

A New Year means new beginnings, and some endings, for Vita

The start of 2020 has been bittersweet for Vita's Dublin office as it heralds the end of an era for two of our most important and longstanding team members.

John Wallace is retiring from Vita after many years of service in a variety of roles, from CEO to Head of Corporate Affairs to Board Secretary.

Under John's steady but visionary guardianship the organisation evolved from Refugee Trust International, caring for displaced people in over ten countries, to the Vita we know today, delivering sustainable livelihoods through food, household energy and water security to families all over East Africa.



John Wallace has been Vita's guiding hand for many years

From supporting the development of several generations of Vita boards, to supporting the introduction of community led total sanitation in Ethiopia, to enabling Vita's continued presence in Eritrea when all other NGOs were forced to exit, John has shown a quiet yet steady determination to keep Vita relevant and effective through wars, droughts and recessions. We wish John every deserved happiness in his retirement.

Maria Kugelmann, our Dublin office's beloved Administrator also retired at the end of January, and Vita is already missing one of our dearest friends. Maria has been with Vita since the nineties when we were located in Frederick Street and has been at the heart of the organisation from the beginning. Always calm, always kind and always supremely organised, Maria can juggle multiple visas, flight changes, server crises and email onslaughts without ever, ever losing her sense of humour.

We will miss Maria's institutional knowledge of all of Vita's friends, past and present, but we wish her every happiness during this next exciting phase in her life.

Maria has been Vita's bedrock of knowledge, wisdom and friendship



However, every cloud has a silver lining—ours coming in the form of Aileen Stapleton, our new Dublin Office Administrator. Aileen has previously worked for the Holocaust Education Trust Ireland as Education and Programme Manager and for the Glasnevin Cemetery Museum. With a keen interest in Irish history, travel, music, cinema, gardening, and reading Aileen is a perfect addition to our culture-loving Dublin team!



Run for Climate Action at the Great Ethiopian Run!

In our last newsletter, we were gearing up for our once-in-a-lifetime fundraising trip to Ethiopia. Three months later and we are still reliving a truly memorable adventure with our wonderful partners, Avolon Aircraft Leasing and Dublin City Fire Brigade.

From the deserts of South Omo to the lush mountains of Chench, we had a jam-packed week visiting potato, mango, banana, clean water, safe cooking and pottery programmes. We were lucky enough to have Avolon's incredible photographer on the trip so, as a picture speaks a 1,000 words, turn over to see just some of the special moments he captured. Or watch this YouTube c



Would you like to take part in this unforgettable adventure all while raising funds for our climate justice programmes in East Africa? Vita is currently seeking entrants to the Great Ethiopian Run 2020 so if you'd like to run for climate action click [here](#) for more information or email info@vita.ie to receive your GER Information Pack. Get a flavour of what it's all about with [this short video](#).

An unforgettable week with Avolon and Dublin Fire Brigade



A Ten Kilometre Carnival

The Great Ethiopian Run is, essentially, a street party unlike any other, with music, dancing, water fights, and singing as just some of the attractions for the almost 50,000 strong crowd on the 2019 starting line. So fun was this year's race, we began to fear we'd lost half our Vita contingent to the crowds as the minutes ticked by with no one in sight!

Surely, after over two hours, they can't still be running, we thought. Just as we were losing all hope, we heard familiar singing and there, through the crowds, was an army of Irish, half running, half laughing towards the finish line! While the Ethiopian runners put on a great show with their sing-songs and banter, I think it's fair to say our Avolon and Fire Brigade gang gave them a run for their money! (every pun intended).



Come Together—Vita's First Community-Led Cook Stove Project Thrives

One year ago, in partnership with CLTS foundation, Vita piloted a new community-led approach to fuel-efficient cookstoves in Ethiopia's Gamo Zone. This approach put the community at the centre of the project and prompted people to come up with their own solutions to address the biggest issues affecting their lives. In the Mirab Abaya district, communities saw the rapid loss of trees as a major threat to their livelihoods. To combat this, community members came together and decided to introduce 100% of households to a more efficient way of cooking that avoided the traditional three-stone, open-fire stove that was causing such rapid tree loss.



"Natural leaders" emerged from communities to help drive this transition to cleaner cooking in their villages and prevent further deforestation. There was a dramatic increase in the use of fuel-efficient cook stoves with several villages even achieving their goal of 100% of households owning the improved stoves.

But communities aren't stopping there! These villages are determined to eliminate three-stone stoves (known as Sost Gulicha in Amharic). In January, communities requested Vita's help to gain access to a large, communal fuel-efficient stove for events like weddings, funerals and religious festivities when they have to cook for a lot of people. Vita shares and is inspired by this determination and will assist the villages in overcoming this final obstacle to become truly "Sost Gulicha Free". We're awed by the grassroots action the community-led approach has sparked and look forward to seeing where this new development approach might take us this year and beyond.



Sowing the seeds for a better life—Tsehaynesh’s story

“I have a plan to open a shop and build a house,” says Tsehaynesh Ditana, a 29-year-old mother-of-one living in the hills behind Arba Minch town in South West Ethiopia.

She has been growing potatoes on her small farm, measuring 2.5 hectares, for many years but the yield was so low that she rarely grew enough to feed her family, let alone have some extra for selling on. Her husband is not around much and only occasionally sends money.

Tsehaynesh didn’t know how to improve her situation without access to better quality potato seed. She also had a problem with the timing of her harvest. Everyone she knew who grew potatoes was harvesting at the same time and this meant that even if Tsehaynesh had some spare potatoes to sell, they would be very cheap because the market would be flooded with the newly-harvested crop. Tsehaynesh knew that potatoes could be stored but she didn’t have the resources or knowledge to build a storehouse.



Two years ago, she heard about the Vita potato programme, and went to visit some farmers who were already participating in it. During the demonstration, they explained how they looked after their land better, and used insecticides as well as fertiliser on their crops. They also explained that they got their improved seeds locally, through Vita’s seed generation programme, and this seed was much more productive.

Tsehaynesh was very impressed by what she saw – especially the ventilated store that kept the potatoes out of direct sunlight and fresh for months at a time. She was also impressed by the increase in yields from using improved potato seeds. But mostly she was impressed by the working groups that Vita helped form as these would be a great source of support and knowledge for women in Tsehaynesh’s position.



She joined Vita’s potato programme immediately and worked hard to learn everything she could about growing potatoes in a modern way. This involved a lot of training and the Vita team visited regularly to help her prepare her land for a new crop. She was given the new seeds and also was supported to build her own store inside her compound.

When her first crop of improved potatoes was harvested, Tsehaynesh had 72 quintals (tonnes) of potatoes, which was four times more than previous harvests. She can store some in her new storehouse for her family and she can sell the rest in the marketplace when the prices go up between harvests. Her neighbours were amazed and she was happy to tell them about the Vita project.

When asked if the programme had benefitted her, Tsehaynesh was in no doubt – “My life has changed dramatically,” she says. “Now I manage all my expenses by myself and I don’t wait for my husband anymore.” Support more women like Tsehaynesh [here](#).

Potato-based Bioplastic—is this the solution to our supermarket woes?

The myriad uses of the adaptable spud have reportedly been expanded to include plastic packaging. [Kompuestos](#), a producer of sustainable plastic compounds, has launched a new bioplastic which is reported to be made entirely from potato starch and biodegrades in just four weeks.



The bioplastic is hoped to replace traditional supermarket plastic bags for fruit and vegetables and thus significantly reduce consumers’ carbon footprint.

By using raw materials of natural origin, Kompuestos says it has created a reduction in both dependence on materials of petrochemical origin and greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere at the end of their useful life (by 30-80% depending on the material and application). The humble potato does it again!



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What are the asks from the One Future Ireland Campaign?

The campaign is asking for specific deliverables from a government that will:

Reduce Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions by at least 8% each year

Support the rural economy as farms reduce emissions and become more sustainable

Ban new fossil fuel projects

End peat and coal burning for electricity and ensure fair treatment of workers

Deliver an ambitious, State-backed home insulation programme

Advocate internationally for faster and fairer climate action and justice

Restore and protect nature and wildlife

Ensure affordable and accessible public transport for all

Enable and support community-owned renewable energy projects

Find out more [here](#).

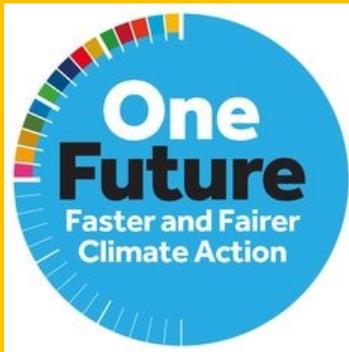
Northern Ireland declares a climate emergency

The Northern Ireland Assembly has this week declared a climate emergency. The announcement followed a debate on climate change on Monday evening and also backed the creation of an independent body to protect the environment.

Members of the Legislative Assembly supported immediate action to cut carbon emissions and called for an independent Environmental Protection Agency to be established within the next twelve months.

Northern Ireland joins the communities of 25 other nations who have acknowledged a state of climate emergency. Speaking on the need for action, Green Party leader Clare Bailey said, "we have the evidence, but we're fast running out of time."

The announcement comes at the start of a year already witnessing the escalating threat of climate change. The Australian bushfires have destroyed an area of land equivalent in size to Iceland, taken the lives of 32 people and killed at least 1.2 billion animals in the blaze.



One Future - General Election 2020

With just a few precious days left before voters will take to the polls in Ireland's 2020 General Election, a new campaign that puts the climate crisis at the heart of Irish politics is gathering momentum.

The One Future Ireland campaign looks to push election candidates to ensure "faster and fairer climate action" and is open to all members of Irish society.



Sandymount Strand saw the launch of the One Future Campaign

It builds on the enormous shift in public consciousness throughout 2019 as events such as the Fridays for Future school strikes, Extinction Rebellion protests and even the Irish Government's release of a Climate Action Plan have pushed environmental issues to the fore of mainstream discussion.

However, the One Future campaign seeks to shift this awareness into action. It is asking voters to support them in their demand for a government that will provide fast but fair climate action for the benefit of all. To find out more about this campaign, download resources and useful questions to ask your local TD, or to get involved, visit www.onefuture.ie