



# The HDP Nexus in Pastoral Zones

An effective approach serving local communities facing complex crises



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Since 1985, Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgique (VSF-B) has been supporting pastoral communities in Africa to strengthen their resilience in the face of food and economic insecurity. Active in Eastern DRC since 2007, the organisation works with indigenous livestock keepers, displaced persons and host families, combining humanitarian, development and peacebuilding interventions within the framework of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus.

## A context marked by interconnected crises

Since 2016, the Rusizi Plain and the Uvira Highlands have experienced recurrent armed violence and intercommunal conflicts. These dynamics have caused massive displacement, loss of livelihoods and chronic insecurity. Since January 2025, more than 1.4 million newly displaced persons have been added to the 5.9 million already recorded, increasing pressure on local resources and aggravating food insecurity (FEWS NET, July 2025).

Security shocks, combined with difficulties in humanitarian access and population displacement due to threats, have led to increased vulnerability of communities. Agro-pastoral households, already fragile, are suffering heavy livestock losses and a collapse in agricultural production, undermining their survival and increasing the risk of community tensions.

## What Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium does

Since 2017, Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium has been implementing an integrated approach in the Rusizi Plain and the Uvira Highlands that combines humanitarian emergency response, development and peacebuilding. The organisation supports agro-pastoral communities in reviving milk production, the strengthening of animal health services and innovation in livestock keeping, while responding to the recurrent crises that disrupt the region, notably the displacement of populations, in particular the local livestock keepers, and their reception by host communities.

In Bwegera, starting in 2021, the Nexus approach has been operationalised by linking immediate assistance to the most vulnerable households with the establishment of sustainable agricultural production structures and support for social cohesion initiatives. Multi-stakeholder dialogue forums and committees representing internally displaced persons were set up to ensure community participation and promote the peaceful resolution of tensions. This experience was then replicated and expanded in Lemera, in partnership with specialised local and international actors.

Thus, the HDP Nexus is not a juxtaposition of interventions, but a coherent strategy. When crises arise, the community mechanisms already in place — private veterinarians, animal health workers, mini-dairies and livestock feed banks — are immediately mobilised and reoriented to respond to the emergency. At the same time, the structuring of sustainable value chains, such as milk, generates regular income, strengthens food security and offers prospects for stability to households, particularly for displaced livestock keepers and their host families.

## Strengthening resilience before, during and after a crisis

The Nexus approach implemented by VSF-B is based on a continuum of actions that aim to support communities in periods of stability, protect their livelihoods during shocks and promote their longer-term recovery.

**In periods of relative stability**, the focus is on strengthening local systems. Livestock keepers are organised into associations and receive support from private veterinarians and community animal health workers, who provide accessible, high-quality services. Mini-dairies set up in the plains collect 160,000 litres of milk each year, improving both family nutrition and producers' incomes. The establishment of fodder fields and livestock feed banks helps to secure animal feeding. Income-generating activities (IGAs) diversify livelihoods and reduce dependence on external aid.

**When security, climate or health crises arise**, these systems are activated in emergency mode. Community structures provide emergency veterinary care to protect livestock. More than 40,000 interventions have been carried out in two years. Unconditional cash transfers provide direct support to vulnerable households. Goat redistributions, organised according to a system of solidarity pairs, enable families to maintain a productive activity and avoid resorting to negative coping strategies. At the same time, actions are taken to limit protection risks and preserve people's dignity by supporting community protection mechanisms and providing assistance to survivors of gender-based violence (GBV). We also support local conflict prevention and management bodies, thereby promoting peaceful coexistence between displaced persons and host communities.

Finally, **in the recovery and consolidation phases**, the approach focuses on restoring the social fabric and reducing tensions. Inter-community dialogues, bringing together farmers, livestock keepers and local authorities, facilitate the peaceful management of transhumance and shared access to natural resources. In Bwegera, these actions have contributed to an 85% reduction in intercommunal conflicts and a 70% decrease in cases of gender-based violence (GBV) in just two years. Solidarity-based livestock redistribution and joint economic initiatives foster trust, strengthen social cohesion, and create tangible incentives for peace.

By combining prevention, response and reconstruction in this way, the HDP Nexus applied by VSF-B transforms crisis management into a comprehensive strategy for resilience and stability for agro-pastoral communities in Eastern DRC.

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Humanitarian–Development–Peace (HDP) Nexus approach ↓

