

University
cooperation
for
development
between

Cuba
and Flanders
(Belgium)

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Towards the East (Picture: Peter De Lannoy)

Cuba is one of the key partner countries of VLIR-UOS. From 2003 to 2020 VLIR-UOS spent over € 24,3 millions in cooperation with Cuba, including a long-term Institutional University Cooperation (IUC) Programme with Universidad Central “Marta Abreu” de las Villas (UCLV).

The ongoing IUC programme with the Universidad de Oriente (UO) and the Network programme led by UCLV are the cornerstones of the Cuba country programme, next to 20 projects that have started since 2017.

Higher education as a driving force for sustainable development

With 25 years of successful cooperation, Cuba assured itself a special place in the VLIR-UOS portfolio as **one of the top countries**. The Country Strategy for Cuba fits in with the Cuban national strategy to increase attention to the development of Eastern (‘Oriente’) Cuba and to give priority to information society (**ICT for development**) and guaranteeing **food security** with attention for sustainability, **environment** and quality of life (public and preventive **health**). Another important subject is the link between socio-cultural development, tourism development and the role and impact of **cultural heritage**.

In the context of international cooperation, Cuban higher education also prioritises strengthening of processes of internationalisation, institutional and human capacity building, doctoral programmes and research and innovation.

VLIR-UOS supports interventions that **strengthen higher education institutions** in their role as actor of change by improving education, research and extension of new knowledge, applications and services in various domains. This is in line with the **Joint Strategic Framework for Cuba**, which was developed in 2016 by the Belgian Non-Governmental Actors active in Cuba. More synergy and complementarity with other Belgian actors in Cuba will be sought for.

National Level Network

University network on ICT for development

The goal of the **Network University Cooperation** on ICT for development is to bring together expertise about ICT for **education** (including tools for English learning), ICT for **research** (including access to information, statistics, bioinformatics), ICT **infrastructure** and **computer sciences**. The cooperation network is an academic programme that emphasizes human capacity building through high-impact research pertinent to economic and social priorities of the country, all related to ICT. The aim is to contribute to the whole of the higher education system in Cuba and societal development, as it is a national level intervention.

Institutional Capacity Building

Results of long-term cooperation with Universidad Central “Marta Abreu” de las Villas (UCLV)

Between 2003 and 2013 UCLV was the main partner university in Cuba through an Institutional University Cooperation (IUC). UCLV was established in 1948 and is located in central Cuba. Initially offering Agricultural Sciences only, it nowadays **offers a full range of academic programmes**. As stated by the final evaluation, “the IUC programme overall has had a **very significant and unprecedented impact on the whole of UCLV**. It has changed the working culture in several key faculties and departments”. UCLV was able to strengthen its position as a **top university** in the Cuban higher education system and affirm amongst other its lead role in **agriculture/biotechnology** and **computer sciences**.

IUC with Universidad de Oriente (UO)

The IUC with Universidad de Oriente of Santiago de Cuba, started in 2013, is in line with the priority to focus on **strengthening the development in Eastern Cuba**. Currently a second programme phase runs until 2022. The programme aims **at improving the university performance on research, innovation and teaching** (in the fields of food security, environment and climate change, health and education support, energy and fuels, science and technology improvement), its overall **institutional support structures** (e.g. ICT and infrastructure, academic English...) and the **cooperation** with eastern Cuban universities. **Extension of the cooperation results** from the university to all the eastern of Cuba is put forward.



VLIR-UOS partnerships

The Network University Cooperation is based on a **partnership** between 6 Cuban universities, the Cuban Ministry of Higher Education and 3 Flemish universities. The goal of these partnerships is **capacity building** based on long term investments in human capital and building up **networks**. The knowledge and knowhow of **6 Cuban universities** (UCLV, Universidad de Pinar del Río, Universidad de las Ciencias Informáticas, Universidad "Oscar Lucero Moya" de Holguín, Universidad de Camagüey and UO) are brought together and represents higher education in all regions of the country.





ICT as a transversal theme

ICT has always had a special place in VLIR-UOS cooperation with Cuba. Since many years Cuban universities had to cope with **extremely limited bandwidth** and only through high creativity and dedication it was possible to run the ICT environments at Cuban universities. **Flemish open source software (ABCD)** also found its way to libraries and museums in Cuba, with the support of a VLIR-UOS library expert group. After the pilot in Cuba, the library computerisation system was implemented in various other VLIR-UOS partner countries.



Focus on country-strategic themes

TEAM and South Initiative (SI) projects are mutually reinforcing projects that aim to strengthen the research and education capacity and to bring into service this capacity to find sustainable solutions to local and global development challenges.

Food security

Eastern Cuba is a crucial region for assuring food security in relation to environment, a priority theme for the Cuban state. Several VLIR-UOS projects from the past already focused on issues related to food security (soil systems, dairy production, livestock production, food and plant biotechnology) and environmental friendly technologies for production. A project with Universidad de Camaguey focuses on developing **eco-friendly strategies** to control invasion of land by invasive woody plants ('marabú') as to increase food production. Another project develops research and training of human resources in **plant biotechnology** in order to develop clean and elite plantlets and seeds for agriculture.

Health

Public health is important in Cuba and research in this domain continues of national priority. A project with the Instituto Superior Politécnico works on **rehabilitation of children** with cerebral palsy. The project with the Centro de Neurociencias de Cuba develops tools and practical guidelines for the prevention and early diagnosis of **dementia**. A short term project with Universidad de Havana strengthened co-responsible **elderly care**.

Environment

A finalised TEAM project with the Universidad de Cienfuegos focused on **clean production and technologies for industry**. This project was particularly relevant in a context of high energy shortage and old industries, where modernization of industries in a **sustainable, environment-friendly** manner is crucial. This new knowledge was transferred to a number of the old industries in the Cienfuegos Bay Area (oil refinery company, cement factory) amongst other to assist relevant stakeholders in complying with heavy metal emission standards.

Scholarships

Scholarships are powerful tools. Most scholarships are awarded within Cuba projects and support the processes of change at the level of a department or institution. Scholars are also triggered to broaden their horizon, learn to look at problems from a multidisciplinary perspective and grow into a skilful researcher.

Main elements of the country strategy for Cuba

Food security & agricultural production: food & livestock production, rural development & agricultural management, plant & animal biotechnology, ...

Environment: climate change, coastal zone management, clean technology & production, clean & efficient energy, ...

Socio-cultural & tourism development: tourism development & management, sustainable management of cultural heritage, ...

Public health: preventive medicine, community health, epidemiology/ICT & health, ...

ICT & applications: artificial intelligence & computer sciences, bio-informatics, ICT & education, ...

Transversal support themes:

ICT & applications: ICT systems & administration, (bio-)statistics, learning platforms development, ...

Language & communications: academic writing & presentation, English learning & communication, ...

Information management: access to and management of research information & resources, ...

About the country strategy

During the reform of non-governmental development cooperation in 2016, VLIR-UOS updated its list of 20 partner countries, hereby reconfirming Cuba as a partner country. For each partner country VLIR-UOS elaborated a country strategy, to serve as a road map for cooperation going forward.

A country strategy reflects the opportunities for university cooperation for development between the country in question and Belgium/Flanders. A country strategy serves as a reference framework for programming, leading to strategy based calls for proposals.

More information:

vliruos.be/cuba

Total budget Cuba 2003-2020 (in €)	
Projects	€ 23.849.451
Individual scholars	€ 541.703
Total	€ 24.391.154

Scholars from Cuba in the context of VLIR-UOS cooperation (2003-2019)	
PhD* (finalised)	140
Short Term*	371
Study/Master*	56
Total	567

* The numbers are a minimal estimation as a number of local (short term and PHD) scholarships within projects and programmes are not calculated.

In addition to Cuban scholars coming to Belgium, 81 Belgian scholars were granted a travel grant (short term) to Cuba. More information on the scholarships of VLIR-UOS: www.vliruos.be/scholarships.

About VLIR-UOS

VLIR-UOS supports partnerships between universities and university colleges in Flanders (Belgium) and the South looking for innovative responses to global and local challenges.

VLIR-UOS funds cooperation projects between professors, researchers and teachers. VLIR-UOS also awards scholarships to students and professionals in Flanders and the South. Lastly, VLIR-UOS helps to strengthen higher education in the South and the globalisation of higher education in Flanders.

VLIR-UOS is part of the Flemish Interuniversity Council and receives funding from the Belgian Development Cooperation. www.vliruos.be

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