

University cooperation for development between Uganda and Flanders (Belgium)

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Higher education as a driving force for sustainable development

For several years the cooperation of Flemish universities in Uganda was fairly limited. In 2011, based on the developmental relevance of working in Uganda and the interest in cooperation from both Uganda and Flanders, VLIR-UOS decided to **strengthen the cooperation** with Ugandan universities and to elaborate a country strategy.

The Uganda **Country Strategy** fits with the national development strategy and Vision 2040. The central themes of the country strategy are: **'Health'**, **'Environment'**, **'Food security'** and **'Good governance'**. The themes of **'Networking'**, **'Gender'** and **'Community engagement'** have been put forward as crosscutting themes that are relevant for all VLIR-UOS activities.

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

Uganda is an important partner country of VLIR-UOS. From 2003 to 2020 VLIR-UOS spent just about € 19 million in cooperation with Uganda, including many scholarships and a long-term Institutional University Cooperation (IUC) Pro-programme with Mountains of the Moon University (MMU).

The ongoing IUC programme with MMU is the cornerstone of the Uganda country programme, next to six ongoing departmental projects.

Institutional Capacity Building

IUC with Mountains of the Moon University

The Institutional University Cooperation (IUC) programme with Mountains of the Moon University (MMU) started in 2013. MMU is a relatively new university (established in 2005) situated in the western region of Uganda. This unique university is founded and governed by the local community, working for and accountable to that community.

The IUC programme wants to enhance the capacity of MMU to use **community based training** and **research approaches** in improving agricultural productivity, with a focus on the **dairy** and the **aquaculture** sector.

The programme is structured around two clusters:

- **Action research** and **community engagement** for development: research is carried out by faculty members and students on soil fertility, aquaculture, water supply & management and agribusiness (in the dairy sector), and on extension of outcomes to the outreach centres;
- **Transversal institutional strengthening** with respect to ICT, library, laboratory, community education, staff development, administration etc.

One aspect of institutional strengthening is the Mountains of the Moon **university radio** project, which plays a crucial role in community education. By doing research on cultivation, milk production and fish farming, new knowledge becomes available. The radio is used to **pass** that **knowledge** on to the people in the region. The university also wants to distribute teaching packages and provide dial-up interactive classes. There is no better way to do that than through the radio, with programmes made by the people at the university.

Scholarships

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



VLIR-UOS partnerships

The IUC programme with MMU is based on a partnership with 3 Flemish universities and 2 Flemish university colleges. The goal of these partnerships is **capacity building** based on long term investments in **human capital** and building up **networks**.





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

The Mt Elgon region in Eastern Uganda is confronted with **environmental degradation**. The effects are rapid deforestation, severe erosion, frequent landslides, sedimentation and recurrent flooding. An ongoing TEAM project with Busitema University and Makerere University aims at understanding the complex chain of causal links that can explain land degradation and their ecological and economic effects; and at identifying and promoting effective strategies for **more sustainable land use** and for increasing the resilience of farm-households to environmental risks and shocks. A new SI project will work on natural resource management in the Rwenzori region.

Health

In parts of Uganda, Tanzania and South Sudan children suffer from the mysterious **noding disease**, which has an unknown cause. The disease affects children between ages 5 and 15. Each seizure provokes irreparable damage to the brain. A recent SI project with Gulu and Makerere University did **pioneer research**, to set first steps in setting up international research on the disease. A new SI project on improving tools for **therapy** will start in 2017.

Food security

A new SI project aims at improving **fish farmers'** livelihoods through applying financial **management practices**. The project will build farmers' capacity at individual and member-based organisations levels for business planning, marketing, record keeping and financial literacy. The project will reap **synergies** of the TRIAS experience on agro-enterprise planning, the financial literacy training and research experience of MMU School of Business & Management Studies and the agronomic/aquaculture research under the IUC with MMU.

Good governance

An ongoing TEAM project with Gulu University and Uganda Martyrs University aims at generating better knowledge on governance and **post-conflict reconstruction**. The objective is to contribute to sustainable peace-building by the dissemination of the research results to policy-actors and communities. Another TEAM project focuses on the capacity of Uganda to manage newly discovered **oil resources**.

Uptake by stakeholders

An ongoing TEAM project on community health research resulted in a three-day workshop on hypertension for healthcare workers and the government. At the end of the workshop, a **sensitisation campaign** was launched on the dangers of hypertension, with an educational movie on the national television in which the doctoral students feature who are involved in the VLIR-UOS project.

Main elements of the country strategy for Uganda

The relevance of the family in addressing food, health and environmental insecurity

Responsible and accountable governance to local communities in the areas of natural resource management, social service delivery and post conflict recovery

Community based and focused university education, research and services

Gender

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 Uganda 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/uganda

Total budget Uganda 2003-2020 (in €)	
Projects	€ 8 448 364
Individual scholars	€ 10 582 966
Total	€ 19.031.330

Scholars from Uganda in the context of VLIR-UOS cooperation (2003-2020)	
PhD*	7
Short Term*	216
Study/Master*	235
Total	458

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

In addition to Ugandan scholars coming to Belgium, 409 Belgian scholars were granted a travel grant (short term) to Uganda and another 9 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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