

University cooperation for development between Cambodia and Flanders (Belgium)

October 2020



Higher education as a driving force for sustainable development

Cambodia returned in 2016 to the VLIR-UOS list of partner countries -after a few years without project opportunities- because of its **potential for university cooperation** and the **growing interest** of Flemish and Indonesian institutions to work together.

The Cambodia **Country Strategy** fits with the national development strategy which recently has put more focus on **human capital development**, considering the knowledge-based economy and information technology. This is translated in the country strategy by means of following central themes: **'education', 'health', 'rural development & agriculture', 'environment' and 'governance & sustainable development'**. **'Institutional capacity building'** and **'research strengthening'** have been identified as crosscutting themes.

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

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.

Health

Two finalized TEAM-projects in Cambodia focused on strengthening **public health care**. One project with the University Hospital Phnom Penh worked on improving the diagnosis, treatment and follow-up of **gastrointestinal cancers**, by introducing a scientific oncology programme with the creation of a **reference centre** for treatment of gastrointestinal cancer tumors. The project resulted in **higher quality and higher quantity** of oncological operations. It also led to a **spin off** for cervical cancer with the cooperation of the Institut Pasteur which led to a national campaign on cervical cancer awareness. A few years later, these experiences resulted in a second VLIR-UOS project establishing an **oncology centre** at the University of Health Sciences in Phnom Penh, setting up a cancer **prevention** and **therapy** programme. At institutional level, the centre enabled the university to develop **bedside teaching** on a graduate and post-graduate level and to start with scientific research on cancer treatment.

Rural development & agriculture

Although Cambodia still largely depends on its agriculture and it is well known that **livestock parasitic diseases** are very common, very little information is available on the prevalence and (economic) importance of these parasitic diseases. Consequently, it is unknown which are the appropriate control measures to recommend. A finalized TEAM project aimed at increasing the **capacity for diagnosis** of parasitic infections. The project worked on equipping laboratories, transferring techniques, and training of both technical and scientific staff. The results of the project were then used in further local research on **control strategies** adapted to the local conditions and needs. An important aspect of the project related to training local staff, was to ensure that the persons trained became **permanent staff** at the institutions involved in the projects. They used the acquired skills for further research and projects.





VLIR-UOS partnerships

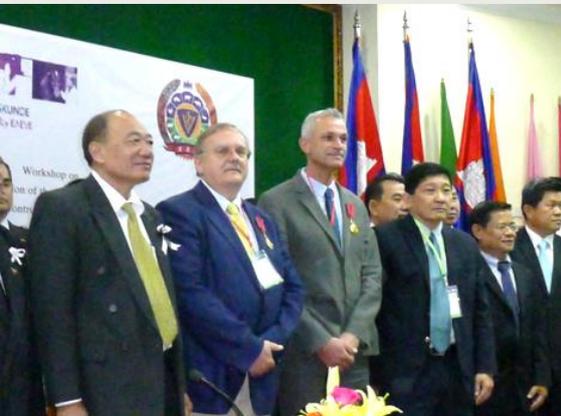
VLIR-UOS projects are based on a partnership between a Flemish and Cambodian higher education institution. The goal of these partnerships is **capacity building** based on long term investments in human capital and building up networks.

Capacity building for VLIR-UOS is more than just giving a training. It is about **long term investments** in human capacities in a spirit of true partnership. By focusing on human capital, and especially by focusing on international networks of academics, VLIR-UOS interventions are by nature relatively **sustainable**. Focusing on capacity building and the building of (inter)national networks allows our partners to use expanding networks to sustainably acquire new skills and new sources of funding. This leads to both **academic** and **financial self-reliance**. Cambodian institutions learn how to find international partners, look for international funding opportunities, develop successful project proposals, implement projects, report on them, etc.



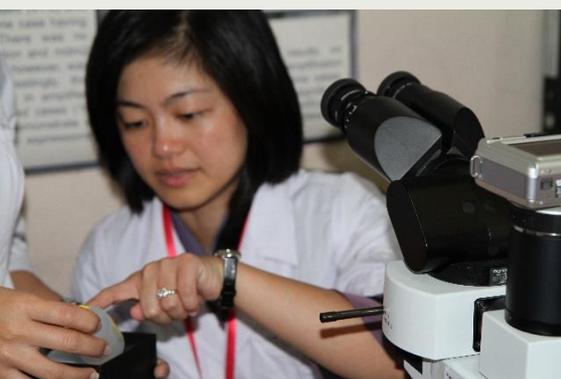
Uptake by stakeholders

The VLIR-UOS project on livestock parasitic diseases organised a final workshop in Cambodia. The results obtained in the different field studies were used to categorise the parasitic diseases in livestock according to the measured morbidity they cause. There were 210 participants among which officials, representatives from ministries and NGO's, veterinary officers from all Cambodian provinces and students. Recommendations concerning appropriate and sustainable prevention and control options were also presented, as an inspiration for provincial/regional plans of actions. During the workshop, the Flemish professors were awarded an Honorary Medal by the Minister of Agriculture.



Scholarships

Scholarships are powerful tools. It allows Cambodian students to broaden their horizon, learn to look at problems from the perspective of multiple disciplines and to grow into a skilful researcher. These students become **agents of change** by implementing the newly acquired knowledge and skills in a sustainable and development relevant way in the professional context of their country of origin. Also Flemish students spend time in a Cambodian institution and **create close ties**.



Main elements of the country strategy for Cambodia

Education: access & quality, 'train the trainers', teacher education, practice-based curricula...

Health: public & preventive (access-to-medicines, medical training, general pathology, cancer research, diabetes, disabilities (post-conflict, road-safety accidents) ...

Rural development & agriculture: sustainable agri- & aquaculture, food patterns, spatial planning rural-urban, private sector development...

Government & sustainable development: rural-urban planning, heritage, sustainable tourism, social economy, democratization, human rights, gender, post-conflict & development, multi-ethnic & multi-religious societies, basic infrastructure & governance (road safety) ...

Environment: biodiversity, wildlife, climate change linked to flooded areas, natural resources management, sustainable tourism...

Transversal support themes: scientific thinking, academic English, teacher training, institutional capacity building, innovation, ITS...

About the country strategy

During the reform of non-governmental development cooperation in 2016, VLIR-UOS updated its list of 20 partner countries, hereby including Cambodia 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/cambodia

Total budget Cambodia 2003-2020 (in €)	
Projects	€ 1.255.531
Individual scholars	€ 556.832
Total	€ 1.812.363

Scholars from Cambodia in the context of VLIR-UOS cooperation (2003-2020)	
PhD*	/
Short Term*	30
Study/Master*	11
Total	41

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

In addition to Cambodian scholars coming to Belgium, 136 Belgian scholars were granted a travel grant (short term) to Cambodia. 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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