Higher education cooperation for sustainable development between Vietnam and Flanders (Belgium)

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Vietnam is a long-standing and very important partner country of VLIR-UOS. From 2003 to 2021 VLIR-UOS spent over € 30 million in cooperation with Vietnam, including three long-term Institutional University Cooperation (IUC) programmes with Hanoi University of Science and Technology (HUST), Can Tho University (CTU) and Hue University (HU).

The ongoing IUC programme with HU and a national NETWORK programme in Biosciences for food together with 5 Vietnamese universities are the cornerstones of the Vietnam country programme. A new IUC partnership with Quy Nhon University (QNU) is currently phasing in and will start full funding as of 2022.

Higher education as a driving force for sustainable development

There is a longstanding history of cooperation between Vietnam and Flemish higher education institutions.

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

VLIR-UOS cooperation in Vietnam has always been strongly aligned with the Vietnamese development plans through stimulating science innovation and high technology in products as well as improving and enhancing the quality of education, training and human resources development. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been mainstreamed into Vietnam’s National action Plan for Implementation of Agenda 2030. This is in line with the objectives of VLIR-UOS on working towards Agenda 2030.
HEIs as driver of change
Biosciences for food Network

In 2013, VLIR-UOS started a Network University Cooperation programme with 5 Vietnamese institutes of higher education. The network builds upon the institutional and human capacity strengthened during 12 years of institutional cooperation with Can Tho University (CTU).

The pole of the activities lies in the Mekong Delta, a region which contributes to more than 50% of the total national agriculture production. Together with universities in the North (Vietnam National University of Agriculture) and in the Centre (Hue University, Nha Trang University and Research Institute for Aquaculture N°2) they will build upon existing Network activities in the Mekong and ASEAN region. The programme will focus on development of the curricula for joint international PhD and MSc training programs in Aquaculture and Food Technology.

Institutional Partnerships

Results of long-term cooperation with Can Tho University (CTU) and Hanoi University of Science and Technology (HUST)

Between 1998 and 2010 2 IUC partnerships were developed in Vietnam with clear regional impact. The IUC CTU was set up around goals in the areas of aquaculture, soil science, biotechnology and technology for education. As stated by the final evaluation, the partnership proved a success story as it combined successes in the academic and regional socio-economic development fields, and CTU became an important driver of change in the Mekong Region.

The IUC with HUST included electronics and telecommunications, chemistry, physics, biomedical engineering and mechatronics. It focused very strongly on the development of research capacity in link with the industries in the surroundings of Hanoi.

IUC with Hue University (HU)

The IUC with Hue University (HU) started in 2013, and was identified as a crucial partnership in the central region in Vietnam. The programme touches upon research in aquaculture and crop production, ecosystems, rural health development as well as on capacity building. The goal of this partnership is capacity building based on long term investments in human capital and building up networks.

Lagoon affects 300.000 people

One part of the IUC with HU studies the preservation of the coastal ecosystems and natural resources under the effects of development activities and climate change. The project aims to increase the number of protected areas and look for sustainable aquaculture. Amongst the various project sites there is Tam Giang Lagoon. People depend on the lagoon for their household activities and fishing. The lagoon is used for aquaculture too, at the cost of biodiversity.
**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.

**Where aquaculture came to new heights**

Agricultural production plays an important role in Vietnamese livelihoods. It contributes about 35% of the total GDP and about 60% of Vietnamese inhabitants are involved in agricultural activities. Vietnam is a famous shrimp and catfish exporter. Through various cooperation projects between Flemish universities and Vietnamese aquaculture institutes the research in this area climbed to new heights wherein Vietnamese alumni and Flemish academics play key-roles in cooperation with the Vietnamese authorities resulting in successful research and education and improved production and development.

**Wastewater treatment**

Several Belgian-Vietnamese projects deal with wastewater treatment systems in Vietnam. University cooperation also contributed by developing on-site wastewater treatment systems by using a combination of an advanced technology of membrane bioreactor and septic tanks in urban and rural areas. A TEAM-project that starts in 2017 is developing decentralized water treatment systems using low cost and high performance technology.

**Food and Health**

Food science as well as the relation between food and health are important topics for the projects in Vietnam. One project looks at the alarming rise of multiple resistant organisms by analysing simultaneously different reservoirs of antibiotic resistant bacteria.

**Scholarships**

Scholarships are powerful tools. It allowed many Vietnamese students to broaden their horizon, learn to look at problems from the perspective of multiple disciplines and to grow into a skilful researcher. On the other hand, Flemish students spent time in a Vietnamese institution and close ties are created. One of the elements of the future cooperation opportunities with Vietnam are joint degree programmes, aimed at increasing the exchanges of researchers and students.
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 Vietnam. 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.

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<th>Total budget Vietnam 2003-2021 (in €)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Projects</td>
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<td>Individual scholars</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<th>Scholars from Vietnam in the context of VLIR-UOS projects (2003-2020)</th>
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<td>PhD*</td>
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<td>Short Term*</td>
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<td>Study/Master*</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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* Only scholarships outside projects and programmes are shown; a lot of scholarships are included in projects or programmes

In addition to Vietnamese scholars coming to Belgium, 214 Belgian scholars were granted a travel grant (short term) to Vietnam and 1 student was granted a Flemish doctoral scholarship to Vietnam. More information on the scholarships of VLIR-UOS: [www.vliruos.be/scholarships](http://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](http://www.vliruos.be)

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