

University cooperation for development between Rwanda and Flanders (Belgium)

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Higher education as a driving force for sustainable development

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

The Rwanda **Country Strategy** fits with the national development strategy **Vision 2020** which indicates that the development of a knowledge based economy is a top priority and which foresees a key role in this for higher education and research. This is translated in the country strategy in following central themes: **'food security'**, **'natural resource management'**, **'environment'**, **'health'** and **'human rights & governance'**. Different themes related to **'research strengthening'**, **'educational strengthening'**, **'ICT'**, **'innovation'**... 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 Rwanda**, which was developed in 2016 by the Belgian Non-Governmental Actors active in Rwanda. More synergy and complementarity with other Belgian actors in Rwanda will be sought for.

Rwanda is a partner country with potential for VLIR-UOS. From 2003 to 2020 VLIR-UOS spent over € 5 million in cooperation with Rwanda, including 7 ongoing departmental projects.

A new project dealing with a 'International & Digital Midwifery Workplace learning Network' started in 2018. More projects are expected to be selected during the coming years. The country programme 2017-2021 for Rwanda will be a kind of **exploratory phase** aiming at motivating researchers to submit project proposals.

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.

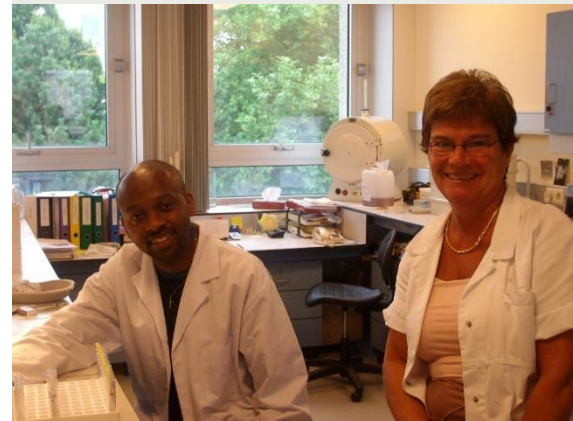
Health

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.

Food security

A finalized SI-project in Rwanda specifically worked on **bridging research outcomes and knowledge to the farmer**. They developed a set of targeted knowledge products for application by extension practitioners and grassroots development partners in the Great Lakes Region, such as **training videos, factsheets and image collections**. Applied in a variety of circumstances and through various channels, the knowledge products were aimed at increasing farmer knowledge about adapted and improved agricultural techniques, which allowed them to **sustainably increase production**, improve human nutrition, reduce incidence of crop diseases, and ultimately reduce food insecurity and improve household income.

During the project, 11 training videos on **banana extension** were remastered and recorded in alternative languages. The Ministry of Agriculture in Burundi, duplicated the DVD with the training videos and **disseminated** the videos to 200 youth centres in 14 provinces.





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 and 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**.



Main elements of the country strategy for Rwanda

Food security: land degradation, soil management, land administration & policy, land rights, land registration, land conflicts, rural economies & infrastructure, family agriculture...

Natural resources management: mineral resources, renewable energy, natural hazards, ...

Environment: urban and spatial planning, climate change, erosion...

Health: non-communicable diseases, audiology, nursing, patient-oriented health care, midwifery, occupational therapy, maternal & child health, ophthalmology, (active) ageing, mental health, medicinal plants...

Human rights & governance: political rights, land rights, gender, urban & spatial planning, conflict...

Transversal support themes: Quality assurance & training the trainers, data analysing & communicating results, research & lab practices, statistics for research, developing spin offs, digitalisation, database access & management...

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 Rwanda 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/rwanda

Total budget Rwanda 2003-2020 (in €)	
Projects	€ 1.184.997
Individual scholars	€ 3.901.146
Total	€ 5.086.143

Scholars from Rwanda in the context of VLIR-UOS cooperation (2003-2020)	
PhD*	1
Short Term*	66
Study/Master*	82
Total	149

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

In addition to Indonesian scholars coming to Belgium, 228 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 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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