trained in the use and ongoing maintenance of the wells. In the dry season, the wells are also very important for the livestock, because most of the temporary waterholes have dried up by then. In recent years, we have installed 4 rainwater tanks for schools and 15 troughs for livestock, and we have repaired 33 wells.

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**Our work
in Uganda** ↓



7,450

PEOPLE
IN 5 SUB-COUNTIES
HAVE BETTER ACCESS
TO CLEAN WATER

2,752

PEOPLE HAVE
IMPROVED
SANITARY
FACILITIES

TESTIMONIAL ↓



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Mohammed Ould Brahime

Village chief of Legrane (Mauritania) and
chairman of the local management committee

“In July 2021, we built two sills to slow down the flow of water at the edge of the hills that surround our village. The work took about ten days. When we were finished, the sills were so high that I couldn’t see the other side. A few months later, following heavy rainfall in the winter, one of the two sills was already almost covered in earth.”

Without these installations, all that soil would have ended up in the basin and nothing would have grown here. Now the stones and gabions keep the soil and vegetation in place, whilst allowing the water to filter through and irrigate our land.”

Mauritania

SUSTAINABLE SOIL AND WATER MANAGEMENT IN THE FIGHT AGAINST EXTREME DROUGHT

In south-eastern Mauritania, the grasslands, dams and water-holes are extremely dry. An exceptionally severe drought has been afflicting the region for several years, greatly reducing the growth of vegetation on the pastures. And the food supply for animals is not the only thing that is suffering. Without sufficient vegetation cover, the soil has become very vulnerable to erosion. The rare rains now soon turn into flash floods that wash away the fertile top layer of the soil, leaving a degraded landscape of rocks and sand behind. The situation is extremely worrying for the local livestock keepers.

This is why Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium is investing in infrastructure in Mauritania to prevent further erosion and restore the land. We have placed gabions around villages over distances of hundreds of metres. These are woven metal cages full of stones that let the water through, but slow down flash floods considerably. We have also built kilometres of stone barriers that further reduce the flow of water. That way, the fertile top layer of agricultural land is irrigated, and degraded soils have the chance to recover.

The extreme drought has brought an increased risk of fire, so we have also created fire breaks. These are strips around productive meadows where the vegetation is removed to stop wild-fires or slow them down. To provide the drinking water that the herds need, we are helping to create and manage dams to catch as much of the unpredictable rainfall as possible.

It is very important to involve the local population and all the stakeholders in every phase of the process. Our experience has taught us that the local people are often not sufficiently capable of managing the infrastructure sustainably. This is why we have developed self-management models for the locally elected management committees. We train them to become well-organised,

transparent groups skilled in the repair and maintenance of the infrastructure and the protection of the grasslands against erosion and fire.

The community builds the infrastructure itself. Villagers who agree to take on heavy tasks are paid appropriately. This extra income helps the agro-pastoralist farmers make ends meet in these difficult times of drought. We are already planning humanitarian campaigns for 2022 to offer the livestock keepers further help in this difficult period.



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Our work
in Mauritania ↓

1,247 m

OF GABIONS
INSTALLED

8,280 ha

OF GRASSLAND AND
AGRICULTURAL LAND
PROTECTED
FROM EROSION

606

PEOPLE PAID
A FAIR WAGE

Find other testimonials
from south-western
Mauritania on
our website ↓



SCAN ME

Raising awareness: our mission in Belgium

Throughout this report, we have emphasised our efforts to make the One Health approach a reality in the African countries where we work. However, we need to focus our efforts on Europe as well. After all, we will always find ourselves back at square one if we do not tackle the underlying causes of the crises we are facing.

The industrial production system of our food is a good example. To produce more and more at low prices, agribusiness constantly tries to increase the area of land used for agriculture. All this comes at the cost of forests and grasslands, the natural habitat of many species. As we now know, one consequence of the loss of biodiversity is an increased risk of the emergence of zoonoses, infectious diseases that can be transmitted from animals to humans. This is how avian flu, Ebola, Lassa fever and more recently Covid-19 have claimed many victims in recent years.

Too few of us are aware of this reality in Belgium. This is what makes our awareness-raising and mobilisation work so important. In both Flanders and Wallonia, we direct our efforts towards the next generation in particular, especially students in higher education. After all, they are the ones who will have to shape our food system on a planet gripped by ever-increasing challenges. To encourage an overhaul of our food system, we show them other production systems, such as agroecology, that are compatible with the One Health approach.

This upstream work often goes unacknowledged because it is less visible, but we see it as a long-term investment. It is a seed we are planting today so that it may bear fruit for future generations. Here are a few examples.



© Patrick Augenstein / VSF



Simanjiro district in northern Tanzania. The expansion of the agricultural area (left) comes at the expense of the forests and pastures used sustainably by the extensive livestock farmers (right).

THE HIDDEN COSTS OF INDUSTRIAL FOOD PRODUCTION

In March 2021, we brought 350 students together online for a day dedicated to the hidden costs of the industrial food system in the age of globalisation. The programme included a lecture by Olivier De Schutter and a dozen hands-on workshops addressing different aspects of the industrial system, both here and elsewhere: health risks, animal welfare and animal health challenges. This was the starting point for fruitful exchanges between the students on the political, health, economic and environmental impacts of this dominant system. It was also an opportunity to discover a host of sustainable alternatives, such as agroecology and agro-livestock keeping.

“As a farmer’s daughter, I want to see things change and do everything I can to ensure that farmers receive the recognition they deserve.”

Cloé

Student at Condorcet university college in Ath

Want to know more about the hidden costs of our food? Watch our video →



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A TRANSDISCIPLINARY HACKATHON TO FEED TOMORROW’S WORLD

In the spring, we organised a day of transdisciplinary exchanges with Liège University. About a hundred students from different faculties participated, spread out around the campus and equipped with walkie-talkies. The future doctors, vets, agronomists and oceanographers thought the issues through together and presented possible solutions to feed tomorrow’s world.

“A transdisciplinary approach gives us a broader view of a situation, allowing us to come up with potential solutions in complex situations, such as the pandemic we’re currently facing.”

Sophie

Master’s degree student at Liège University

IS LIVESTOCK KEEPING ALWAYS BAD FOR THE PLANET?

This is something we asked all of our audiences this year. The dominant discourse often presents livestock keeping in a negative light with regard to climate disruption. However, this discourse lacks nuance, because meat and milk are not produced the same way everywhere. Whereas industrial animal farming does indeed have a harmful impact on the planet, the effect of extensive livestock keeping is very limited and may even be positive.

So it is up to us, people with high incomes and the largest ecological footprint, to change our meat and milk consumption. And because students in agriculture, agrotechnology and biotechnology, bioengineering and veterinary sciences also have the power to change our production methods, we focus particularly on them. It is time to learn to put less meat on our plates and focus on quality. But we also need to acknowledge and support extensive livestock keeping, which is essential in the fight against climate change and to preserve biodiversity (see page 14 for more information).

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Find out about the positive impact of extensive livestock keeping on the environment and biodiversity in our video “It’s not the cow, it’s the how” →



“Food and agriculture play a very important role in creating a fair world. I am convinced that agro-ecological livestock keeping has a major role to play. Especially when you consider the threat of the climate crisis, this innovative vision offers many essential solutions. I would like to see these solutions applied more in my own surroundings and throughout the world.”

Casper

Biotechnology student at Thomas More university college in Geel

They support us

We carried out our activities in 2021 with the support of many donors. In particular, we worked with:

- 11.11.11
- Acting for Life / Air France
- Brussels Environnement
- DGD – Belgian development cooperation
- CNC-D-11.11.11
- Enabel
- European Union
- Flemish Government
- Gilbert Tuts Fund / King Baudouin Foundation
- International Organization for Migration
- Millenium Challenge Corporation
- Province of Flemish Brabant
- Province of East Flanders
- Research Triangle Institute / USAID
- Rotary Club International
- UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- Vivaqua
- Wallonie-Bruxelles International
- WeHubit
- World Bank
- World Food Programme

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 and can be obtained on request from 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.



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SCAN ME





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