

Vétérinaires  
Sans Frontières  
Dierenartsen  
Zonder Grenzen



# Activity report

VSF BELGIUM  
2023

MEMBER OF VSF INTERNATIONAL



Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium is a Belgian NGO and a member of the VSF International network that supports African livestock keepers through humanitarian activities and development campaigns.

Millions of people in Africa depend on their livestock. Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium develops animal healthcare activities there in partnership with the local population, and supports agroecological livestock keeping.

We work together by providing training, equipment and medicines to keep both animals and the environment in good health, so that everyone can live their lives in dignity. The special attention we pay to the health of ecosystems also reduces the risk of diseases spreading from wild animals to humans and livestock. This way, we help to prevent pandemics such as Covid-19 and Ebola.

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Odette Nyagazura, a beneficiary of our humanitarian activities in South Kivu (DR Congo), tells our colleague Richard Maisha Barhabula about her circumstances as a displaced woman.  
© Arlette Bashizi / VSF

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## FOREWORD

Dear partners, friends and supporters  
of Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium,

2023 was another year full of challenges. Nevertheless, we achieved important successes in the world's most vulnerable regions, helping to improve the health and welfare of people, animals and their environment. What were the highlights, and what lessons have we learned from them?

We organise all our activities around three fundamental principles: healthy animals, healthy people and a healthy planet. So one of the most encouraging trends in 2023 was the growing interest in the One Health concept. An excellent example was all the attention that our project in the Democratic Republic of Congo attracted, which led to visits from specialists and journalists, invitations to symposiums and increased media attention. This has strengthened our conviction that this integrated approach is essential to solving the complex health and welfare problems facing marginalised population groups who are dependent on livestock farming.

However, we made this progress in increasingly difficult working conditions. The turbulent regions where Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium works, such as the DRC or West Africa, have been hit by severe political unrest and insecurity, often in combination with climate disasters such as the recent flooding in South Kivu or droughts in the Sahel. These events underline the immense importance of our humanitarian aid campaigns for the local populations who suffer the most from these disasters.

In 2023, we also celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the Services Vétérinaires Privés de Proximité in Niger. These local private veterinary services form an important link in our long-term support for the local communities. Simultaneously, we are working hard to expand our decentralised approach and build up local capacity. At a recent workshop in Cotonou, our colleagues were introduced to the PAID (Project Activity Impact Database), run by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

This database will enable us to monitor our activities even more closely and compare them with other international stakeholders' livestock-related activities. Starting to use the WELI (Women Empowerment in Livestock Index) by the International Livestock Research Institute is another activity in the same context. This tool helps us to better target our activities so that we can make a real contribution to empowering women. Initiatives such as these support our efforts to stimulate sustainable, inclusive development.

We continued to implement and perpetuate this One Health approach in 2023, in Central Africa (Burundi, DRC, Uganda and Rwanda) and West Africa (Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger). At the end of 2023, we also prepared a new project in the Comoros that will start in 2024. Here, too, we will support communities whose livelihoods depend on livestock keeping.

We would like to thank our partners, generous donors, and workers in the field and in Belgium from the bottom of our hearts for their vital support, without which none of this would be possible. Together, we will continue to build a future in which the health and welfare of animals, people and the planet are inextricably linked.

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**Joep van Mierlo**  
General Director



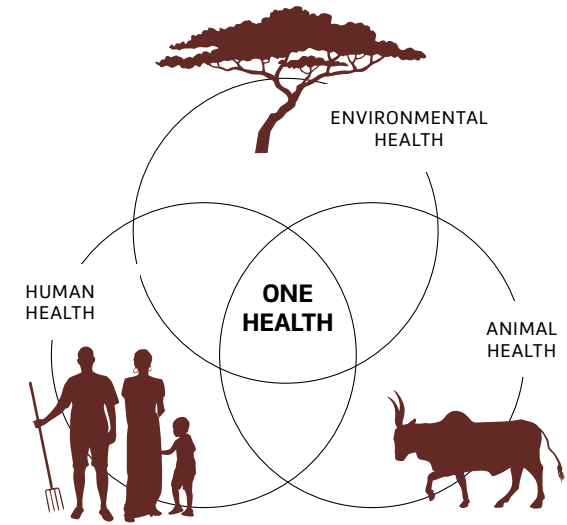
# Healthy animals, healthy people, healthy planet

## OUR MISSION

Empowering disadvantaged livestock dependent communities in the Global South to improve their well-being.



Find more information about how we apply the One Health approach on our website.



## OUR ONE HEALTH APPROACH

At Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium, we are convinced that human, animal and environmental health are intrinsically linked. This forms the basis of the “One Health” approach, a guiding principle in all our projects.

## 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 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 Belgium's  
intervention area  
in 2023**

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

**VSF International's  
intervention area**

**42**  
PROJECTS

**10**  
COUNTRIES

**19**  
LOCAL  
PARTNERS

**21**  
EMPLOYEES  
IN BRUSSEL

**117**  
EMPLOYEES  
IN WEST-AFRIKA

**48**  
EMPLOYEES  
IN THE AFRICAN  
GREAT LAKES

**121**  
EMPLOYEES FINANCED  
BY OUR LOCAL PARTNERS



VSF INTERNATIONAL  
VÉTÉRINAIRES  
SANS FRONTIÈRES



Panel debate on the transition to an agro-ecological food system. Studio Skoop, Ghent. © Fien Boone / VSF

# Belgium

**A MORE SUSTAINABLE  
FOOD SYSTEM  
MAY PREVENT PANDEMICS**

**KEY FIGURES  
FOR 2023** ↓



**2,466**

PARTICIPANTS  
IN OUR ACTIVITIES  
OF WHOM

**522**

PARTICIPATED  
IN ACTIVITIES ORGANISED  
BY MOBILISED STUDENTS,  
CITIZENS OR PROFESSIONALS

**52%**

OF OUR ACTIVITIES  
INVOLVED COLLEAGUES  
OR PARTNERS FROM  
THE SOUTH

**8**

INTERNS

To *really* help Africa, we need to tackle the fundamental causes of the crises we are experiencing at the source. Industrial livestock keeping is a good example. Constantly investing in increasing the scale of activities may seem efficient and economically necessary, but this choice incurs many hidden costs. These costs are becoming increasingly visible today.

The poultry industry is largely responsible for spreading the H5N1 bird flu virus around the world. This extremely deadly and increasingly contagious virus did not only affect poultry last year, but it is also claiming increasing numbers of victims among wild animals. For the first time, a polar bear and thousands of elephant seals died of the disease. The virus has now gained a foothold in Antarctica as well, where it is threatening the lives of millions of penguins. In our own country, peregrine falcons have been affected, and in America many cattle became infected, ultimately spreading the disease to humans as well through unpasteurized milk.

This shows how the health of humans, animals and the environment are inextricably linked. Our global food system clearly needs to change, and it can. We talk about this to students, citizens and professionals, since they are the ones who will shape the food system of the future together.

To do this, we present inspiring stories and films to open up the complex issues of global food to discussion. We use educational activities such as panel debates, youth ideathons and round-table discussions to create space for debate and critical

reflection on the underlying causes of today's environmental and health issues, as well as possible solutions. By committing to dialogue and allowing different voices to have their say, we offer a nuanced context in which to think about different food systems, such as agro-ecology, for example.

All of this leads to action. Inspired citizens organise film screenings themselves, to engage in conversation in their own surroundings about these food issues. University students want to make a difference themselves, and travel with us to our project

countries to exchange knowledge and conduct research in partnership with our local teams. We also inspire researchers to set up projects with us to conceive innovative solutions for these complex global challenges.



Our colleague Anthony Denayer, who is in charge of our global citizenship and solidarity education activities in Flanders, at a round table discussion on agro-ecological livestock keeping with agronomy students from Ghent University and HOGENT.  
© Fien Boone / VSF





# Healthy animals

Among the many common features of the areas where we intervene, the main one is surely the lack of veterinary care. Given the immensity of the livestock herds, vets are outnumbered and cannot provide health care for all the animals. The problem has many causes that vary according to the context. Our mission is always the same, though: to restore the balance needed to guarantee animal health care in the remotest regions.

This is a long-term undertaking that we started almost 40 years ago and that has always involved a focus on strengthening local talent. Our priority is to identify the existing vets and give them the material and technical resources they need to do their job. When the local authorities are supportive, we also reduce their burden of work by training animal health workers among the livestock keepers themselves. This professional pairing has proved its efficiency and constitutes the basis of our local private veterinary services.

KEY FIGURES  
FOR 2023 ↓



**77**  
VETS AND  
**316**  
PARA-VETERINARY  
WORKERS ASSISTED

**1,094**  
COMMUNITY  
ANIMAL HEALTH WORKERS  
SUPPORTED

**13.3 million**  
ANIMALS TREATED  
AND VACCINATED

**470,251**  
FAMILIES BENEFITING  
FROM ANIMAL HEALTH  
SERVICES

# Burundi

## LIVESTOCK KEEPERS, KEY PLAYERS IN IMPROVING ANIMAL HEALTH IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

OUR ANIMAL HEALTH  
ACTIVITIES IN BURUNDI  
IN 2023 ↓



118

COMMUNITY ANIMAL  
HEALTH WORKERS ACTIVE

213,844

ANIMALS TREATED

58,927

ANIMALS VACCINATED

95%

OF LIVESTOCK KEEPERS  
SATISFIED



Find out more about  
the community animal  
health workers:



SCAN ME

For a large proportion of the Burundian population outside the major cities, subsistence and well-being are dependent on livestock. But as is the case in many regions of Africa, access to animal health care is far from assured. Professional vets, most of whom are government employees, are scarce in comparison to the size of the herds. So in the countryside, animal health is often the direct responsibility of livestock keepers, who have little ability to fulfil their task.

Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium has been active since 2014 in the north of the country, in the provinces of Ngozi and Kayanza, and extended its area of activity to include the provinces of Makamba and Gitega in 2022. Staying as close as possible to the communities, our teams work hard to guarantee the livestock keepers access to local, high-quality veterinary services.

Specifically, we provide training, equipment and materials to people who want to become community animal health workers. In spite of our support and their practical understanding of the local context, however, their skills still remain limited in comparison to those of a vet. To get around this problem, we put them under the direct supervision of a government vet located as close to them as possible. This partnership guarantees professional support, sensible advice and ongoing training while assuring the quality and effectiveness of their activities in the field.



Willy Nsengiyumva, a community animal health worker trained by Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium, visiting a livestock keeper on Nyabizinu Hill in the village of Busiga (Ngozi Province).  
© Amani Papy / VSF

The task of animal health workers is to provide basic animal health care, advise livestock keepers and encourage certain livestock-keeping techniques in order to optimise animal production. They also play an important role in epidemiological surveillance and the prevention of risks of disease transmission between animals and humans.

In 2023, we trained and equipped 118 animal health workers in the nine communities where we work. Over the course of the year, they vaccinated more than 58,000 cows, goats and sheep against foot and mouth disease, lumpy skin disease and Rift Valley fever. In total, almost 215,000 animals were treated. The animal health workers are readily welcomed by communities and also provide many

other services on a private basis: deworming and spraying for ticks and mites, castrations or horn removals. They provided services to more than 90,000 households, with a satisfaction rate of more than 95%.

Between now and 2026, it is our ambition to train at least one animal health worker on each hill in our intervention areas. In this way, we hope to improve overall livestock health, reduce economic losses linked to animal disease and improve the productivity of agricultural farming and livestock keeping. All of this is aimed to increase the resilience of agro-pastoralist communities.

# Mali

## ANIMAL HEALTH FOR THE REMOTEST COMMUNITIES

### KEY FIGURES FOR 2023 ↓

6

NEW VETS  
SUPPORTED

45

ANIMAL HEALTH WORKERS  
FROM REMOTE  
COMMUNITIES TRAINED

597,673

ANIMALS VACCINATED

15,764

LIVESTOCK KEEPERS  
BENEFITED



Ramata Sabadogo, a young veterinary assistant trained in 2022, who works for the private, locally-based veterinary service in Koro cercle.  
© Hamdia Traore / VSF



Livestock keeping is a crucial lifeline for countless families in Mali, but food security in remote regions is under threat from political instability and security problems. Armed groups are causing unrest and making it particularly difficult for vets to reach livestock keepers in isolated areas. All this is leading to an increase in outbreaks of animal diseases, such as contagious bovine pleuropneumonia in cattle and goat plague in small ruminants such as goats and sheep. These diseases cause considerable fatalities and rob communities of the last remaining securities that keep them alive.

That is why Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium is focusing especially on the less accessible regions of Kayes, Koulikoro, Sikasso and Mopti. We set up private vets in these regions close to the remotest communities. We help them obtain permits and give them the training and support they need to set up their own practice. We also facilitate contact with accredited suppliers to safeguard the quality of medicines. This is important to prevent the use of illegal products that may be harmful to animals and humans.

To bring veterinary services to the very remotest communities, we also set up networks of animal health workers from those communities. They act as local contacts for livestock keepers and help the vet with vaccination campaigns and deworming activities. We give them the training they need to be able to offer livestock keepers practical advice and provide basic animal care. In that way, we also contribute to employment opportunities for hundreds of young people.

By putting the vets in contact with accredited suppliers of quality medicines and giving them extra support in the form of animal health workers from the local community, the livestock keepers in these remote areas can be sure of access to crucial animal health care.

Since the start of our activities in Mali in 1998, we have succeeded in greatly improving access to veterinary services. Today, our veterinary support covers 75,533 km<sup>2</sup>, an area the size of the Benelux. Our ongoing efforts to improve access to veterinary care is guaranteeing the most vulnerable livestock-keeping families in Mali a hopeful future.

© Hamdia Traore / VSF



## TESTIMONIAL

# Safi Ngomora

AGED 31,  
A VET IN SOUTH KIVU,  
DR CONGO ↓

Whether she is at her practice or visiting clients, a wide smile lights up Dr Safi's face. Being a vet in South Kivu is far from easy. However, caring for livestock has been in her blood for a long time.

The first time our paths crossed in 2019, Safi was a young graduate. In spite of her efforts, she had difficulty earning a living and paying back her loan. Thanks to our support, she now has her own practice equipped with laboratory apparatus. As the head of a network of 72 community animal health workers, she is responsible for the health of livestock belonging to more than 3,500 livestock keepers in Kabare and Kalehe territories.

*"Without the support of Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium, I would probably have remained a village vet. I would never have made a name for myself. If I have become a fighter, a woman who can face up to difficulties, it is thanks to you."*



SCAN ME



Discover her inspiring journey  
on our website.

© Thomas Cytrynowicz / VSF – Médecins du Monde



# Rwanda

## AN EXPANDING ANIMAL HEALTH NETWORK TO FIGHT ZOONOSIS MORE EFFECTIVELY

### OUR ACTIVITY IN 2023 ↓

**14 of the 30**

DISTRICTS IN RWANDA  
COVERED BY  
VETERINARY SERVICES



**11**

NEW VETS  
SET UP

**88**

VETS  
SUPPORTED



**389,202**

ANIMALS TREATED

In Rwanda, four out of five people work in agriculture, essentially to meet their daily needs. To fertilise the soil and maximise harvests, manure is the main source of organic fertiliser. For this reason, most agricultural farmers also keep livestock, guaranteeing them better food security. However veterinary services are rare, expensive and generally of poor quality, especially in the countryside. This situation contributes to low productivity among small agricultural and livestock-keeping businesses.

Since 2011, Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium has therefore undertaken to develop accessible, high-quality animal health care for Rwandan agro-pastoralists. In twelve years, no fewer than 114 vets and technicians have received our material and technical support to open their practice and provide livestock care. By the end of 2023, this expansive network covered 14 of the 30 districts in Rwanda, or nearly half the country.

New recruits join this network every year. In 2023, we set up 11 private vets and veterinary technicians. Since most of them already had a solid background in animal health, we supplemented their knowledge with training in finance and management. These are essential skills to ensure that their services are profitable and therefore long-lasting for the livestock keepers. In just five years, certain vets have seen their monthly income increase tenfold. On the livestock keepers' side, the benefits are equally tangible: in the targeted areas, the mortality rate has halved among cattle since 2017, and been reduced fourfold among goats. The mortality rate among pigs and chickens

dropped by 2.5% and 2.4% respectively between 2021 and 2023. These figures doubtless account for the 89% satisfaction rate among livestock keepers.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, we are also stepping up our efforts to fight zoonoses, diseases that can be transmitted from animals to humans. Given the high population density in Rwanda, the risks of transmission are particularly high around the national parks of Nyungwe and Akagera.

To reinforce epidemic-surveillance, we have therefore extended the veterinary network to include the three districts adjacent to these nature reserves. Moreover, the technical aspect of our training has been complemented with specific modules linked to the One Health approach. In 2023, 88 vets and technicians were made aware of the appropriate use of antimicrobial agents, the management of medical waste, and bio-security.

Gatali Samuel, one of the private, locally-based vets who have recently set up a business near Nyungwe National Park. Nyamagabe District, Southern Province. © Thibault Flament / VSF







# Healthy people

According to the World Health Organisation, health is defined as a state of complete well-being, both physical, mental and social. So being in good health means much more than not being ill or not suffering from a disability. It also means being able to eat your fill, having a roof over your head, being safe and not fearing for your life, not feeling isolated, having a sustainable income and perspectives for the future. That is nothing out of the ordinary for most of us. But for the communities we support in Africa, these things can seldom be taken for granted.

The health and well-being of our livestock keepers have always been our top priorities. Because livestock keeping and animal health care are our main areas of expertise. These are the issues around which we develop most of our activities, and we are convinced that they remain the starting point of good health for the communities we support. But when these communities express a need, we sometimes focus on other areas: at that point financial assistance, peace forums or even psychological support services come to the fore. Whatever the cost, we are ready to take any action to enable our beneficiaries to live dignified and healthy lives.

KEY FIGURES  
FOR 2023 ↓



**57,892**  
BENEFITING FAMILIES  
OF WHICH  
**16%**  
THROUGH OUR  
HUMANITARIAN ACTIVITIES

**22,001**  
ANIMALS  
DISTRIBUTED

# Benin

## SMALL LIVESTOCK FARMING TO REDUCE FOOD INSECURITY BETWEEN HARVESTS

### OUR ACTIVITY IN 2023 ↓



**800**

GOATS AND

**825**

SHEEP DISTRIBUTED  
TO

**475**

VULNERABLE  
HOUSEHOLDS

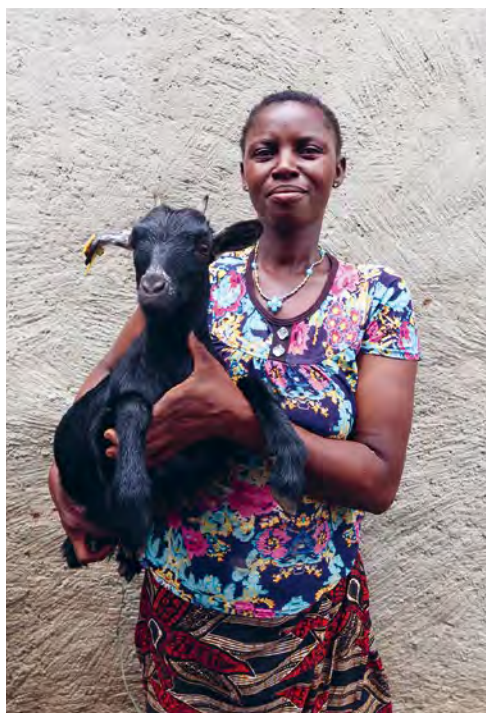


**416**

WOMEN TRAINED  
IN AN ACTIVITY  
TO GENERATE INCOME

**525**

PEOPLE TRAINED  
IN AGRO-ECOLOGY



Madeleine Santchoukouma was selected to receive four goats in the village of Boukombé.  
© VSF

In Atacora department in northern Benin, five to seven people out of ten make a living from rain-fed agriculture and small livestock farming. Poor soils and the unavailability of animal health care mean that yields from agriculture and livestock keeping in the region are low. The communities produce little and have little to sell, which limits their financial resources and the diversity of their diets. One person in five in the region suffers from moderate to severe food insecurity.

Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium intervenes in four villages in the department to develop veterinary services adapted to local needs. Over the past few years, many families have lost their livestock to disease or a lack of care. For the most vulnerable among them, these animals were often their only guarantee of being able to eat properly between two harvests. So we selected 500 families who would each receive four goats or three sheep. In total, 1,625 animals were distributed in 2023.

These animals contribute directly to strengthening the families' resilience. Their meat guarantees more protein in their diets. Between April and July, when stocks from the previous harvest are exhausted and people have to wait for the next harvest, selling animals also makes it possible to buy other food to supplement their diets. Furthermore, animal waste helps to fertilise the soil, increasing agricultural yields. This practice also reduces the use of chemical fertilisers, which has a positive effect on the health of agro-pastoralists and the environment.

All the beneficiary families take our training to gain essential knowledge of nutrition, hygiene and animal health. In parallel, we have also trained

416 women in the production of shea butter, mustard, garri flour and soya cheese or in beekeeping. This vocational training is intended to help them diversify their sources of income and improve their financial management skills.

For a year after they receive the animals, the families benefit from free animal health care. They are given this service to guarantee that the animals remain in good health and reproduce. After a year and a half, the families commit to giving two lambs or three kids to another vulnerable family. In 2024, 150 families were able to relaunch their small livestock farming activity in this way.

Making shea butter, one of the activities we offer women to generate additional income in Atacora.  
© VSF



# Democratic Republic of Congo

## RESPONDING TO THE DISTRESS OF PEOPLE DISPLACED BY THE VIOLENCE IN SOUTH KIVU

OUR HUMANITARIAN ACTIVITY  
IN BWEGERA, SOUTH KIVU,  
IN 2023 ↓

**13,955**

BENEFICIARIES  
IN 2 YEARS

**412**

LIVESTOCK KEEPERS  
BENEFITING FROM ANIMAL  
HEALTH CARE



**150**

WOMEN RECEIVED  
AN UNCONDITIONAL  
CASH GRANT

**55**

WOMEN RECEIVED  
ANIMALS

**240**

WOMEN OPENED  
A SMALL BUSINESS

For decades, South Kivu has been gripped by conflicts between agricultural farmers and livestock keepers. Foreign armed groups have taken up residence in several areas beyond the government's control, exacerbating the tensions and insecurity. Every day, clashes destroy a little more of the socio-economic fabric, causing massive displacements of the population.

This is the context in which the village of Bwegera, situated in Uvira territory, turned into a host community in the spring of 2021. In barely two years, the village saw its population multiply following the influx of displaced persons. On average, for every ten displaced persons, six choose to stay, given that tensions are unlikely to ease in their original home. However, the needs of this growing population greatly exceed the capacities of basic services, in spite of local hospitality. So Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium began its interventions in autumn 2021. Our objective was to improve living conditions and the conditions of living alongside the local population in the long term.

In 2023, more than 3,000 new arrivals found refuge in Bwegera, some more destitute than others. For those who were able to bring a few animals with them, we provide care through local vets. That is crucial to ensure they have a means of long-term subsistence and, by extension, to guarantee the health of their families.



© Arlette Bashizi / VSF



Read the testimonials  
by Florence Nyabigondo  
Nyamajana, a displaced  
person, and other residents  
of Bwegera.



To reinforce their economic security, we also offer the women an opportunity to start livestock keeping or open a small business.

Since most of the displaced people have lost everything, however, a holistic response is required, adapted to their most basic and urgent needs. Because women and girls are especially vulnerable to violence in the region, our assistance is focused on their specific needs. When they arrive, food and protection are often the main concerns. So we granted 150 women an amount equal to 370 euros each, which they could spend according to their family priorities. This is a considerable help, given that three out of four Congolese people live on less than two euros a day. This unconditional cash assistance stimulates their financial autonomy while benefiting the local economy.

Moreover, we called upon a local NGO partner to provide psychological and medical support to the victims of sexual violence. To avoid assaults, which most often happen when they go looking for food outside the village, we have also set up community vegetable gardens and a surveillance system managed by female protection officers. Finally, to improve the general hygiene conditions, we have built public toilets and provided about a hundred girls with sanitary protection.

## TESTIMONIAL

# Ngorok Angolekori

AGED 69,  
VICTIM OF PLUNDERING  
IN KARAMOJA ↓

In the shadow of a group of trees, people gather who have been indicated by the community as the most vulnerable. Most of them are elderly, widows and widowers, people with a disability or a chronic illness. In the distance, we see Ngorok approaching with her two grandchildren. She is one of the 1,650 beneficiaries of unconditional cash payments. She has received 50 euros and 5 chickens to help her get back onto her feet.

*“I’ve always kept chickens. Last year I had 16, but the plunderers took everything. Because the harvest failed and the grain stores were robbed bare, it soon became very difficult to find enough food. Hunger cost my daughter her life, leaving me with a newborn grandchild. If every goat and cow in the village had not been stolen, we would have had milk to keep the baby alive”*

Ngorok tells us, pointing to the small grave a few metres from her hut.

*“That loss was nearly the end of me as well. I was close to death. Without this unconditional gift, I wouldn’t be alive today.”*



© Tim Dirven / VSF

# Uganda

## WORKING HOLISTICALLY FOR PEACE

### KEY FIGURES FOR 2023 ↓



**1,665**

VULNERABLE FAMILIES  
EACH RECEIVED UP TO  
93 EUROS IN CASH

**350**

VULNERABLE YOUNG  
PEOPLE EACH RECEIVED  
2 GOATS



**70**

LOCAL ASSOCIATIONS  
TRAINED TO HELP  
BUILD PEACE

**30,000**

LIVESTOCK KEEPERS  
GIVEN ACCESS  
TO PASTURES

After four long years of ethnic conflicts, the great majority of cattle raiders finally laid down their weapons in 2023. Peace slowly returned to Karamoja, a region in north-eastern Uganda. The pastoralist families were able to start gradually increasing their herds, rebuilding their resilience in this semi-arid climate and repairing their social safety nets. At the beginning of the year, almost half of the 1.2 million Karimojong people were still struggling with serious food shortages. That figure has now dropped to 5%.

Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium has played an important role in alleviating the consequences of the humanitarian crisis and restoring peace in the region. In the districts of Napak, Moroto and Kaabong, we supported the local communities with a holistic approach that combined humanitarian aid with peacebuilding and development initiatives.

As a direct response to the serious food shortages, we provided the 1,665 vulnerable households with cash so that they could meet immediate needs such as food, health care and housing. The unconditional distribution of cash enables the people affected to direct their own recovery and regain control of their lives.

To face up to the countless ethnic conflicts, we offered to train more than 70 local associations in peacebuilding. Along with more than 900 trained people, we encouraged a peace dialogue between communities through various media channels ranging from radio broadcasts to theatre plays performed by peace caravans. Ultimately, this resulted in the voluntary surrender of hundreds of weapons.

This enabled us to give more than 30,000 livestock keepers from different ethnic groups, including groups from the Turkana region in Kenya, access to common pasturelands without the risk of violent confrontation.

To restore the resilience of the affected communities, we offered sessions on conflict resolution and trauma processing to young rustlers who surrendered their weapons. Each of them received two goats, so that they would have the chance to build

an independent future and reintegrate themselves into the community. We also repaired 86 water points, which provide access to clean water for 37,500 livestock keepers and their animals. We vaccinated 122,786 animals to maintain the health of 49,846 livestock keepers' herds.

Now that we can turn the page on violent livestock thefts and ruthless plundering, the affected communities are looking to the future with hope again.

© Tim Dirven / VSF



Discover the poignant story of Abibah Moru and learn more about the hidden dimensions of the conflict in Karamoja.



SCAN ME





# Healthy planet

As befits advocates of the One Health approach, we are certain of one thing: our activities to support the health of livestock keepers and their animals only make sense if we take into account the environment they live in. As climate change intensifies in Africa, the natural resources that the livestock keepers and their herds depend upon are increasingly threatened.

Very often, the reduction of these resources exacerbates tensions within the populations, particularly between agricultural farmers and livestock keepers.

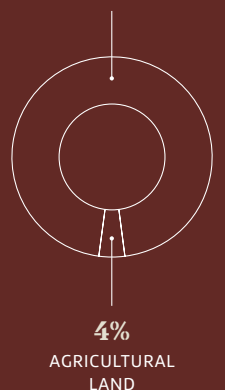
Our intention is to protect and restore biodiversity in the regions where we work, so that it can provide maximum benefits to the local communities. To achieve that, agro-ecology and pastoralism are our greatest allies. This is why we promote these practices and all the services they provide to the ecosystem everywhere we can. When that is not enough, we also set up water and soil conservation systems in parallel to these activities, to counter the effects of climate change. By protecting local ecosystems, we lay the foundations for a better future for African communities who depend on livestock keeping.

KEY FIGURES  
FOR 2023 ↓

**20,962**

HECTARES  
PROTECTED

**96%**  
PASTURES



**4%**  
AGRICULTURAL  
LAND

# Mauritania

## SELF-RELIANT LOCAL POPULATION FIGHTING CLIMATE CHANGE

### KEY FIGURES FOR 2023 ↓



**2,185 m**  
OF GABIONS  
INSTALLED



**5,446**  
HOUSEHOLDS  
RECEIVED ACCESS  
TO MORE FERTILE  
AGRICULTURAL LAND

**2,089**  
PEOPLE INVOLVED  
IN WATER AND SOIL  
CONSERVATION WORK

90% of Mauritania is in the Sahara Desert, and it is particularly vulnerable to climate disasters. In the south-east of the country, extreme climate conditions are afflicting the poverty-stricken population with increasing frequency. Extreme, persistent droughts alternate with catastrophic flooding. When drought restricts the growth of fresh savannah grass, the ground becomes highly susceptible to erosion. In turn, devastating flash floods wash away all the fertile land. What remains is a degraded landscape of rocks and sand, and a desperate local community of livestock keepers.

To make the local population more resilient to future climate shocks, we have been investing in community training for the past three years, teaching people to prevent further erosion and restore the soil. With them, we have installed gabions in ravines and along slopes. These are woven metal cages full of stones that let the water through but slow down flash floods considerably, thus reducing their power to destroy. We have also built kilometres of stone barriers that follow the contours of the land, which further reduce the flow of water and allow it to seep into the soil. That way, the fertile top layer of agricultural land is irrigated, and degraded soils have the chance to recover.

These tried and tested technologies are beginning to pay off. The community and the authorities have gained sufficient confidence in them and are requesting financial support for building materials so



Two members of a local management committee check that the sills used to fight erosion are working properly. Oudey Ejride, Assaba.  
© Tim Dirven / VSF

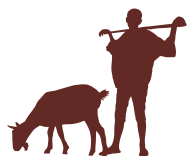
that they can do this important infrastructural work on their own. Therefore, we are supporting the local community to enable them to scale up these applications themselves. To do so, we have developed self-management models for locally elected management committees that we continue to coach as they develop into self-reliant, professional organisations. They gain proficiency in building, maintaining and repairing water and soil conservation infrastructure. They also become autonomous in organisational, administrative and financial terms, so that they can continue their high-impact work once our project is over.

This meant that we were able to leave our work in good hands in the region of Assaba and start taking the same approach in the neighbouring region of Hodh El Gharbi last year.

# Burkina Faso

## PROTECTING BIODIVERSITY WITH AREAS OF PASTURE AND LIVESTOCK ROUTES

OUR NATURAL RESOURCE  
PROTECTION ACTIVITIES  
IN CENTRE-EST  
IN 2023 ↓



105

HECTARES OF PASTURELAND  
RESTORED

5

COMMUNITIES  
COACHED  
IN SUSTAINABLE  
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT



25 km

OF DESIGNATED  
LIVESTOCK ROUTES

88.9%

SATISFACTION LEVEL  
AMONG THE AFFECTED  
RESIDENTS

The Centre-Est region, which has borders with Ghana and Togo, has a mainly agro-pastoral population. Although a considerable proportion of the population are livestock keepers, the area of pastureland is very limited. Most of the pastures are concentrated in the east, where a wide transhumance corridor has formed between the north of the country, the Nouhao pastoral area and the neighbouring countries.

Although there are many seasonal visitors to these areas, there is no management plan to protect their status as pastures. In recent years, demographic growth has led to a reduction in the space devoted to herds and to the obstruction of the

livestock routes that give access to the pastures, for the benefit of settlements and agricultural fields. This has resulted in violent conflicts between agricultural farmers and livestock keepers, with each group fighting to safeguard their livelihoods.

The consequences for the environment are also disastrous. When grazed by herds, pastures actually ensure the regeneration and optimal fertilisation of the soil. They are also home to unique flora and fauna. As such, their disappearance entails serious losses of biodiversity. Furthermore, this highlights certain forms of climate disruption: a shorter rainy season and less rainfall that is unevenly distributed.



© Wouter Elsen / VSF



To find out more about the challenges experienced by pastoral communities in Burkina Faso, see the interview with our country director, Hamado Ouedraogo.



SCAN ME

This is one of the reasons why we are working actively to secure pastureland and livestock routes. Along with the population and local authorities, we identify measures to protect natural resources and suitable sites for agricultural activities. We encourage livestock keepers and agricultural farmers to draw up shared rules for the sustainable management and use of the pastures and waterholes, and to limit poaching and woodcutting for charcoal production.

These measures have already made it possible for the mobility of herds to recover and to safeguard many pasturelands in the region for the benefit of local herds and those passing through. The availability of pasturelands avoids a high concentration of animals in a limited area that has become fragile, thus also preventing the destruction of natural resources. When the livestock routes are freed up, forage species also thrive again.

The positive impact is not just on the environment. The mobility of herds reduces the risk of animals becoming contaminated by an outbreak of disease. When they are well-nourished and can move around freely, they produce more milk and meat, and bear more young. The agricultural farmers who are moved to more fertile land also experience better harvests. In both communities, people's dietary and socio-economic circumstances improve, and tensions are eased. After adopting rules to manage their resources, 88.9% of the agricultural farmers and livestock keepers concerned report that they are satisfied.

## TESTIMONIAL

## Patrick Uwingabire

AGED 38,  
BEEKEEPER AND ENTREPRENEUR  
IN RWANDA ↓

Patrick lost his father at an early age. Because the family didn't have any land of their own to farm, he had to give up school and go to work when he was twelve. Determined to keep his own children out of poverty, he has grown into one of Rwanda's most successful beekeepers and an example to his community.

*"As a teenager, I gathered sticks from the forest nearby to sell as firewood. But one day that was no longer permitted, and we were forced to go in search of a new livelihood. A group of friends and I decided to do traditional beekeeping in the same forest. A few years later, Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium noticed us. Since 2010, they have supported us with technical training, equipment and entrepreneurship coaching. Our productivity has quadrupled, and last year our group sold about 7,000 kilos of honey for the national and export markets. Beekeeping has become our life, a sustainable way of supporting our families and protecting forests instead of exhausting them."*

© Thibault Flament / VSF



# Niger

## AGRO-ECOLOGY HELPS CROPS STAND UP TO CLIMATE CHANGE

### KEY FIGURES FOR 2023 ↓



**26**

FIELD SCHOOLS  
FACILITATED

**832**

EARNERS



**63%**

LEVEL OF ADOPTION  
OF GOOD PRACTICES

**13.2 ha**

SUBJECTED  
TO AGRO-ECOLOGICAL  
PRACTICES

In the Dosso, Tahoua and Tillabéry regions of south-western Niger, agro-pastoralists are confronted with a multitude of challenges exacerbated by climate change. Extreme temperatures, alternating floods and droughts, violent winds and sandstorms have greatly reduced their productivity.

To help the communities adapt to this new reality, our teams have set up agro-pastoral field schools. The idea is simple: the field has become a space for sharing and experimentation, a kind of open-air school. Every week, around thirty agricultural farmers and livestock keepers gather there to learn about the best agro-pastoral techniques. Divided into working groups, they try the techniques out practically to test, evaluate and adapt what they have learned. The results obtained allow the agro-pastoralists to take critical and informed decisions to improve the profitability and sustainability of their own businesses.

The practices tried out include ones relating to animal health and nutrition. On the agricultural side, the objective is to restore soil fertility and vegetation cover while increasing yields despite the effects of climate change. We aim to counter these challenges with agro-ecology. The programme includes the production and use of compost and mineral fertiliser, crop rotation between leguminous plants and cereal crops, mulching, improved land clearance and the production of biopesticides. These practices help to improve the profitability of crops and make them more resilient to variations in the climate.

Something else our facilitators encourage is the 'zai' technique. By digging holes in the ground to collect rainwater and growing crops there with compost, this technique helps to restore land that has become infertile. Whereas total recuperation takes about three years, certain members of the school have already observed up to 75% increases

in yield in one year with this technique. The groups also sow several varieties of seed to compare the benefits: in this way, they have discovered a short-cycle variety of millet that can be harvested after 55 days instead of 90. That is a major advantage in a region where the period of drought between two harvests means food insecurity.



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# They support us

We carried out our activities in 2023 with the support of many donors. In particular, we worked with:

- Acting for Life / Air France
- DGD – Belgian development cooperation
- Enabel
- European Union (DG INTPA / DG ECHO)
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
- Fondation NIF
- Flemish Government
- Gilbert Tuts Foundation / King Baudouin Foundation
- Institut de la Francophonie pour le Développement Durable (OIF / Québec)
- International Institute of Tropical Agriculture / USAID
- International Organization for Migration
- IRAM
- Land O'Lakes – Venture 37 / USAID
- LuxDev (Luxembourg Cooperation)
- Province of Flemish Brabant
- Province of East Flanders
- Province of Limburg
- Research Triangle Institute / USAID
- Swiss Cooperation
- UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- Wallonie-Bruxelles International
- World Bank
- World Food Programme

## FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY ↓

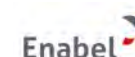
Would you like to know more about where our funds come from and how we manage our expenses? Our financial report is available on our website: [www.vsf-belgium.org](http://www.vsf-belgium.org) and can be obtained on request from: [info@vsf-belgium.org](mailto:info@vsf-belgium.org) or +32 (0)2 539 09 89.



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.



## OUR CERTIFICATES ↓



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SCAN ME





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