



# Private, locally-based veterinary services despite insecurity in the Eastern Congo



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In the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo, livestock keepers are faced with a crumbling animal health system. Perennial insecurity and the poor condition of the roads make the zone difficult to access, which discourages qualified animal care staff from setting up business there and complicates the supply of veterinary products.

This situation is slowing the development of animal farming, although most of the population depend on it to meet their needs. In the absence of professionals, livestock keepers are obliged to care for their animals themselves, which poses risks both to animal health and to humans and the environment. Inappropriate treatments may lead to the spread of zoonoses (such as tuberculosis), for example, or increase resistance to antibiotics in animals and the population that consumes them.

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Vétérinaires  
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Dierenartsen  
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## What Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium does

In order to offer high-quality animal health services suited to the needs of livestock keepers in the most remote areas, we have been setting up **private, locally-based veterinary services** in the provinces of North and South Kivu since 2007. The first ones were in North Kivu, but these services have now been extended to South Kivu and Tanganyika as well.

This animal health network is supervised by both **technicians and private vets** who have received accredited professional training to higher vocational, bachelor or doctoral level. To encourage them to **set up a consultancy in rural areas**, we offer a range of financial, material and technical support.

However, the scale of their task means that they require assistance. That is why we provide **basic technical training** for livestock keepers selected in the neighbouring villages. These **community animal health workers (CAHW)** are subsequently **coached by a professional** in the network.

To ensure that these locally-based veterinary services are sustainable, they are **entirely private, which means they have to be paid for**. The livestock keepers themselves bear the costs of the care and services that their animals need.

### Method

There are two aspects to **building the vets' and technicians' skills**:

- **technical training** that combines theory and practice on topics such as the diagnosis and treatment of the most common animal diseases, basic surgery and breeding techniques, so that they can advise the livestock keepers.
- **management training** to be able to run their business as well as possible: this includes the financial management of their consultancy and stock, staff management and so on.

We also provide them with **basic tools** (veterinary products and equipment) and make it easier for them to access **credit facilities**. This enables them to purchase a **means of transport** (motorcycle or bicycle) and set up a **working capital**.

Obviously, the vets and technicians in the network are **involved in the selection of community animal health workers** in the area where they work. They are also responsible for **raising awareness among livestock keepers** of the main issues in animal breeding and health, using our awareness-raising tools.

To ensure optimal cooperation between everyone involved in animal health, the network **maintains close links with the local authorities and officials from the state-run technical services**. The latter are also closely involved in the selection of the vets and technicians in the network, as well as epidemiological monitoring (especially for zoonoses). This cooperation also ensures compliance within the network with the laws that apply to veterinary care.

How the locally-based veterinary services work



## Results

Since 2007, we have helped to establish **13 private vets** (doctoral level), **14 technicians** (bachelor and higher vocational level) and **354 community animal health workers** in the provinces of North and South Kivu and Tanganyika.

After an average of three years, the vets and network staff cease to benefit from direct support. They are capable of conducting their business profitably and autonomously. Certain staff have even been able to purchase motorcycles or have a house built with the income from their professional activities.

Today more than **115,000 livestock keepers** in 858 villages have access to veterinary products and care, in spite of the logistical and security challenges experienced in the region.

The **quality of the veterinary care** provided by the network has enabled livestock breeding activities in the region to expand, in terms of large and small ruminants and other species. In the herds cared for by the network in South Kivu and Tanganyika between 2018 and 2020, the **mortality rate dropped from 13 to 5.8% in calves and from 9% to 4% in adult bovines**.

The improvement of animal health also benefits **agricultural production**. By adopting semi-stabled livestock keeping practices, following the network's advice, livestock keepers can use animal waste to fertilise their fields.



### Key figures

**14** private vets (doctoral level)

and **13** technicians

(higher vocational and bachelor level) established

**354** Community Animal Health Workers trained

**115,000** livestock keepers have access to veterinary care

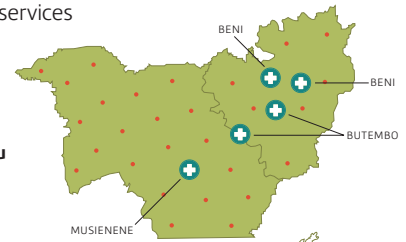
in **858** villages

**-7.2%** decrease in mortality rate in calves

**-5%** decrease in bovine mortality rate

Private, locally-based veterinary services

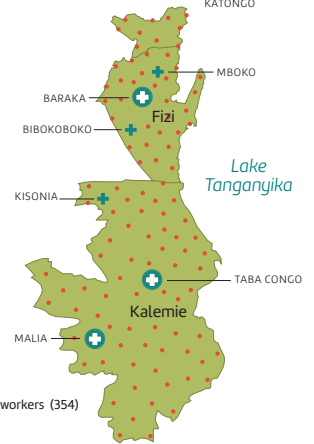
In North Kivu



In South Kivu



In Tanganyika



- Private veterinary practices (14)
- Secondary veterinary practices (13)
- Operational community animal health workers (354)
- VSF-B intervention zones



## Lessons learned

The model developed with our partners in the Eastern Congo demonstrates that it is possible to **set up sustainable, profitable animal health networks in unstable areas that are difficult to access**. The locally-based, private veterinary services have a significant impact on the socio-economic situation of agro-pastoralists, enabling them to increase their income whilst improving their **access to animal proteins**.

However, access to animal healthcare remains insufficient, or even non-existent, across a large proportion of these regions. That is why continuing the development of the animal health network in these areas is still a major challenge. It will make it possible to further develop breeding activities and **thus improve economic and food security** by facilitating access to high-quality animal products for livestock keepers and consumers. The extension of the veterinary services will also allow **better epidemiological monitoring and an improved response to the spread of animal diseases and zoonoses**.