

Vétérinaires
Sans Frontières
Dierenartsen
Zonder Grenzen



Activity report

VSF BELGIUM
2022

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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Raising awareness in Belgium

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

The health of humans, animals and the environment they live in are closely linked. That is why Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium is a pioneer and advocates the principles of “One Health”. It is a multidisciplinary approach that studies aspects of human, animal and environmental health together, from various perspectives. We never tackle one aspect of health without considering the others.

The rapid rise of global health and environmental crises demands a holistic approach. To give this basic principle the best possible chances of success, we apply a specific model of development cooperation and humanitarian aid. Central to this vision is the concept of decentralisation and partnerships.

The best way to guarantee a long-lasting effect is to work with local partners and stakeholders who are directly affected by major health challenges. We delegate our activities to our teams in the project countries and our local partners, who have a better understanding of local contexts and the priorities of the communities they work with. They also are better positioned to respond flexibly to constantly changing situations, especially in emergencies.

Along with our partners – including private and public veterinary services, animal health workers, farmers’ organisations, social associations and local authorities – we look into the best ways to invest in increasing their capacity. We support them where necessary with supplementary insights, providing customised courses for local trainers and discussing which equipment and skills are needed the most to improve our services. Through consultation with our partners, we have gained knowledge on what is needed to get through to local authorities and on how we can create a lasting impact. Conversely, the ongoing interactions with our partners in the Global South also provide input for development education and raising awareness here in Belgium.

In terms of international cooperation, power relationships with structural imbalances still exist, which undermine the dignity and strength of local players. We are committed to fighting these attitudes and structures by promoting a more equal and respectful partnership with the Global South.

This is our way of contributing to a new narrative of cooperation based on solidarity and justice.

This increases the legitimacy, sustainability and relevance of our work. As a consequence, we can allocate more resources directly to our project countries and reach more people who can help themselves and their communities. By empowering our local partners and livestock keepers, we ensure that they can continue their work after we scale back on a project or leave a project country.

This partnership model is based on mutual trust and respect. Through cross-fertilisation and innovation, we can learn from each other’s insights and solutions, as well as bring academic and local knowledge together. This allows us to refine our working methods with increasing precision and to attune them in different contexts to the needs, priorities and expectations of the livestock keepers and local communities. We don’t work for the livestock keepers; we work with them.

This method demands a lot from everyone involved and is a constant challenge. Everything depends on the commitment, capacity, transparency and sense of responsibility of all the parties concerned. Good communication, coordination, feedback and evaluation are needed at all times to guarantee the quality and efficacy of our work.

Nonetheless, the results are very promising, and we’re very proud to have such a diverse and competent team. Together, we contribute to better food security, nutrition, income, gender equality, environmental protection and social cohesion in the communities we support in nine African countries. You can read all about it in this report.

It would have been impossible to do this without your generous support and trust. In the name of Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium, and along with our national partners and the livestock-keeping communities in Africa, I would like to offer my heartfelt thanks for your solidarity with our cause.

Joep van Mierlo
General Director



Healthy animals, healthy people, healthy planet

OUR MISSION

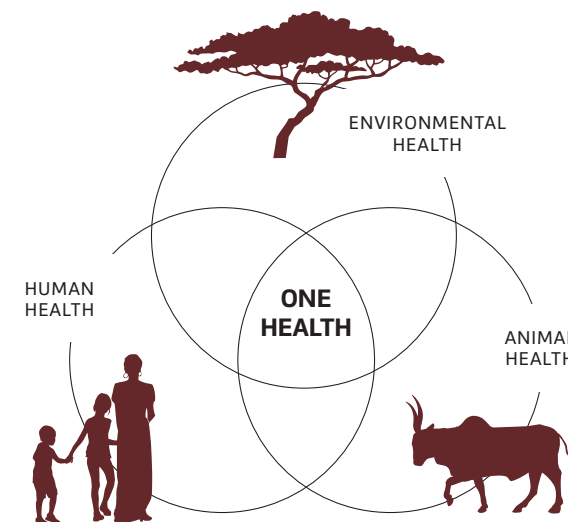
Empowering disadvantaged livestock
dependent communities in the South
to improve their well-being.

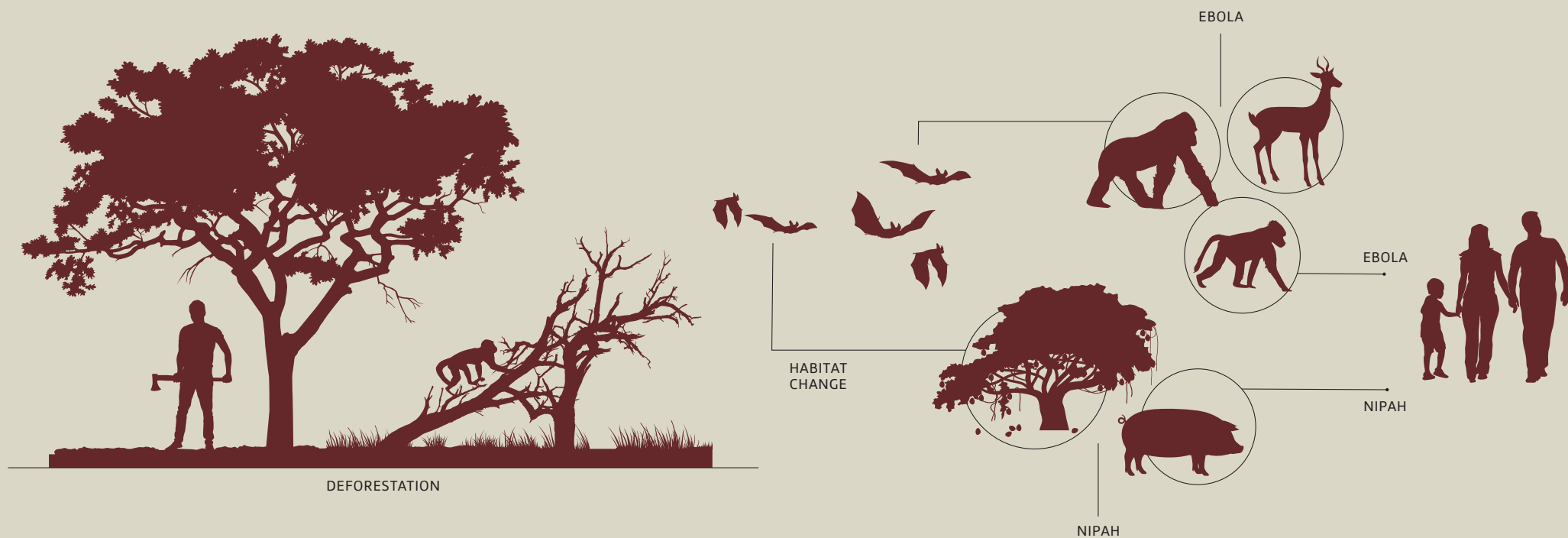


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OUR ONE HEALTH APPROACH

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.

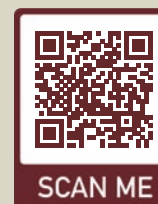




Interfering with nature means that infections are passing from animals to humans more and more often. Deforestation and the transformation of natural grasslands into fields disrupt the habitats of wild animals. These species are forced to retreat into a smaller biotope. The stress that this causes to the wild animals leads to them passing microbes on to each other more often. Many species are even going extinct. In a healthy ecosystem, biodiversity helps to regulate diseases. But a disrupted ecosystem is weakened, which ultimately leads to more diseases that can also infect humans.



Find more information
about how we prevent
next pandemics on
our website ↓





A SOLID INTERNATIONAL NETWORK

We are a member of the Vétérinaires Sans Frontières International network, made up of 13 national NGOs in Europe, Australia and Canada. Together we work in more than 40 countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia, serving the most vulnerable rural populations. Our aim is to support family-run livestock keeping and farming. We believe in the importance of a healthy relationship between humans, animals and their environment. Through our veterinary services and our work with local populations, we help to improve food security and food sovereignty around the world.

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

www.vsf-international.org



VSF INTERNATIONAL
VÉTÉRINAIRES
SANS FRONTIÈRES

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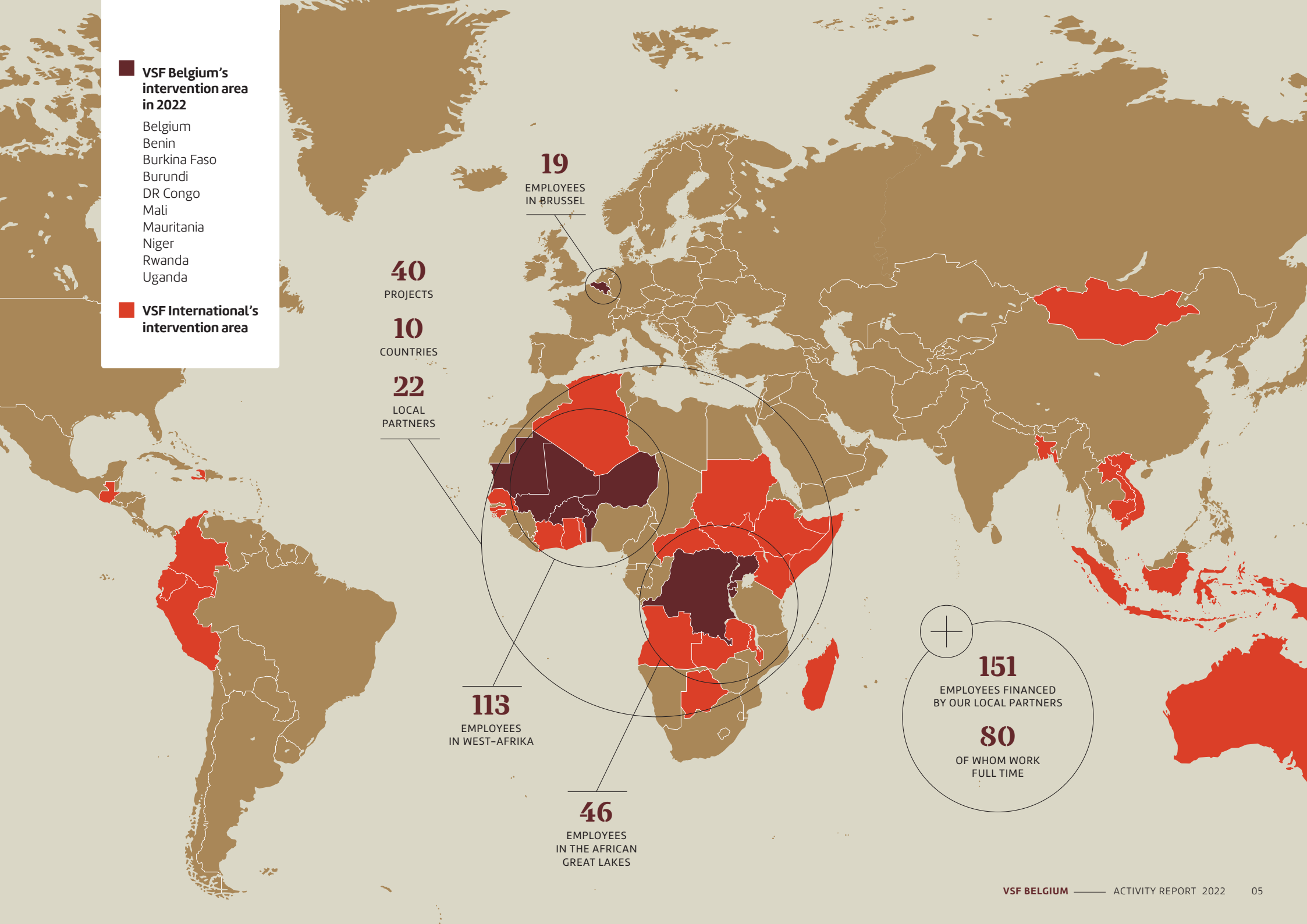
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**VSF Belgium's
intervention area
in 2022**

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

**VSF International's
intervention area**





Healthy animals



103

VETS SUPPORTED

1,181

ANIMAL HEALTH WORKERS AND
VETERINARY ASSISTANTS

18.5 million

ANIMALS
TREATED AND VACCINATED

413,576

FAMILIES
WHO BENEFITED FROM ANIMAL
HEALTH SERVICES

Whether in Congo, Uganda or the Sahel, animal health is undermined by insecurity and conflicts.

In fear of pillagers, some livestock keepers corral their livestock into confined spaces, which makes them more vulnerable to disease.

Others, fleeing to save their lives, are on the road with their herds for days at a time. Underway, the absence of pastures and waterholes soon weakens their animals, and the most fragile ones do not survive.

However, the conflicts are merely exacerbating a long-term problem in the regions of Africa where we work: the lack of vets. Private practices are often abandoned by the profession in favour of more prestigious or comfortable jobs in the large cities. Since they are unattractive to vets, remote areas soon become veterinary “no-man’s lands”, although the needs there are greatest.

This is why Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium supports community animal health workers. Usually keeping livestock themselves, they make animal health services both physically and financially accessible, even in the remotest areas. Trained by our teams in basic care and supervised remotely by a vet, they carry out a wide range of crucial tasks: keeping the livestock in good health, informing livestock keepers about best practices and detecting diseases before they develop into epidemics. Without them, mass vaccination campaigns, epidemiological surveillance and animal disease reporting would quite simply be impossible.

Although they are not always recognised by the government, these community workers are the cornerstone of the local veterinary services that we support. Introduced in West Africa in the first decade of this century, this model is highly successful among livestock keepers, particularly in Niger, where it has now been institutionalised. The system will soon be copied in Benin, and in Burkina Faso it is already indispensable as a way of reaching the livestock of communities that have been isolated by violence. The same is true in Uganda, where the animal health workers are able to keep the herds in good health in spite of the insecurity in Karamoja.

In 2022, we supported about a hundred vets and almost 1,200 animal health workers. Their joint efforts have safeguarded the health of 18.5 million animals in eight countries.

Benin

LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR LOCAL PRIVATE VETERINARY SERVICES

In the department of Atacora in north-west Benin, around two thirds of the population make at least part of their living from livestock keeping. For every ten of these people, one practices pastoralism and two others raise cows in combination with small-scale farming. In all cases, livestock keeping is mainly a means of subsistence that generates little income. Most people in the department live in poverty.

To infuse livestock keeping in the region with new energy, we have been working in the municipalities of Natitingou, Toucountouna, Boukombé and Coby since mid-2022. Our intention there is to support vulnerable agro-pastoralists by distributing livestock among them. However, conditions do not guarantee the survival of these animals or profitable production. There is not a single private vet or veterinary assistant working in Atacora. Public services, whose role is theoretically limited to monitoring, do their best to provide veterinary care. The result is a whole series of problems: livestock keepers medicate their herds themselves, they rely on untrained parties to care for their animals, or they use medicines from illicit channels.

This is why we have decided to set up local private veterinary services, the first time this system has been introduced to Benin, which has less than 100 active vets. Since this is nowhere near enough, our model focuses on training extra community animal health workers. Trained to administer basic care and working with vets and veterinary assistants, they help to increase access to veterinary services in the long term. To keep these services viable, livestock keepers have to pay for them, but the prices are kept accessible.

In 2022, the first foundations of this system were laid. In time, it will consist of a private vet, two veterinary technicians and about forty community animal health workers. The success of the model will depend to a great extent on how readily the livestock keepers make use of the services. To ensure that they do, our teams have developed different awareness-raising tools. The subjects covered range from the consequences of self-medication to good practices in animal health, as well as the detection of the main livestock diseases.



Want to find out more about the lessons learned from the different community animal health worker programmes around the world? Discover the new literature review produced by our network, VSF International. ↓



Burkina Faso

COMMUNITY ANIMAL HEALTH WORKERS ARE AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT OF THE ANIMAL HEALTH NETWORK IN HIGHLY INSECURE AREAS

For about a decade, armed groups have been increasing in number in the Sahel, unsettling the population. Unfortunately, Burkina Faso has not been spared. The situation has been deteriorating since 2018, and more and more public property, roads and bridges are being targeted, leading to entire towns being cut off from the outside world. State services, including veterinary services, are a beloved target for armed groups and have had to withdraw from many areas. This has happened especially in the Sahel region, in the extreme north of the country, bordering Mali and Niger. At the end of 2022, 22 of the 27 municipalities there were totally deprived of public animal health services.

In this context, the community animal health workers have become essential players to guarantee the health of herds in the region. Recruited from local communities, these livestock keepers receive the training and equipment they need to provide basic care to the animals in their local area. Besides giving advice, they provide curative and preventative care. For example, they treat the livestock for parasites and contribute to vaccination campaigns against fatal diseases such as contagious bovine pleuropneumonia, goat plague and Newcastle disease in poultry.

The fact that they are members of the community is a major asset in the system of local private veterinary services that we promote. With certain places becoming inaccessible to vets, the presence of animal health workers within the livestock-keeping communities themselves allows the continuity of animal health services to be guaranteed. Their efficient care of sick animals is also more affordable for livestock keepers.

In 2022, we trained 25 new animal health workers in the Sahel region, who will join their 236 colleagues already working in five regions in Burkina Faso. Together, they have been able to treat more than 1.3 million animals throughout the year, in spite of the insecurity in the region. They have done all this without compromising on the quality of their services: on the contrary, in fact, if we look at the mortality rate among small animals in the region. In 2022, it fell below 5%, compared to 15% at national level.



Our local private
veterinary services
in Burkina Faso ↓



8

VETS AND

5

VETERINARY TECHNICIANS
AT WORK

261

COMMUNITY
ANIMAL HEALTH WORKERS
OPERATIONAL

1,314,782

ANIMALS CARED FOR,
VACCINATED OR TREATED
FOR PARASITES

More information on
the context of insecurity
in which we work
in Burkina Faso ↓



SCAN ME



© Martin Demay / VSF

TESTIMONIAL ↓



© Tim Driven / VSF

Peter Lochap

32 years, Community animal health worker
Karamoja (Uganda)

Peter Lochap (32) has been a community animal health worker since 2011. He is convinced of the importance of disease prevention. As a boy, he saw his father struggling to keep the few animals they owned healthy. He wanted to learn how to care for animals better. When we put out a call for more animal health workers to train, he was an ideal candidate.

"I received a starter kit and training in animal health and business skills from Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium. Now I have a small business as an animal health worker. I buy and sell medicines, advise livestock keepers on best practices and treat their sick animals. Unfortunately, calf mortality is at an all-time high. The conflict situation is making it difficult to continue providing our veterinary services, and the increase in poverty means that profit margins are also very limited. But we continue to commit to our duty to our livestock keepers and their animals to prevent the worst, even working as volunteers if we have to!"

More information
on our work
in Karamoja ↓



The work of
community animal
health workers
in Karamoja ↓



181

COMMUNITY ANIMAL HEALTH
WORKERS SUPPORTED

170,000

ANIMALS TREATED,
OF WHICH

71,000

ANIMALS VACCINATED

AWARENESS RAISED
AMONG MORE THAN

5,000

LIVESTOCK KEEPERS

Uganda

CARING FOR ANIMALS IN TIMES OF CONFLICT

In Karamoja, a region roughly the size of Belgium in the northeast of Uganda, an unnoticed catastrophe is unfolding. After a decade of relative peace, conflicts between different ethnic groups have been flaring up again over the last few years, resulting in violent thefts of livestock and merciless plundering. At least three thousand people have already been killed in these conflicts. Livestock keepers are also suffering from the situation. The insecurity is forcing herders to drive all their animals into kraals at night. Because they have to travel increasingly long distances by day to reach productive pastures, the animals arrive in the evening in a greatly weakened state. When tens of thousands of them spend the night packed together in a small space, major outbreaks of animal disease are a very real risk.

The need is great, and our work is more relevant than ever. For more than 15 years, we have been building a network of local community animal health workers in the region. In precarious times like these, our efforts are bearing fruit. Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium can rely on local teams in many insecure areas that have now become inaccessible. Everywhere we are active, our animal health workers are being mobilised to conduct large-scale vaccination campaigns and to raise awareness among livestock keepers. In total, they have vaccinated 71,000 animals against many infectious diseases and have thus been able to prevent major disease outbreaks.

Climate change is making rainfall in this region increasingly heavy, and kraals can turn into huge pools of mud in just a few hours. These are ideal conditions for outbreaks of diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease, blackleg and lumpy skin disease. Tsetse flies also thrive in damp weather, increasing the risk of trypanosomiasis in cattle and sleeping sickness in humans. Last year, the region also suffered from periods of extreme drought which have weakened livestock. This has made them more vulnerable to ticks, which carry many pathogens, and exacerbated the spread of East Coast fever, anaplasmosis and babesiosis.

Animal health workers play an important role in the early tracing and control of disease outbreaks. In the districts of Moroto, Kaabong and Karenga, we supported 181 community animal health workers last year with veterinary equipment and training in animal care and entrepreneurship. Under the supervision of four vets and three veterinary assistants, with background support from us, they cared for a total of more than 170,000 animals and sensitized 5,000 livestock keepers.



Healthy people



65,449

BENEFICIARY FAMILIES

26%

OF WHOM
BENEFITED FROM OUR
HUMANITARIAN ACTIVITIES

14,633

ANIMALS
DISTRIBUTED

In all our projects, the link between animal health and that of the populations who depend on them has always been very close. In the parts of Africa where we work, livestock keepers and their families cannot stay healthy unless their cattle, goats or chickens are healthy too. This is the perspective from which we consider most of our interventions, because the main reason for our activities is to ensure the well-being of the populations who make a living from livestock keeping.

However, there are times when the livestock can no longer guarantee the health of livestock-keeping communities. And in certain circumstances, our animal health activities are not enough to solve the problem. In spite of all their efforts, locally based private veterinary services also find themselves helpless in the face of climate disruption and lootings. This is what is happening in the region of the Great Lakes, where a historic drought has inflamed regional and inter-ethnic tensions. Not to mention the Sahel, where insecurity has been spreading like wildfire for more than ten years, causing constant population movements. In both cases, the food security of millions of people is at risk.

It is impossible to stand idly by and watch as the populations are thrown into disarray. Our initial reflex is to strengthen their resilience, with livestock keeping as a central pillar in all our campaigns. To preserve the livelihoods of the most vulnerable people, we may give them goats, for instance. This opens a door to a sustainable recovery, assuring them of a stable income and a balanced diet for their entire family.

But when the situation is too critical, other solutions are required, even if we have to abandon our tried and trusted methods. At that point, we switch to emergency activities, such as food aid or monetary aid. In 2022, we did this in Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Niger, and also in Uganda.



Our activity
in Mali ↓



600

HOUSEHOLDS SUPPORTED
IN BOTH DISPLACED
AND HOST COMMUNITIES

1,200

FEMALE AND

600

MALE GOATS
DISTRIBUTED



Find more information
about our
humanitarian activities
on our website ↓



SCAN ME

Mali

IN THE FACE OF INSECURITY, GOAT REARING OFFERS A LITTLE RESILIENCE AND STABILITY

In Mali, 2022 marked the sad anniversary of a decade of instability. Located in the centre of the country, the region of Mopti has not escaped the surrounding climate of violence in the Sahel. In recent years, the region has experienced significant population movements, hosting thousands of internally displaced people. However, the local communities are already living in highly precarious circumstances and lack the resources to help them whilst meeting their own needs.

That is why we have decided to intervene in the cercles (districts) of Koro, Bankass and Djenné, as part of a humanitarian programme implemented in five countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Supported by the livestock-keeping potential of the target regions, our ambition is far from modest: to transform the insecure areas by creating an environment that promotes stability, peace and development. Although our activities are mainly focused on displaced, uprooted families without resources, we also target the most vulnerable members of the host community.

To help preserve the livelihoods of these people in Mali, we decided to distribute animals. Given the difficult context, we opted for goats, which are very resilient animals that require few resources and little expertise. Distributing them in “reproductive units”, consisting of one male and two females, enables people to expand their livestock-keeping activities rapidly. Goats have a short reproductive cycle, so families can count on getting a few kids in the year after the one when they received the animals. In 2022, 600 households in the three cercles in Mopti were able to start raising goats thanks to our support.

From a dietary point of view, owning goats gives them daily access to milk (and sometimes meat), thus meeting the entire family’s need for animal protein. The animals also constitute financial capital that is not insubstantial, especially for women, who do not have access to other livestock. It also stimulates the local economy.



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Chérifa Mint Mèhédi

A beneficiary from our distributions,
Al-Houman, Mauritania

Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium organises food and cash distributions for the most vulnerable people in Mauritania. This allows them to meet their dietary needs in the last few months before the next harvest season begins. Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding receive a supplementary 18 kg of enriched flour.

Vatimetou Mint Devaye lives in the town of Al-Houman and is a couscous maker. *“This aid has made us feel like worthy human beings again. Before it came, we felt dirty and despairing. We were hungry and didn’t even have enough money to buy soap. We carefully hang up the meat we receive to dry on ropes, so that it will keep for longer.”*

Chérifa Mint Mèhédi also lives in Al-Houman. She sells the bark of medicinal trees as a traditional medicine. *“The money we receive enables us to meet our basic needs, buying clothes and shoes. This project has helped us move from a very difficult situation to a stable one. Our children can go back to school, and they have decent clothes again.”*



Food aid ↓

**4,176**PEOPLE
RECEIVED MEAT**400**PREGNANT AND
BREASTFEEDING WOMEN
RECEIVED ENRICHED FLOUR**177**CHILDREN
AGED 6 TO 23 MONTHS
RECEIVED ENRICHED FLOURUnconditional
gifts ↓**560**BENEFITING
FAMILIES**3**UNCONDITIONAL GIFTS
OF 50 TO 70 EUROS
PER FAMILY

Mauritania

WHEN CLIMATE DISTRESS
EXACERBATES NUTRITIONAL NEEDS

Mauritania is one of the few countries we work in where the security situation has actually remained calm. However, the vulnerability of the population is no less worrying than elsewhere in the Sahel. In the wilayah (region) of Hodh El Gharbi, in the south of the country, the population is suffering the full force of climate disruption. By the beginning of the summer in 2022, the region had not recorded a single drop of rain in almost 18 months. A large proportion of the livestock did not survive. Then the searing drought suddenly gave way to torrential rain that caused devastating floods.

Deprived of their livelihoods, the largely pastoralist communities found themselves even more destitute. More than one in five people suffered extreme food insecurity. To assist the most vulnerable, we rolled out a food aid programme between July and October.

We organised three distributions of meat, in portions of 7,5 to 9,5 kg per family (depending on household size), to improve the population’s nutritional status. This activity was important for the local communities, as meat consumption is strongly embedded in their dietary habits, mainly due to the poor yield of agricultural farming. Many families dried some of their meat to preserve it for as long as possible. Young children and pregnant and breastfeeding women also received enriched flour. This was intended to guarantee them a daily calorie intake of 420 to 840 kcal.

Although it is not as widely known among the general public, a measure that is frequently taken in humanitarian aid programmes is the distribution of cash, which has a rapid impact on the health of the beneficiaries. Although they are given complete freedom in how to use this money, their situation is so precarious that most of them use it to buy food. If the money is used entirely for food, which is almost always the case, the amount allocated should enable families to cover 70% of their nutritional needs.



Our activity
in Niger ↓

1,073

HOUSEHOLDS
RECEIVED FOOD DURING
THE SUMMER OF 2022

2 out of 3

HOUSEHOLDS
WERE INTERNALLY
DISPLACED

3,219

FOOD AID PACKAGES
WERE DISTRIBUTED

1,273

CHILDREN RECEIVED
ENRICHED FLOUR

Read the interview
of our colleague
Djibo Boubacar Mazou ↓



SCAN ME

Our impact
in 3 months ↓



REDUCTION IN NEGATIVE
COPING STRATEGIES

- 31%

IMPROVEMENT IN
NUTRITIONAL CONSUMPTION

+ 29%

IMPROVEMENT IN
NUTRITIONAL DIVERSITY

+ 8%

IMPROVEMENT IN
NUTRITIONAL DIVERSITY FOR PREGNANT
AND BREASTFEEDING WOMEN

+ 19%

NUMBER OF FAMILIES EATING
2 MEALS A DAY

+ 30%



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Niger

FOOD AID
TO ESCAPE FROM A VICIOUS CIRCLE

Armed groups have been destabilising the population in south-western Niger for several years. In the Tillabéri region, there have been successive murderous attacks and cattle raids in the villages, forcing the inhabitants to flee to the large towns. Confronted with an almost continuous tide of displaced people without resources, the towns of Torodi, Makalodi and Kobagué are no longer able to guarantee effective access to health and education services for everyone.

In 2022, bad harvests and poor vegetation growth on grasslands only accentuated the needs of the local populations – both the displaced people and their hosts. At the beginning of 2022, the municipality of Torodi had 55,562 people affected by dietary vulnerability. During the dry season¹, between June and August, humanitarian analyses forecast almost 13,000 more. Hoping to stop these predictions from coming true, we intervened throughout the summer of 2022 in this town of refuge.

On the ground, our teams soon witnessed negative coping strategies in many families, often single-parent households run by women. Trying to improve their circumstances as best they could, they sold their animals and productive goods to feed themselves, whilst reducing their spending on healthcare and school fees. Many also started reducing their number of daily meals, with adults depriving themselves to feed the children. In despair, some people even went into debt or started begging to feed themselves.

Faced with such distress, food aid was necessary. Thanks to the active involvement of all the local stakeholders, more than 9,000 men, women and children benefited from the campaign from July to September. Once a month, each family received food coupons to exchange for fruit, milk, oil, sugar, grain and beans. We also distributed enriched flour produced by a local women's cooperative to remedy nutritional deficiencies in children aged 6 to 23 months.

Due to our support, the number of people resorting to negative coping strategies was halved in three months. At the end of our intervention, 88% of the families were eating at least two meals a day, which was a third more than when we arrived. The diversity of their diets improved by 8%, and by 19% among pregnant and breastfeeding women.

¹ Period between the moment that stocks from the previous harvest have run out and the next harvest.



A healthy planet

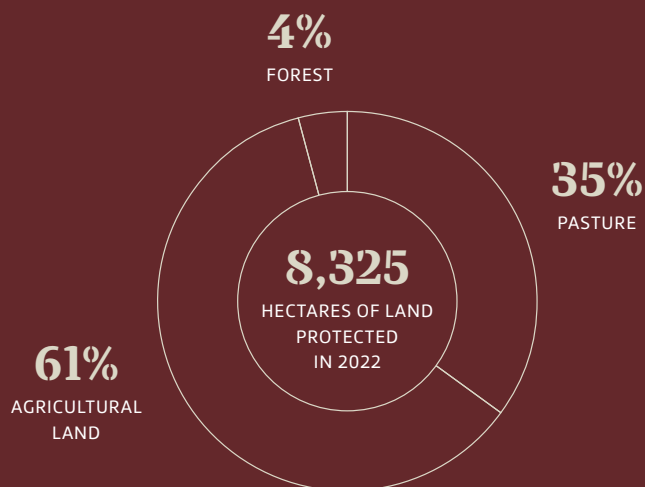
It is something we see in every country where we work: a healthy environment is the vital basis for humans and animals to be able to thrive. However, whether in the Sahel or in the region of the Great Lakes, our Earth is being sorely tested with unprecedented flooding, extreme heatwaves and unending droughts.

As always, the most vulnerable people are the first to suffer. Often left to their fate, broken by poverty and conflicts, they do what they can to make ends meet. Sometimes they are forced to destroy their natural surroundings, against their better judgement. By destroying the natural habitat of wild animals, they are at daily risk of contracting diseases whose spread can quickly degenerate into a global pandemic. Just think of Ebola or Covid-19: the danger of zoonotic risks is very real.

To break this vicious circle, we make a point to integrate the health of ecosystems into all our activities. Throughout our projects, we prove that livestock keeping is not necessarily always harmful to the environment. On the contrary, the animal farming systems we support, such as pastoralism, are beneficial to it. By moving around with their herds, livestock keepers contribute to the conservation of nature and biodiversity. On the pastures where they roam, their livestock disperse seeds and thus improve the diversity of the vegetation and landscapes.

However, pastoralism is not the only example of a livestock-keeping practice that is good for the planet. In the densely populated countries in the Great Lakes region, small-scale agroecological livestock keeping can also help solve environmental problems. As a source of income and healthy food, it is a sustainable alternative to deforestation and poaching. Rather than using external agricultural inputs, agroecological livestock keepers manage to produce food by using what nature has to offer rather than fighting it.

By promoting agroecology and combining conservation and restoration efforts, our projects have helped protect thousands of hectares of pasture, agricultural land and forests in 2022. More than ever before, environmental health is a crucial aspect of all our activities, to prevent future pandemics and to help build a better, fairer and healthier world.



Our activity
in Burundi ↓



550

FAMILIES TRAINED
IN AGROECOLOGICAL
LIVESTOCK-KEEPING
TECHNIQUES

2,000

GOATS DISTRIBUTED
AS "LIVESTOCK LOANS"
BY THE PROJECT

2,599

GOATS AND

1,494

PIGLETS PASSED ON ALONG
THE SOLIDARITY CHAINS

60

HECTARES OF AGRICULTURAL
LAND PROTECTED,
THE EQUIVALENT
OF 78 FOOTBALL FIELDS

Burundi

COMBINING LIVESTOCK KEEPING AND AGRICULTURE IS GOOD FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Burundi, one of the most densely populated countries in Africa, is faced with poor agricultural yields that do not allow it to feed its population of roughly 12 million. Willing to do anything to feed their increasingly large families, Burundian farmers cultivate every plot of land they can find, even on steep slopes and on drained marchland. However, by cultivating the land non-stop they end up exhausting it, with harvests going from bad to worse.

This vicious circle also affects the environment. Overexploitation of the land has resulted in nature reserves and protected areas dwindling. The same applies to forest cover, which may even disappear completely by 2040, with all the dangers linked to the loss of biodiversity and zoonotic risks that come with it.

But how can we preserve a fragile environment and feed the population at the same time? In the provinces of Gitega, Kayanza and Ngozi, our team has been proving for several years that it is possible to produce more while respecting the environment. The secret lies in three words: agroecological livestock keeping. We are doing our part to disprove the common misconception that livestock keeping is always disastrous to the environment.

In the forms that we support, family livestock keeping has a high potential to tackle the problems of erosion and infertile soils. However, rural households living in great poverty are incapable of investing in animals and tools. That is why we have developed a system of in-kind "livestock loans", through which households can receive either four goats or two pigs. Each household then pays forward the equivalent of what they received to another family when the first young are born. In addition, we teach them the best practices in agroecological agriculture and livestock keeping.

To protect their activities, we help the families draw contour ditches to improve rainwater management and limit erosion. We also explain the benefits of spreading manure and compost. These powerful natural fertilisers assist the infiltration and retention of rainwater, preventing soil erosion while increasing harvests. We also encourage farmers to plant hedgerows of fodder to feed their livestock. The roots help to stabilise and anchor the soil whilst improving water infiltration and retention, thus preventing water run-off and soil loss.

In 2022, 550 families were trained in these techniques. They now contribute on a daily basis to the conservation of 60 hectares of agricultural land and the restoration of its fertility.

Democratic Republic of Congo

AN INNOVATIVE ONE HEALTH PROJECT AROUND KAHUZI-BIEGA NATIONAL PARK

2022 marked the launch of a completely new project for our team in South Kivu. To the east of Kahuzi-Biega National Park, on Kabare and Kalehe territories, we are developing the One Health approach with teams from Médecins du Monde Belgium and the local partner Action pour le Développement du Monde Rural.

Covering more than 600,000 hectares, Kahuzi-Biega National Park hosts a rich diversity of animal and plant species. Its direct proximity to densely populated agricultural areas and pastures make it particularly vulnerable to zoonotic risks. Some scientists even put it at the top of the list of areas where future pandemics are likely to emerge.

In the eastern sector of Tshivanga, at high altitude, many indigenous peoples and other residents of the surrounding area find their way into the park to meet their needs. Some cut down trees to cultivate the land or to sell wood or charcoal, while others set traps to catch animals that they can eat or sell. By disturbing the natural habitats of wild species, they are unwittingly exposing themselves to zoonotic diseases and threatening their entire communities.

In an attempt to limit these practices, which are both environmentally destructive and harmful to human and animal health, we focus especially on prevention and information. At the end of 2022, we supported a patrol that was able to dismantle 35 traps and six charcoal kilns and break up three poachers' camps. We have also started raising awareness among the surrounding communities of the dangers of zoonotic diseases that they can catch through contact with animals. To reach as much of the local population as possible, we trained four journalists who broadcast awareness-raising advertisements and presented programmes on the subject on the local radio station, Gorilla FM. The park rangers, another group of key players, have not been forgotten. They now understand the basics of epidemiological surveillance and early warning systems.

Aware of the need to offer the vulnerable population of the region alternative sources of income, we have trained 100 people in livestock keeping. With the goats they have received, they can meet their families' needs without having to resort to deforestation or poaching. In 2023, we focused on participatory action research in order to involve the local communities as much as possible and find the most appropriate responses to the health issues that affect them.



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Our One Health project
in South Kivu ↓



4,888

PEOPLE MADE AWARE
OF THE ONE HEALTH
APPROACH

100

AWARENESS-RAISING RADIO
ADVERTS BROADCAST AND
45 PROGRAMMES DEDICATED
TO ONE HEALTH

30

RANGERS TRAINED
IN EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS

100

PEOPLE TRAINED
IN LIVESTOCK KEEPING
AS AN ALTERNATIVE
TO HUNTING
AND WOODCUTTING

194.4 ha

OF FOREST PROTECTED,
OR THE EQUIVALENT
OF MORE THAN 250
FOOTBALL FIELDS



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Emma De Winter

A veterinary student
at Ghent University

Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium works with researchers at Belgian and African universities. Emma De Winter, a veterinary student at Ghent University, spent two months with us in Rwanda doing innovative research into the nutritional value of black soldier fly larvae used as chicken feed.

“How can we provide enough healthy food for a growing world population? In Rwanda, the importance of that question was really brought home to me. With a very high population density, Rwanda is strongly committed to intensive pig and poultry farming these days. But the types of animal feed required for this, such as soy and fish meal, are mostly imported. They’re very expensive and far from sustainable. So livestock keepers who can no longer pay for the feed soon become discouraged. That’s exactly why I believe breeding insects as a source of food (for animals and even for humans) is very interesting and promising. Since they can convert waste into high-quality fats and proteins, insects help both to boost food production and to reduce waste!”



Our activity
in Rwanda ↓

**180**

PILOT FARMS,

30%

OF WHICH
ARE MANAGED
BY WOMEN

5,905

CHICKENS AND

554

PIGS
FED WITH LARVAE
IN 2022

Rwanda

BLACK SOLDIER FLY LARVAE, AN ECOLOGICAL ALTERNATIVE FOR FEEDING LIVESTOCK

Along with neighbouring Burundi, Rwanda is one of the most densely populated countries in Africa. This high demographic pressure means that there is not enough available agricultural land to meet the growing need for food. Since grain production is mostly used to feed the population, the country has no choice but to import animal feed. 90% of the maize and soy intended for animal feed comes from abroad. These goods were already expensive, but when the war broke out in Ukraine in 2022, prices exploded. At that point, many small farmers in Rwanda gave up livestock keeping.

To fight this problem that is both economic and ecological, we have launched a pilot project to breed black soldier fly larvae. Rich in protein, these insects are an ideal ingredient to replace fish and soy meal, which are commonly used in Rwanda to feed pigs and poultry. In four districts, we are supporting the livestock keepers who want to try it. In 2022, 180 farms had already joined the project and started breeding larvae.

Whereas the production of fish and soy meal is catastrophic for marine biodiversity, the Amazon rainforest and the Cerrado savannah, these larvae have almost no impact on the environment. Produced at the very farms where they will be used to feed the animals, they take up very little space and do not need to be transported. Furthermore, they provide a way of extracting value from kitchen scraps and manure, which they feed on.

The results observed in 2022 are very promising. Every two weeks, up to 32 kg of fresh larvae can be harvested. Once they have been dried, they are incorporated into traditional animal feed, as a high-protein supplement. 25 kg of dried larvae added to 300 kg of feed is enough to sustain about 10 pigs or 100 poultry birds for a month. Almost 6,000 chickens and a good 550 pigs already benefited from this mixture last year.

This innovative project has been extended into 2023 and is already attracting a lot of interest, both in the private sector, the world of non-profit organisations and academia. Thanks to research by students at Ghent University and a PhD student at the University of Rwanda, we will soon know more about the nutritional benefits and added socio-economic value of this innovation. This should enable us to improve the process and create a bright future for this circular, ecological alternative in Rwanda.



RAISING AWARENESS IN BELGIUM

A more sustainable food system to prevent pandemics

Covid-19, the most serious pandemic in a century, was hardly under control before another health crisis emerged, this time among birds. Last year, Europe experienced the worst outbreak of bird flu ever. The consequences for poultry farmers were immense. At least fifty million birds in 37 European countries were culled, and here in Belgium we experienced more outbreaks than ever before in a single year. When it comes to the climate, many records were broken again last year. 2022 became the second warmest and driest year – after 2020 – since records began.

Humans, animals and the planet are suffering from increasingly frequent health crises. We need to try and prevent outbreaks of contagious diseases and the continued escalation of the climate crisis at any cost. That is what we strive for in our work in Belgium. We use low-threshold educational activities to raise awareness among students, professionals and the general public of the underlying causes of today's environmental and health issues, and possible solutions.

EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW OF LA FABRIQUE DES PANDÉMIES

In May 2022, we showed the new documentary by Marie-Monique Robin, *La Fabrique des Pandémies*, based on the book of the same name, to a full house at Cinéma Galeries in Brussels. The film discusses the link between the loss of biodiversity and the emergence of pandemics, showing how humans are disrupting many wild animal habitats with large-scale agricultural practices. These animals are forced to retreat into a smaller biotope, which makes it easier for microbes to spread between them. Many species are even going extinct. In a healthy ecosystem, biodiversity helps to regulate diseases. But a disrupted ecosystem leads to a greater prevalence of many diseases, several of which can ultimately also infect humans.

“WHAT IS YOUR 2040?”

Our organisation is very active in higher education, working with future vets, agronomists, bioengineers and students in other disciplines such as food technology and animal care. “What is your 2040?” was the question we asked the next generation of young experts who will be shaping the food system of the future in both Flanders and Wallonia. By engaging in debate with the students and organising film showings, workshops, “ideathons”, lectures, guest seminars and panel discussions, we want to inspire interdisciplinary reflection on how to build alternative systems to produce food that are compatible with the One Health vision.



Our awareness-raising work
in Belgium ↓

3,588

PARTICIPANTS
TO OUR ACTIVITIES

890

OF THEM PARTICIPATED
IN ACTIVITIES ORGANISED BY GROUPS
OF CITIZENS AND STUDENT ACTIVISTS

50%

OF OUR ACTIVITIES
INVOLVED COLLEAGUES OR PARTNERS
FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH

6

INTERNS

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TESTIMONIAL ↓



© VSF

Catherine Achoke, Eva Maes and Emma De Winter

Sustainable Development and Veterinary Medicine students
at KU Leuven and Ghent University

Global challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic or the consequences of the war in Ukraine demand holistic solutions. That is why international cooperation is essential to shaping our activities in Belgium. Last year, colleagues and experts came from Argentina, Congo, India, Kenya, Uganda and various European countries to support us in spreading our message in Belgium. Conversely, six Belgian professors and lecturers and four university students visited our project countries to exchange knowledge and conduct research to strengthen our impact there.

“Our visit to a project country was an eye-opener that left a really big impression. We got to meet a lot of interesting people, we gained new experiences and we learned a lot, especially from the local population. It was a truly enriching journey for us. The wonderful places we got to visit and the touching stories we heard will stay with us for a long time. In short, this was an unforgettable experience.”

They support us

We carried out our activities in 2022 with the support of many donors. In particular, we worked with:

- Acting for Life / Air France
- Brussels Environment
- DGD – Belgian development cooperation
- Enabel
- European Union (DG INTPA / DG ECHO)
- Flemish Government
- Gilbert Tuts Foundation / King Baudouin Foundation
- Institut de recherches et d'applications des méthodes de développement
- International Organization for Migration
- Land O'Lakes – Venture 37 / USAID
- LuxDev (Luxembourg Cooperation)
- Millenium Challenge Corporation
- Province of Flemish Brabant
- Province of East Flanders
- Research Triangle Institute / USAID
- Rotary Club International
- Swiss Cooperation
- UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- Vivaqua
- 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.veterinaire.sansfrontieres.be 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.

OUR CERTIFICATES ↓



DONATE

BE73 7326 1900 6460 (CREGBEBB)



SCAN ME





CONTACT US

Headquarters

Avenue des Arts 7-8
1210 Brussels, Belgium
T: +32 2 539 09 89
E: info@vsf-belgium.org

Regional Coordination West Africa

Secteur 24, Arrondissement n°05
Quartier Dagnoen, rue 29.13
BP: 9508 Ouagadougou 06
Burkina Faso
T: +226 25 36 29 02
E: g.vias@vsf-belgium.org

Regional Coordination African Great Lakes

Sainte Famille Hotels Building
Plot Number 1260
Nyarugenge District
Kigali City, Rwanda
T: +250 787 77 33 74
E: d.ripoche@vsf-belgium.org

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