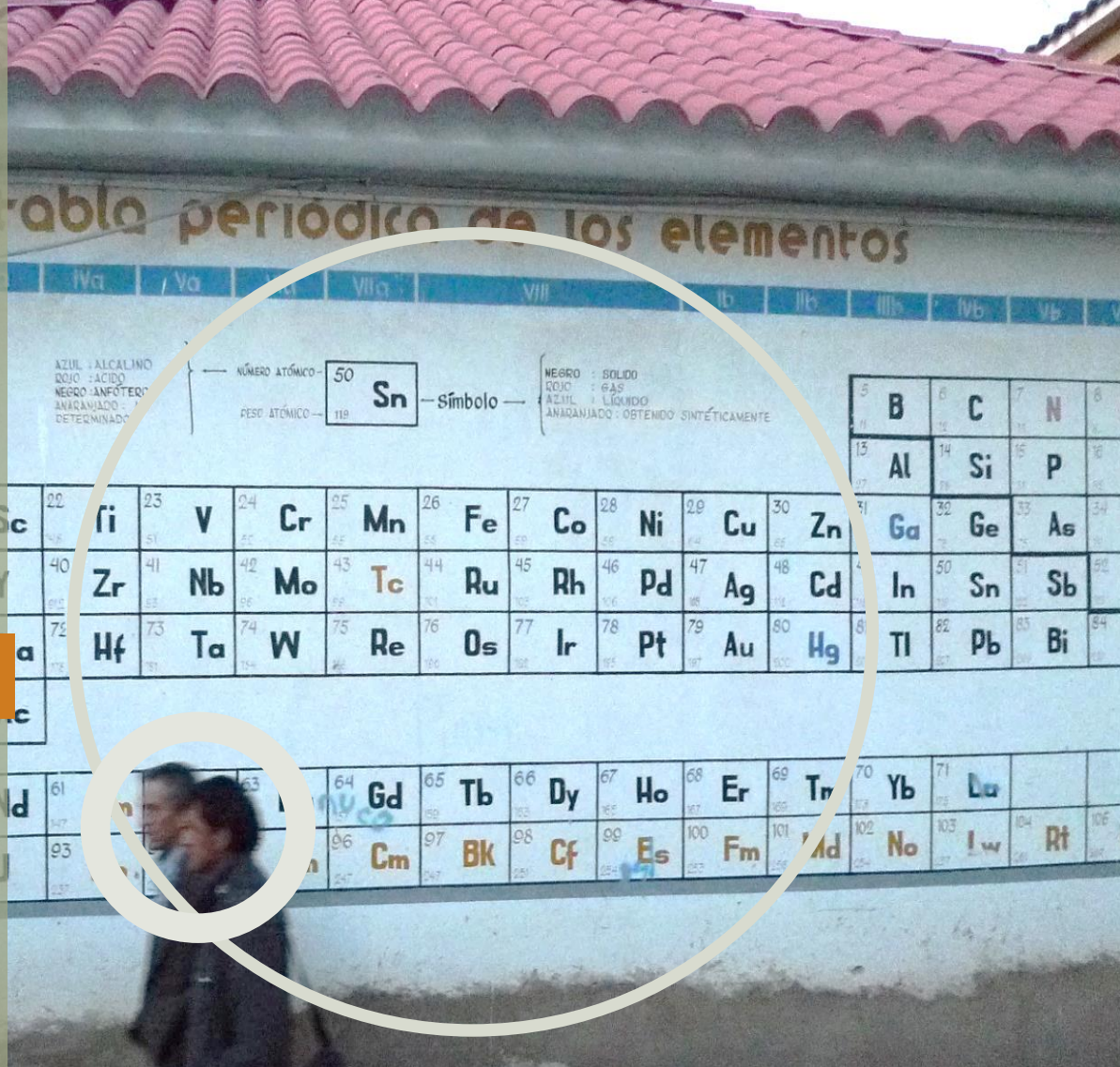


Higher education cooperation for sustainable development between

**Bolivia** and Flanders (Belgium)

February 2024

Bolivia is an important partner country of VLIR-UOS. From 2003 to 2023 VLIR-UOS spent more than € 11,2 million in cooperation with Bolivia, including a long-term Institutional University Cooperation (IUC) Partnership with Universidad Mayor de San Simon (UMSS) of Cochabamba and an ongoing IUC with the Universidad Católica Boliviana (UCB) which started in 2017 and is now in its 2nd phase of cooperation.



## Higher education as a driving force for sustainable development

VLIR-UOS has a **long lasting history of cooperation** with higher education institutions in Bolivia.

VLIR-UOS revised its country approach towards an 'Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development' centred approach. Moreover, VLIR-UOS wants to facilitate connections between different actors and projects present in a given country. With these objectives in mind, the Country Reference Framework (CRF) for Bolivia supports teams of academics when identifying and formulating project proposals, by providing a context analysis focused on Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development and the higher education sector in Bolivia, and by providing an overview of Belgian development actors active in Bolivia, their ongoing projects and partners, in view of exploration of opportunities for synergy and complementarity.

VLIR-UOS cooperation in Bolivia fits very well with the national development strategy and plans focusing on 'vivir bien' and sustainable development and has mainly focused on themes such as environment and natural resources, food security and sovereignty, social development and research support. A new national economic plan for development 2021 – 2025 integrates the SDGs, which is in line with VLIR-UOS' objective of working towards Agenda 2030.

# Institutional Partnerships

## Results of long-term cooperation with Universidad Mayor de San Simon

The Institutional University Cooperation (IUC) with the Universidad Mayor de San Simon (UMSS) of Cochabamba started in 1996.

The programme worked on improving several laboratories (on geotechnics, hydraulics, limnology and aquatic resources) and research centres (on water and environmental sanitation, biodiversity and genetics, planning and management).

The IUC aimed at strengthening research capacity and postgraduate education at a university which also faced the problem of a lack of a scientific culture. As stated by the final evaluation of the programme in 2008, the main achievement was “that a **research culture was born** and activities deployed have proven to be valuable for the **education of students** and to several external users. UMSS counts today several **competitive research centres** that are **sustainable** even without VLIR-UOS collaboration”.

## IUC with Universidad Católica Boliviana

In 2017, a new IUC started with the Universidad Católica Boliviana (UCB). This partnership, which moved into a 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of cooperation since 2022, aims to contribute to the development of the Bolivian society by creating Transdisciplinary Learning Communities at the four regional academic units of UCB (Cochabamba, La Paz, Santa Cruz and Tarija).

The UCB, in cooperation with public universities and local communities, will be strengthened to develop the **training and research capacity** to transdisciplinary generate and disseminate knowledge, know-how and practical tools, with the aim to respond more adequately to **complex local problems**.

By supporting UCB to build out interdisciplinary and interuniversity research which will collaboratively **involve local communities as equal partners**, these communities will increase resilience to challenges of climate change, environmental degradation, migration and urbanization with the aim to maintain and improve the **quality of life for all the community members**, especially families, women, children and adolescents.



### Centre of Biodiversity and Genetics at UMSS

The VLIR-UOS support for this centre was highly relevant, as Bolivia is a country rich in biodiversity but which is seriously threatened. This relevance was confirmed by the Vice Ministry for Environment, which has selected it as one of four Bolivian reference centres. This means that any national or international organization who wants to enter in Restricted Natural Areas, must go through one of these centres.



### VLIR-UOS partnerships

The IUC programme with UCB is based on a partnership between the four regional academic units of UCB, four Flemish universities and one university college. The goal of these partnerships is capacity building based on long term investments in human capital and building up networks.





Master students in Irrigation



Uptake by stakeholders



A VLIR-UOS TEAM-project resulted in a spin-off project, where socially vulnerable mothers who were involved in the project, decided to continue seeing and helping each other in a self-support group.



## Focus on sustainable development priorities

TEAM and Short 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.

### Environment and natural resources

Both mining and domestic sewage have a major impact on **water quantity and quality** in the headwaters of the La Palca basin in Potosí. An SI project which starts in 2017 wants to contribute to the improvement of water quality through strengthening the **investigative skills** of teachers of the Universidad Autónoma Tomás Frías by developing training programs and field training. As a first step, emphasis is put on data-collection and analysis. Mining activities within and near the basin will be investigated and strategies of prevention and mitigation of **pollution** will be established in order to promote sustainable management of water resources in the region.

### Food security and sovereignty

Given the challenges related to water resources and agriculture in Bolivia, irrigation is an extremely important issue. However, until recently, no **Master Science (MSc.)** programme existed on **irrigation**. In the framework of a VLIR-UOS TEAM project with the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés of La Paz, a new MSc. on Irrigation was elaborated and implemented. Now, this programme delivers highly qualified irrigation specialists to the labour market.

### Social development

A recent VLIR-UOS team project developed research strategies and methodologies to support the **psycho-social wellbeing** of children, adolescents and (migrant) families. The research starts from practice and implements participatory action research, **involving NGOs and policy makers**. A parent group made a video to show how they are experiencing their children living in the streets. Through this video, a local NGO working with children in vulnerable situations realized that they had never thought about the parents. Now, the NGO involves the mothers in the project.

## Scholarships

Scholarships are powerful tools. It allows Bolivian 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 a Bolivian institution and create close ties.

## About the Country Reference Frameworks

VLIR-UOS **Country Reference Frameworks** (CRF) support teams of academics when identifying and formulating project proposals, by providing a context analysis focused on Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development and the higher education sector in a given country, and by providing an overview of Belgian development actors, their ongoing projects and partners in that country in view of exploration of opportunities for synergy and complementarity within the Joint Strategic Framework of Belgian Non-Governmental Actors active in Bolivia. On the other hand Belgian HE and Science actors joined in a thematic Joint Strategic Framework (JSF) on HES4SD.

The country reference frameworks consist of three components: (i) overview of VLIR-UOS projects in the country; (ii) context analysis focused on the Agenda 2030 framework and the higher education sector; (iii) overview of Belgian development actors (ANGCs involved in thematic or geographic JSFs & Enabel), their local partners and their regional/thematic focus.

More information:

[vliruos.be/bolivia](http://vliruos.be/bolivia)

Total budget Bolivia 2003-2023 (in €)	
Projects	€ 9,525,876
Individual scholars	€ 1,738,806
<b>Total</b>	<b>€ 11.264.672</b>

Scholars from Bolivia in the context of VLIR-UOS cooperation (2003-2023)	
PhD*	/
Short Term*	22
Study/Master*	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>



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

In addition to Bolivian scholars coming to Belgium, 269 Belgian scholars were granted a travel grant (short term) to Bolivia and another 3 were granted a sandwich Ph.D. scholarship. More information on the scholarships of VLIR-UOS: [www.vliruos.be/scholarships](http://www.vliruos.be/scholarships).

## About VLIR-UOS

VLIR-UOS supports partnerships between universities and universities of applied sciences and arts in Flanders (Belgium) and partner countries looking for innovative responses to global and local sustainable development challenges.

VLIR-UOS is part of the Flemish Interuniversity Council and receives funding from the Belgian Development Cooperation. [www.vliruos.be](http://www.vliruos.be)

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