

# University cooperation for development between Nicaragua and Flanders (Belgium)

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## Higher education as a driving force for sustainable development

Nicaragua 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 Nicaraguan institutions to work together.

The Nicaragua **Country Strategy** fits with the national human development plan and its focus on innovation and research as an important factor for development. This is translated in the country strategy by means of 3 central themes: **'environment'**, **'territorial development'** and **'society'**. **'Research strengthening'**, **'intercultural diversity'** and **'gender'** 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 Nicaragua**, which was developed in 2016 by the Belgian Non-Governmental Actors active in Nicaragua. More synergy and complementarity with other Belgian actors in Nicaragua will be sought for.

Nicaragua is a partner country with a high potential for VLIR-UOS. From 2003 to 2020 VLIR-UOS spent over € 2,4 million in cooperation with Nicaragua, including 6 departmental projects.

One new project on 'inclusive rural development through social innovation ...' started in 2018.

# 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.

## Territorial development

Nicaragua is the most **rural country** of Central America. But rural poverty remains high as growth tends to be exclusionary, leaving behind the land-poor, women and youth, with difficulties to connect to the dynamic sectors and often dependent on non-agricultural activities.

A finalized TEAM project with the Universidad Centro Americana (UCA) has worked on strengthening knowledge and teaching about methods and approaches to promote **inclusive and sustainable rural development**. They supported UCA by further improving their financial and non-financial services to small scale rural enterprises through action research and training. Instead of offering weakly articulated and inflexible interventions (microcredit, business and legal services, technical assistance...), they developed a more integral and responsive territorial approach with **increased effectiveness** for priority groups and in synergy with external partners.

## Society

Three finalized VLIR-UOS projects worked on improving **health care** in Nicaragua and the region. The first project with the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua (UNAN) worked on reducing the incidence, morbidity and mortality associated with **cervical cancer**. The project even had repercussions at **national level**, as it led to adaptations in the national curriculum.

Building further on this experience, a second project created a closer link with the **primary health care system**. UNAN promoted the introduction of an **integrated model** for more equitable and accessible health care. A closer articulation with the healthcare system also offered the faculty of medicine better conditions to deliver doctors prepared for the field work.

A third project went further at improving research and training at health institutes at **regional level**, by involving partners in Ecuador, Bolivia and Chili. The project focused on **provider-patient communication** as an often neglected aspect of quality health services in Latin-American countries.







## VLIR-UOS partnerships

VLIR-UOS projects are based on a partnership between a Flemish and Nicaraguan 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**. Nicaraguan institutions learn how to find international partners, look for international funding opportunities, develop successful project proposals, implement projects, report on them, etc.



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### Long term partnerships

The Flemish Institute of Development Policy and Management recently celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its research partnership with the Nitlapán Institute of Nicaragua. Its spin-off, the microfinance organisation, turned 20. An external evaluation of this institutional partnership corroborated the mutual satisfaction of the institutes.



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## Uptake by stakeholders

A VLIR-UOS project on rural development strengthened a partner research institute through academic capacity building and **contributions to social impact and outreach**. By strengthening research capacities, the institution improved its knowledge of rural development. This knowledge made it possible for the partner institute to set up a **network of local banks** to provide micro-finances to farmers. This improved the availability of funds for more than 70.000 local farmers in Nicaragua.

## Scholarships

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



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## Main elements of the country strategy for Nicaragua

**Environment:** climate change, effects on disease, agriculture, biodiversity, natural resources, waste management link with economy, eco-tourism & eco-labels, entrepreneurship, ...

**Territorial development:** land transition, local development, local governance, productive landscapes, link with agroforestry, spatial contexts (rural & urban), conflict, agricultural development, possible link with public health/disease control...

**Society:** inclusive governments, human rights, migration, social & community development education, local governance, transitional justice, intercultural issues, land rights, gender & violence, youth & violence, link with public health...

Transversal support themes: research strategy, problem based research & innovation, academic English, proposal writing, open library & access systems, gender mainstreaming & balances, intercultural diversity, multidisciplinary research...

## 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 Nicaragua 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/nicaragua](http://vliruos.be/nicaragua)

Total budget Nicaragua 2003-2020 (in €)	
Projects	€ 1 208 390
Individual scholars	€ 1 209 082
<b>Total</b>	<b>€ 2.417.472</b>

Scholars from Nicaragua in the context of VLIR-UOS cooperation (2003-2019)	
PhD	1
Short Term*	8
Study/Master	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>

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

In addition to Nicaraguan scholars coming to Belgium, 84 Belgian scholars were granted a travel grant (short term) to Nicaragua and 3 students were granted a sandwich Ph.D. scholarship. 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 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](http://www.vliruos.be)

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