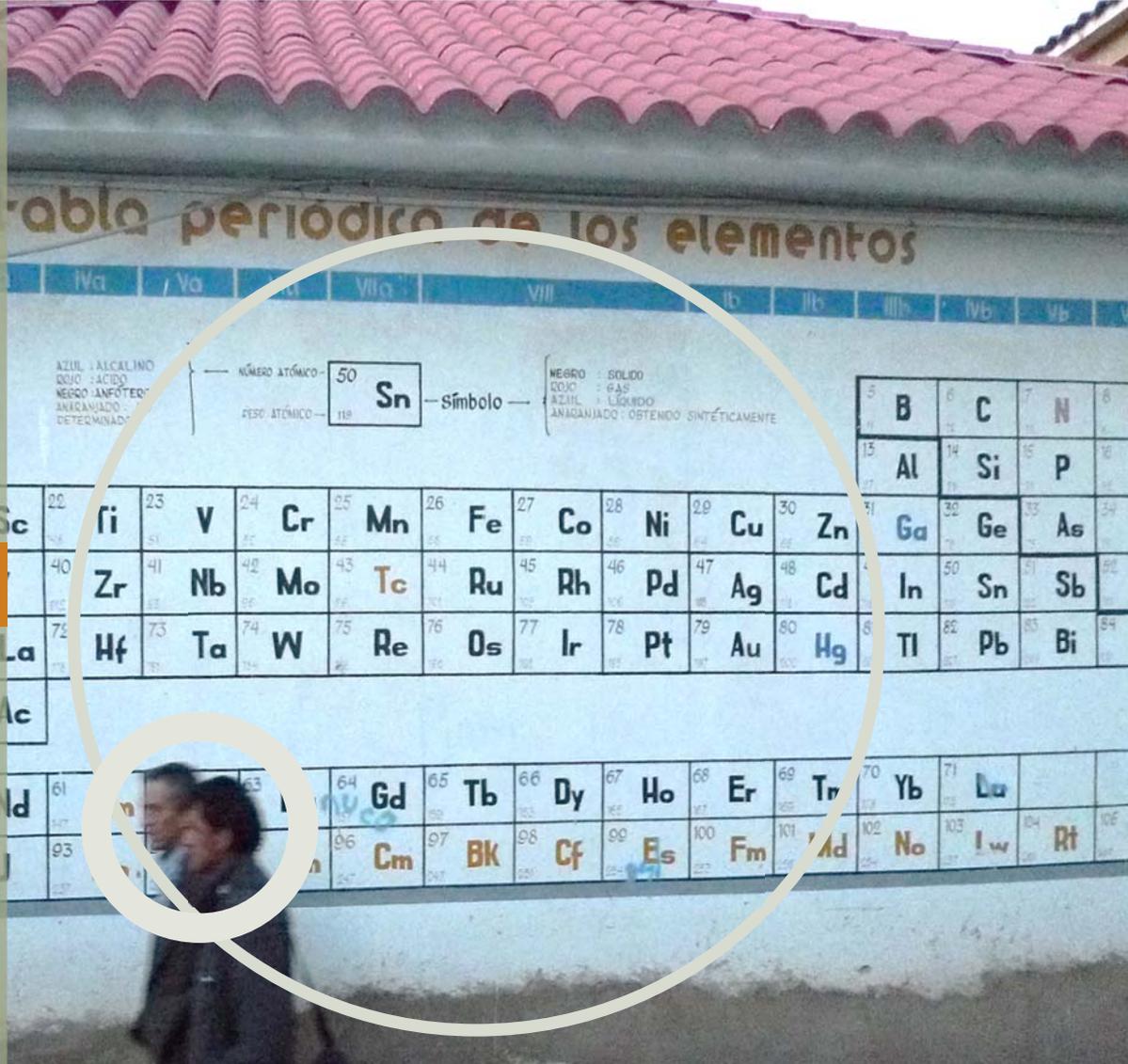


University cooperation for development between Bolivia and Flanders (Belgium)

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Bolivia is an important partner country of VLIR-UOS. From 2003 to 2020 VLIR-UOS spent more than € 8,5 million in cooperation with Bolivia, including a long-term Institutional University Cooperation (IUC) Programme with Universidad Mayor de San Simon (UMSS) of Cochabamba.

A new IUC programme with the Universidad Católica Boliviana (UCB) which started in 2017 is the cornerstone of the Bolivia country programme.



Higher education as a driving force for sustainable development

VLIR-UOS has a long lasting history of cooperation with higher education institutions in Bolivia. One of the first generation long term IUC programmes started in Bolivia in 1996.

The Bolivia **Country Strategy** fits very well with the national development strategy and plans focusing on 'vivir bien' and sustainable development. This is translated in the country strategy by means of 3 central themes: '**environment and natural resources**', '**food security and sovereignty**' and '**social development**'. Given the limited research culture in Bolivia, '**research support**' has been identified as crosscutting theme.

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

Institutional Capacity Building

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

The institutional university cooperation (IUC) programme 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 programme 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 2016, a new IUC programme was elaborated with the Universidad Católica Boliviana (UCB). This program 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 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.

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.

Main elements of the country strategy for Bolivia

Environment and natural resources: water, irrigation, climate change, pollution, biodiversity...

Food security and sovereignty with a specific focus on family agriculture and nutrition

Social development: social insecurity and safety, public health, indigenous rights, multiculturalism, immigration...

Transversal support themes:

Research support: research policy, data management, statistics, academic English, scientific writing, interface with society...

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 Bolivia 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/bolivia

Total budget Bolivia 2003-2020 (in €)	
Projects	€ 7.216.227
Individual scholars	€ 1.484.138
Total	€ 8.700.365

Scholars from Bolivia in the context of VLIR-UOS cooperation (2003-2020)	
PhD*	/
Short Term*	20
Study/Master*	21
Total	41

*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, 245 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.

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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