

Higher education cooperation for sustainable development between

Rwanda

and Flanders (Belgium)

October 2021



Higher education as a driving force for sustainable development

Rwanda returned in 2016 to the VLIR-UOS list of partner countries because of its **enormous potential for university cooperation.**

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 Rwanda 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 Rwanda, and by providing an overview of Belgian development actors active in Rwanda, their ongoing projects and partners, in view of exploration of opportunities for synergy and complementarity.

VLIR-UOS cooperation in Rwanda has been aligned with Rwanda's long-term strategy Vision 2050 which indicates that the development of a knowledge intensive economy is a top priority and which foresees a key role for higher education and research. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been mainstreamed into Vision 2050 as well as the National Strategy for Transformation. This is in line with the objectives of VLIR-UOS on working towards Agenda 2030.

Focus on sustainable development priorities

TEAM projects and Short Initiatives(SI) projects aim to strengthen the research and education capacity, exploring and building capacity in view of creating sustainable solutions to local and global development challenges.

Health

A finalized TEAM-project in Rwanda worked on strengthening **laboratory medicine** at the University of Rwanda (UR). The project made it possible to train 3 scientists in laboratory medicine at the faculty of Medicine, in order to found a **scientific and reference centre** for clinical biology. These scientists worked out clinically oriented laboratory research activities and investigated affordable laboratory techniques in order to better serve the patients. The 3 PhD's now have **leading functions** in hospitals in Rwanda and DR Congo. At the level of the partner university (UR), the project significantly improved the quality of the labs and led to the "rwandisation" of teaching staff within the faculty of medicine.

Education

A finalized SI project with the University of Rwanda (UR) aimed to improve the quality of **midwifery clinical education**. The project team conducted two qualitative studies to explore if the competency-based continuous workplace learning model and the e-portfolio were feasible for clinical education in Rwanda. The results of this project show that both paper-based and ePortfolios are important tools to improve clinical education, although the ePortfolio was preferred because it is user-friendly, enhances self-directed learning and improves assessment of learners' performance.

Community outreach

An ongoing SI project with the University of Rwanda aims to strengthen the **Integrated Community Outreach Programme (ICOP)** at the University of Rwanda, College of Medicine and Health Sciences. This project aims to strengthen ICOP by developing a curriculum of community outreach activities, developing tools to coordinate these activities and developing and testing a community needs assessment toolkit and training module.





VLIR-UOS partnerships

VLIR-UOS projects are based on a partnership between a Flemish and Rwandese 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**. Rwandese 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

A VLIR-UOS SI-project has integrated an interdisciplinary module on **occupational therapy** in existing physiotherapy courses and developed an occupational therapy curriculum to start up a undergraduate programme. At the end of the project, the curriculum was validated and approved by different Rwandese partners. Two years after the project ended, the occupational therapy programme officially started as **project partner** Handicap International had continued activities focusing on the **implementation** of the curriculum.



Scholarships

Scholarships are powerful tools. It allows Rwandese 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 development relevant way in the professional context of their country of origin. Also Flemish students spend time in a Rwandese 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 Rwanda. 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/rwanda

Total budget Rwanda 2003-2021 (in €)	
Projects	€ 1.404.626
Individual scholars	€ 4.256.765
Total	€ 5.661.391

Scholars from Rwanda in the context of VLIR-UOS cooperation (2003-2020)	
PhD*	1
Short Term*	69
Study/Master*	83
Total	153

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

In addition to Rwandan scholars coming to Belgium, 268 Belgian scholars were granted a travel grant (short term) to Rwanda and another 6 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 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

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