



VEGAN COMPASSION GROUP SUMMER NEWSLETTER JUNE 2024

Dear Friends,

As has become a recent custom, I'm sending a summer update on the Vegan Compassion Group's current projects and our plans for the next few months. While our work continues to focus on feeding hungry children - with the additional hope of creating improved educational opportunities for them - we have also supported emergency food aid, sending a couple of donations to feed vulnerable infants living in the Moretina Jiruworeda camp for displaced people in the north of Ethiopia.

What we offer is a little practical and valuable assistance to a tiny, tiny fraction of the millions who need it, while at the same time trying, where appropriate, to explain and encourage the non-violent vegan values that drive us.

We're both dependent upon and extremely grateful for all the encouragement we continue to receive, whether sharing our Facebook posts, sending us much-needed funds or simply passing on words of encouragement. Special thanks also to Vegfest UK, who have offered us free stalls at all their events in 2024 and other generous promotional help.

School feeding programmes in Ethiopia and Uganda

Since our formation, our mission has been to support long-term sustainable vegan projects that offer the possibility of improving lives for individuals and communities in areas of economic deprivation. We began with a school feeding programme in Ethiopia and, after eight years, this remains our biggest annual commitment. Currently, we fund monthly take-home food parcels for 124 children and their families at Jihur Primary School in Amhara. Each 10kg allowance consists of grains and pulses, carefully formulated to provide many and varied essential nutrients. Barley, maize, teff, chickpeas, wheat and sorghum are all included; they are locally grown and therefore help the community by creating reliable incomes for its farmers.

The parcels come with recipe suggestions, particularly for breakfasts – traditional dishes such as Genfo (thick porridge), Chechebsa (torn flatbread) and Atmit (a much-loved comfort food/ beverage, also used as a nutritional supplement during periods of scarcity).

Monitoring of this initiative shows that it has consistently helped to achieve improved school attendance and academic performance.

We began a second school feeding programme last autumn, funding a nutritious daily meal for 50 children at Kasikombe Primary School in the Kibuga district of Uganda throughout the school year. As part of the scheme, children also learn about vegan diets and their benefits.

Kibuga is an area where most families survive through subsistence farming and cannot afford to eat more than once every day. Easily accessible safe water is a luxury unavailable to more than half of the population.

Our contribution is part of a wider initiative by our partners Magic Marble Foundation that reaches 400 children at two schools and has already helped to reduce malnutrition rates by 20%.

Similar to the project in Ethiopia, the aim is to improve educational opportunities for academic progress by alleviating hunger and encouraging improved school attendance. The difference between the two projects is that the Ugandan students receive a daily nutritious meal at school rather than take-home rations. Both methods have had a positive impact.



School feeding programme in Uganda

New project in Guatemala

Later this year, we will be funding our first initiative in Latin America, covering the costs of 500 healthy vegan meals at a vacation camp for children in the small community of El Hato, most of whom are Indigenous.

Guatemala has the highest malnutrition rate in Latin America and the sixth highest globally. Nearly half of all children face chronic malnutrition, with 47% of those under the age of five experiencing stunted growth, rising to 70% among Indigenous children.

The camp is organised by local group **Asociación Juntos Podemos** as part of its *Garden of Hope* project. The overall aim is to combat hunger in the community through education. The local population is encouraged to opt for affordable, healthy and environment-friendly plant-based food systems. Part of the educational goal is to shift perceptions of animals and the environment, emphasising the value of partnering with nature rather than working against it

Sixty participants at the camp (largely recommended by local schools) will engage in a combination of leisure activities and education. In addition to receiving healthy vegan meals, they will learn about humane living through lessons in vegetable growing and cooking. There will be time for fun as well. Children will have opportunities to express themselves through art activities and games.



Previous children's camp in Guatemala

Emergency help for war victims

Ethiopia

Although it is now 18 months since the government and rebels signed a ceasefire to end Ethiopia's vicious civil war, true peace has never been established. In April, the influential *Foreign Affairs* journal described the civil war as 'arguably the worst armed conflict of the twenty-first century'. It has claimed the lives of more than 500,000 soldiers and as many as 360,000 civilians. According to the journal, the humanitarian crisis facing Ethiopia now may be 'equally terrible'.

Our modest help in the first half of 2024 has enabled roughly 110 children aged 0-2, surviving in a camp for displaced people, to be fed for several weeks on Famix, a locally prepared vegan flour mix specially formulated to be palatable for children and easy to prepare in the refugee camp where our contributions have been distributed. The intervention has certainly saved those infants from short-term hunger and will also hopefully reduce the incidence of stunting and related ill-health.



Beneficiaries of Famix food aid in Ethiopia

Ukraine

We are also on the point of sending a donation to Ukraine to provide vegans serving in the military with nutritious meals. There are currently no provisions for those following a vegan diet, so they are dependent on parcels from families, friends and charities for healthy food.

Working with the Ukrainian group *Every Animal*, we will provide more than 300 meals for vegans serving in the military. Each recipient will receive 18 pre-prepared meals.

Our donation is sent in recognition both of the sacrifice and the dilemma these soldiers face, believing in a world of non-violence and yet feeling compelled to defend their country against Putin's invasion.

Gaza trees destroyed

Our biggest blow this year has been to learn that the 130 olive trees we planted on public land in Gaza 2022 were destroyed by bombs, not long after Israel began its revenge for the Hamas attack on October 7.

In addition to providing a valuable food source, the trees had a symbolic value, representing peace for the Palestinian people. So while it may seem a relatively minor incident when compared to the death, suffering and destruction of homes that Gaza has experienced, it is nevertheless another example of the extreme violence that continues to destroy life, despite condemnation from international courts.

We do hope that one day the chance to plant more olive trees in a peaceful Gaza will return.

Veterinary centre in Nepal

How do you choose one project to help suffering non-human animals when there is almost infinite need? Our recent decision to buy sterilisation equipment to help set up a veterinary centre in Nepal is perhaps not the most glamorous project, but is an effective and practical way of alleviating a massive animal welfare problem.

Initially, the equipment we are providing will allow our trusted and inspiring partners, Magic Marble Foundation, to set up a temporary tent and recovery rooms to allow safe sterilisation for dogs living at the garbage dump of Teku. Although a dedicated team of volunteers provide vegan food for the animals, the population continues to multiply. Animals face the prospect of hunger, ill-health and disease. There is general agreement amongst the animal protection community that sadly, sterilisation is key to developing a better future for the street animal population.

The same sterilisation equipment will then be used inside the new veterinary care centre when it is completed, hopefully reducing suffering for generations to come.



Helping dogs in Nepal

The usual plea!

I feel a little like a politician who has presented his manifesto and now asks for your support!

While the VCG has grown slowly over the years and has taken on more projects accordingly, we are painfully aware of how much more there is to do.

But we are limited by lack of funds. Our expenditure has exceeded income for the last two years and while we certainly don't want to keep reserves in the bank, this is not sustainable in the long term.

We know, however, that not everybody can afford to send donations and that there are countless other good causes that deserve support. If you can't support us financially or prefer to donate to other charities, can you help in other ways? Sharing our posts on Facebook or telling others who might be interested about our work is invaluable. We do need to increase our support base.

At the moment that support base is small yet immensely loyal and generous. We are very grateful and fortunate to have you.

Thanks and best wishes,

Mark Gold
Founder

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