



VEGAN COMPASSION GROUP ANNUAL NEWSLETTER NO. 2

December 2020 - December 2021



Hana School in Addis Ababa

Like many organisations across the world, the Vegan Compassion Group has seen its best-laid plans for 2021 partly thwarted by the COVID pandemic.

In early spring, we were hoping that we might soon be able to initiate more long-term, sustainable initiatives rather than simply providing funds for emergency food aid, as had proved essential in 2020. But then

the Delta variant of COVID (along with other factors) wreaked havoc in the three countries where we are currently active (Ethiopia, Nepal and Uganda).

This demanded some adjustment to our ambitions for a second year running. With so many people unable to work during lockdowns and little or no medical services or welfare assistance available, families needed basic and immediate help.

SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMME IN ETHIOPIA

Our first and still our largest partnership remains with the International Fund for Africa (IFA) in Ethiopia. For several years, dating back to before we became a registered charity, we had been providing funds for the most poverty-stricken children at a primary school in Addis Ababa to receive a carefully balanced daily vegan breakfast and lunch. Malnutrition and stunting rates in the country are high.

When COVID struck, IFA requested that our funds should be transferred to a rural school in the north of the country, Jihur Primary, and that, instead of school meals, we should fund monthly take-home parcels to help feed whole families who were struggling. We agreed, and were able to assist 124 children and their wider families during the school year 2020/21.

This September, we renewed our funding to cover the current school year though to July 2022. This support is needed more than ever because, in addition to COVID, the brutal civil war in Ethiopia is spreading disastrously, impacting

upon the nation's economy as well as prompting the inevitable horrors that go with war. (The conflict has now spread to parts of the Amhara region, not too far from where Jihur school is located). According to the UN, 500,000 people are threatened with severe hunger.

Every month, each family receives a 10kg food parcel that includes locally grown barley, maize, teff, chick peas, wheat and sorghum and provides a wide range of nutritional benefits: carbohydrates/starch (energy), protein, fibre and essential vitamins and minerals. By improving the children's nutrition, the scheme will hopefully improve cognition and learning achievement and increase school enrolment and attendance. It also offers food security, both to recipient families and to smallholder farmers who benefit from stable and predictable demand.

'IFA is now in its fifth year of partnering with The Vegan Compassion Group and our organization has built a good rapport with our donor, with great ease in communication and it is with deep appreciation that we welcomed the flexibility in the use of funds for our work in another school. This is a unique quality of The Vegan Compassion Group. Additionally, sharing the vegan ethos has strengthened our relationship'

Tsedaye Bezabe, Programme Director, International Fund for Africa,
August 2021



Food parcel distribution at Jihur School



School meals at Hana Primary School

FEEDING FAMILIES IN NEPAL

Nepal experienced a devastating outbreak of the Delta variant of COVID earlier in 2021. Death rates were actually higher than in neighbouring India for a while, accelerated by the return of migrant workers who had lost their work and income.

After consultation with the Grassroots Movement in Nepal (GMIN), we agreed in March to provide monthly food parcels for ten struggling families in Dang province – in the west of the country – over a six-month period. As with our project in Ethiopia, each parcel contained locally grown, nutritious staples including soya beans, legumes, lentils and rice, again benefiting local producers as well as recipients.

No sooner had Nepal started to recover from the worst of the pandemic than the west of the country suffered monsoon rainfalls long after the expected rainy season had passed. Almost certainly an early indication of climate change, this change in weather patterns has damaged much of the region's grain harvest.

We have therefore agreed to fund ten families with food parcels for a further six months from November. We have also given our partners the flexibility to spread the donation more widely if they believe the situation demands it.



Food distribution

'Thank you for supporting another six months. This help was really needed as farmers usually need to leave their cut crops in the field for two days to dry before separating the grains from the stalk and it rained heavily and wet the grains and then it seems most of the harvest went to waste. Most that we support depend mostly on farming and this year has been hard on them.'

Lobsang Sangbo, Grassroots Movement in Nepal, November 2021



Families in need of help



HELPING NEPAL'S STREET DOGS

When Nepal was experiencing the worst of its second COVID wave, we sent funds (for the second year) to help the brave vegan campaigners from Project Humane Nepal in their daily efforts to feed the street dogs in Kathmandu. Tourists and restaurants normally keep the dogs from starvation, but lockdown and a strict curfew put a stop to that. Every day the activists cooked up a meal of rice, pumpkin, carrots, turmeric and biscuits and distributed it to roughly 50 dogs.

While the unique aspect of our work has, thus far, been to apply our vegan ethos predominantly to the plight of suffering people, we would also like to have the resources to help more non-human animals as well.



'It's a difficult time for many animals here as they don't know where their next meal will come from. We are glad we can help through your support. Thank you for ensuring they won't starve during these panic-stricken times.'

Angeela Shrestha, Founder, Project Humane Nepal, April 2021

DEMONSTRATION VEGETABLE GARDENS IN UGANDAN SCHOOLS

In April, we began an exciting longer-term initiative in the Mubende District of central Uganda to set up demonstration vegetable gardens at both Kisojjo and Kanyagoga Primary Schools.

Mubende is one of the country's most under-resourced regions and is also home to large numbers of refugees, notably from Rwanda and South Sudan. Life there is hard and the local diet is mostly limited to maize and beans. The idea behind this new initiative was to plant a more extensive selection of vegetables such as aubergines, cabbages and carrots and to teach the children organic gardening methods and techniques, with parents later invited to share the knowledge. We also purchased fruit trees for the plots and extra seeds for the children to take home and potentially provide significant nutritional benefit for their families.



School garden site



At Kisojjo school Godfrey Kisakye demonstrates how to use the A frame to dig contour ditches. The old, temporary classrooms are in the background.

The project started from nothing. Tools, seeds and trees had to be purchased and rough plots were identified, dug and prepared for planting.

With enthusiastic support from teachers and school governors, it all got off to a great start, transforming rough land into impressive vegetable plots within a few weeks. But alas, COVID intervened again! In June, Uganda was struck by the rapidly spreading Delta variant and the government introduced a strict lockdown. We recently learnt that this will last until at least January 2022 in schools.

There has been limited easing of nationwide restrictions since September, allowing our project co-ordinator Godfrey Kisaye (employed by Devon Development Education to co-ordinate such work in Uganda) to visit the schools. At Kisojjo, the two teachers who live on site have managed to maintain the garden and, together with Godfrey, were able to plant the remaining trees that had been purchased. With nobody able to work on the school site, Kanyagoga has unfortunately been less well maintained.

While we have been frustrated in our attempt to fulfil our primary objective of teaching students and their families the skills that will enable them to improve their meagre diet, we fully intend to get the scheme up and running at both schools, though original plans may need to be modified. At Kisojjo, the infrastructure will be healthy and in place when children are permitted to resume their education; Kanyagoga may need more extensive revision.



Students and teachers planting seeds in raised beds at Kanyagoga school

'This is an exciting project which has the potential to make a real difference to these children and their families.'

Sue Errington, Devon Development Education, March 2021

Tree planting at Kisojjo school in the Autumn



SMALL IS OFTEN BEAUTIFUL



An activist gives food to street dogs and cats

There are disadvantages to being a small charity – most obviously that resources are extremely limited, sufficient to help only a tiny number of the millions of humans and other animals who need a helping hand. Our efforts are modest. Unlike the vital, bigger humanitarian charities, we do not have the means to move quickly into the very worst disaster areas in countries such as Afghanistan, Syria or Yemen (although Ethiopia too is now, alas, descending into one of the world's most dangerous war zones).

On the other hand, organisations like ours can still be valuable. Finding and developing trusting relationships with other small organisations in developing nations allows us to react swiftly in regions where we already have a presence. Our established partners purchase food locally, providing a stable income for producers as well as sustenance for those in need, and they share our ethos or can at least be trusted to understand and respect it. We feel as if we almost know some of the struggling individuals we assist personally.

Kisojjo school gardening



Handing over tools to pupils at Kanyagoga school. The containers are for making green manure.



Right and left: tree planting at Kisojjo school

Moreover, all funding goes directly to our projects. Bank charges are – thus far – our only expense. We have no staff to pay. No expenses are taken. No huge infrastructure needs to be financed. No corrupt officials divert resources along the food chain.

While our impact is small, it is real – helping small numbers of distressed children and families, while quietly promoting our vegan principles.



Tree planting, Kisojjo

CAN YOU HELP?

Please pass on this report and/or news of our work to anybody who you think might be interested, including non-vegans. Please consider a donation via our website.

While we will always be exclusively vegan, support for our humanitarian projects is not exclusive to vegans!

A word or two of thanks:

Special thanks to Vita Sleigh for once again designing our annual report and to Ned Buyukmihci for continuing to update our website. Both are heavily involved in other related projects. Find Vita on social media as @vitasleigh. Ned helps to run a valuable online website – Action for Primates – that encourages compassion and respect for primates worldwide: <https://actionforprimates.org/>

Rob Masterson has kindly taken on the job of organising a small fundraising cycling team for us at the Ride London event in May 2022. Look out for further details on our social media outlets.

Last but not least, our grateful thanks to everybody who has supported our work, whether through donations, by spreading the word or just with kind words of encouragement. It has all been much

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