

University cooperation for development between Ecuador and Flanders (Belgium)

September 2020



Ecuador is one of the key partner countries of VLIR-UOS. From 2003 to 2020 VLIR-UOS spent over € 22 million in cooperation programmes with Ecuador, including 2 long-term Institutional University Cooperation programmes with the **Escuela Politécnica del Litoral (ESPOL)** and the **University of Cuenca (UCuenca)**.

The national **Network in Biodiversity** coordinated by ESPOL and 3 other Ecuadorian universities is currently the cornerstone of the Ecuador country programme.

Higher education as a driving force for sustainable development

There is a longstanding history of cooperation between Ecuadorian and Flemish higher education institutions. After nearly **25 years of successful cooperation**, Ecuador remains one of the main partner countries in the VLIRUOS portfolio, currently second in Latin America after Cuba.

The Country Strategy for Ecuador fits in with the Ecuadorian national strategy for **improving the quality of life** ('Buen vivir'). Two main themes of the Country Strategy are **biodiversity** and **education**. Ecuador also aims at becoming 'a country of knowledge' whereby the focus is both on scientific and ancestral knowledge. Training of individuals and **higher education** institutions of excellence is a top priority. Other important subjects are **preventive health** and the role and impact of **migration, cultural heritage** and **diversity**.

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 Ecuador**, which was developed in 2016 by the Belgian Non-Governmental Actors active in Ecuador. More synergy and complementarity with other Belgian actors in Ecuador will be sought for.

Institutional Capacity Building

Results of long-term institutional university cooperation with ESPOL

Between 1998 and 2010 ESPOL was a partner university of the Institutional University Cooperation programme (IUC) of VLIR-UOS. Jorge Calderón, professor at ESPOL and former local coordinator of the IUC programme, testified on **the impact of the partnership** on the university:

‘We were the subject of university cooperation with several countries: Sweden, France, Japan, the United States, Germany among others. But only the one with the Flemish universities lasted. What makes the difference? I think it is because **it aimed to change the culture of the university system**. It’s the long-term effort with emphasis on research that brought this change. This IUC cooperation really moved the university in a different direction, trying to focus on knowledge generation. It’s the **long-term effort**, among other things, that really brought this change.’

IUC with the University of Cuenca

The IUC with Cuenca University started in 2007 ended in 2019. The aim of the programme was to **improve the quality of life in the southern highlands of Ecuador**.

The programme aimed at institutional capacity building, as also on the following themes strategic for Cuenca, the Azuay region and Ecuador: **biodiversity** (mainly medicinal plants) and **natural resources** (focus on water management), **health** and **educational matters** related to quality of life (nutrition; sexual education) and managing national/global and cultural **heritage**.

Network Ecuador: Universities unite on biodiversity

The Network University Cooperation aims to bring expertise together about biodiversity and natural resources with a particular focus on **water management** and **biodiscovery**. The aim is to set up the first **interuniversity master programme** in Ecuador and link up with regional and international initiatives.

During the preparatory year, the network already led to the establishment of REDU, a **research network** of Ecuadorian universities. In addition to the biodiversity master’s programme, REDU will also launch two other pilot interuniversity master’s programmes.



VLIR-UOS partnerships

The biodiversity Network is based on a partnership between four Ecuadorian universities and three Flemish universities. The goal of these partnerships is **capacity building** based on long term investments in human capital and **building up networks**.

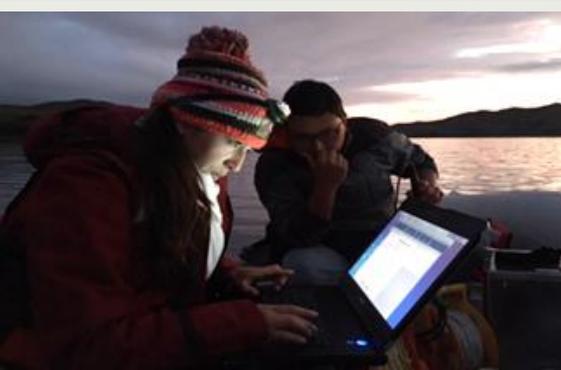


Focus on country-strategic themes

TEAM, South Initiative (SI) and JOINT 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.

Biodiversity and natural resources

The lakes in Northern Ecuador provide important ecosystem services to local communities, such as fisheries, acting as a tourist attraction pole, and providing drinking water to cities or irrigation water for agriculture. **The quality and quantity of water** in the lakes, however, is declining and there is a need for **sustainable management** of these lakes. An ongoing TEAM project with Universidad Tecnica del Norte (UTN) is assessing the ecological status of four major lakes in the region and links water quality issues in these lakes with human activities in the catchment basin. The project aims to capacitate UTN to provide sound **scientific advice** to regional authorities for the sustainable management of the lakes. From the start of the project, meetings were organised with **stakeholders**, as to facilitate the take-up of the research results during the project. Through the project, UTN wants to expand its facilities and expertise and aims to become a **national centre of excellence** in the ecological assessment and management of freshwater ecosystems.



Education

Close cooperation with VVOB and the Ecuadorian ministry of Education has already led to a number of pilot initiatives with a national impact. The aim is that these projects reinforce the other activities of VLIR-UOS in Ecuador, bringing these experiences to a national level. A new **national project** to improve the quality of **educational research** with the national pedagogic institute (UNAE), will establish a national association for educational research. They will also work on **research based education**. Key to the country wide association is to establish a **strong steering committee** with authorities from several Ecuadorian universities, as well as an **international advisory board** in order to learn from international experiences and experts. Two other projects in Ecuador focus on early childhood education and train the trainers.



Scholarships

Scholarships are powerful tools. It allows Ecuadorian students to broaden their horizon, learn to look at problems from the perspective of multiple disciplines and to grow into a **skilful researcher**. Also Flemish students spend time in an Ecuadorian institution and **create close ties**.



Main elements of the country strategy for Ecuador

Biodiversity & natural resources

Education: educational research and problem based learning, research based education, teacher training, PHD training...

Health: health system and public health/family medicine, HIV...

Social Sciences: security issues, migration and intercultural topics...

Food & Nutrition

Cultural Heritage

The following cross-cutting and transversal themes were identified. :

University Management and issues related to strengthening of academic skills (scientific writing, statistic, Academic English, ..) and **institutional capacity building**.

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 Ecuador 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/ecuador

Total budget Ecuador 2003-2020 (in €)	
Projects	€ 19.626.296
Individual scholars	€ 2.440.963
Total	€ 22.067.259

Scholars from Ecuador in the context of VLIR-UOS cooperation (2003-20189)	
PhD*	1
Short Term*	58
Study/Master*	53
Total	112

* Only scholarships outside projects and programmes are shown; a lot of scholarships are included in projects or programmes.

In addition to Ecuadorian scholars coming to Belgium, 423 Belgian scholars were granted a travel grant (short term) to Ecuador and 2 students were granted a sandwich Ph.D. scholarship. 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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