

Nicaragua Strategy document

Approved by the Bureau UOS of 26 August 2016



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Foreword

Country Strategy Process

The process of country strategy identification was rolled out by VLIR-UOS, the Flemish Interuniversity Council – University Cooperation for Development, in the context of the implementation of the Political Agreement signed in 2010. In this agreement, VLIR-UOS committed itself to formulate a strategy for each of its 20 VLIR-UOS partner countries. During the reform of non-governmental development cooperation in 2016, Nicaragua was reaffirmed again as a partner country of VLIR-UOS (and the Belgian development cooperation).

A country strategy is in fact a road map for cooperation. It is the result of numerous inputs and consultations with a wide spectrum of actors in Flanders and the country in question. The basis of the country strategy paper is a desk study comprising a context analysis of higher education and development priorities in the country. Each country engagement results in a country strategy paper. It is a policy document that will be used by VLIR-UOS to guide its funding decisions.

The country strategy represents the strategic niche for future VLIR-UOS cooperation in a specific country. A strategy can contain a geographical and/or thematic focus. It should be multi-disciplinary and include an optimal balance between the different levels and types of intervention of VLIR-UOS.

Framework for programming and selection

A country strategy reflects the objectives and the choices of instruments 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.

A strategy assures relevance and complementarity and promotes synergy. Relevance because it focuses on the needs and priorities of the partner country, and complementarity because it takes into account what other development partners do. The country strategies of VLIR-UOS are as such a major asset as to how VLIR-UOS will engage in this process of seeking synergies and complementarities. Specifically for Belgian actors, this is guaranteed by including the Joint Strategic Framework (JSF) as an important element in the process.

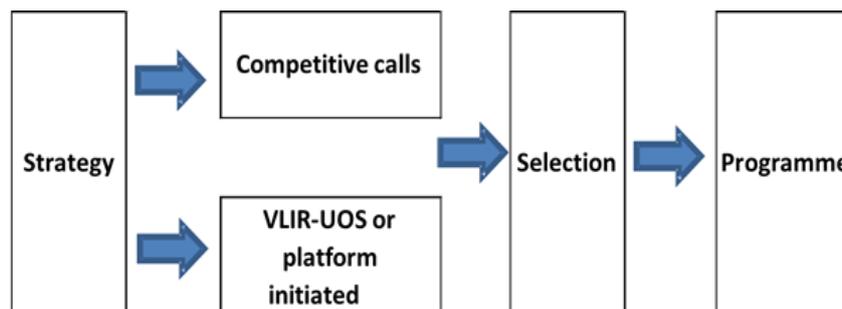
As such, a strategy starts from the needs of the partner country, and in particular the national priorities in terms of poverty reduction and national policies for Higher Education. Furthermore it will take into account the ambitions, capacities, expertise, and interest for cooperation among the Flemish academic community.

Time frame

The development of academic capacity requires a long-term framework that is often precluded by current policy dynamics, which are characterized by constant changes and shifts at the international and country level in both North and South. In the case of Nicaragua, VLIR-UOS has opted for a strategic framework covering, in principle, 5 years.

From country strategy to country programme

The country strategy paper is the basis for working out a fully-fledged country programme. A country programme consists of a portfolio of specific cooperation projects according to different intervention types. In order to achieve this, both competitive open calls and strategically earmarked partner selection will take place as appropriate.



A country programme will consist of a portfolio of different intervention types:

INTERVENTION TYPE		LEVEL
		INTERNATIONAL
		NATIONAL
		INSTITUTIONAL
		DEPARTMENT/FACULTY
		INDIVIDUAL
SCHOLARS	TEAM SOUTH INITIATIVES JOINT	
	IUC	
	NETWORK JOINT	
	JOINT	

Country level objectives and results

VLIR-UOS facilitates academic partnerships and related initiatives within the context of a long-term country strategy with a general objective. Furthermore, VLIR-UOS has defined a range of indicators (Key Result Areas) on the basis of which individual initiatives are expected to report. Apart from tangible key result areas, VLIR-UOS also tracks more qualitative results. In a country programme, results from individual projects are brought together in order to come to a set of clear country-level results.

1. Introduction

1.1. General Info

Nicaragua, officially the Republic of Nicaragua, is the largest country in the Central American isthmus, bordering Honduras to the north and Costa Rica to the south. Nicaragua achieved its independence from Spain in 1821. Since its independence, Nicaragua has experienced several military dictatorships, the longest being the hereditary dictatorship of the Somoza family, who ruled for 43 years (1927–1979). In the 2005 legislative and presidential elections, Daniel Ortega (from the Sandinista National Liberation Front - FSLN) became president with 37.99% of the vote. Nicaragua's 2011 general election resulted in re-election of Daniel Ortega, with a landslide victory and 62.46% of the vote. In 2014 the National Assembly approved changes to the constitution allowing Daniel Ortega to run for a third successive term. The increasingly authoritarian president is near-certain to win an increased majority and a third consecutive term in elections in November 2016.

Despite global economic turbulence, Nicaragua has stood out for maintaining growth levels above the average for Latin America and the Caribbean. While country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) shrank to a 3.9 percent in 2015, the lowest rate in the last five years, GDP forecast for 2016 is 4.2 percent. Foreign direct investment and trade also show an improved outlook. Despite this progress, Nicaragua is still one of Latin America's least developed countries, where access to basic services is still a daily challenge. Poverty, although declining steadily in recent years, remains high. Income distribution is also very unequal, and the poor, agriculturalists and indigenous people continue to have less access to healthcare services. Nicaragua's total fertility rate has fallen from around 6 children per woman in 1980 to just above replacement level today, but the high birth rate among adolescents perpetuates a cycle of poverty and low educational attainment. Uneven income distribution also results in much migration from rural areas to the cities or even abroad.

Nicaragua has started the construction of the "Grand canal of Nicaragua" in December 2014. The canal will run from Brito, cross Lake Nicaragua - the largest freshwater reservoir in Central America - and then cross mountains and rain forest before finishing at the mouth of the Punta Gorda River in the Atlantic Ocean. The proposed canal has been heavily criticized by environmental experts and campaigners, as well as activists. As of March 2016, no significant construction has taken place.

For more information on the country we refer to the Country Fact Sheet, available on the [VLIR-UOS website](#).

1.2. Development priorities

The development strategy of Nicaragua for economic growth with macroeconomic stability and job creation to fight poverty and inequality is presented in its second National Plan of Human Development (Plan Nacional de Desarrollo Humano, PNDH). The following axes are seen as priorities by the Government for the period of 2012-2016:

- Economic growth and stability, employment and poverty reduction (*in continuation of the first PNDH*)
- Alignment of workers, producers and the government
- Open foreign policies and international cooperation to fight poverty
- Regional integration with the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC)
- Fight against narcotic traffic and organized crime
- Development of the Caribbean Coast (*in continuation of the first PNDH*)
- Participative and direct democratic public administration (*in continuation of the first PNDH*)
- **Social welfare and equity perspectives (*in continuation of the first PNDH*)**
- **Science, technology, innovation and entrepreneurship**
- Food security and sovereignty (*in continuation of the first PNDH*)
- Improved infrastructure in the domains of production, energy, transport and tourism
- Natural disaster risk management (*in continuation of the first PNDH*)

Within the priority of fostering social welfare and equity, quality education for all is a specific goal.

1.3. The Nicaragua higher education system

Nicaragua's higher education system consists of 59 universities, and 113 colleges and technical institutes in the areas of electronics, computer systems and sciences, agroforestry, construction and trade-related services. The oldest institution of higher education in Nicaragua is the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Nicaragua, which was founded in 1812, which also dates back to the Spanish colonial period.

The public and private universities are not regulated by a ministry or governmental unit, but by the National Council of Universities (el Consejo Nacional de Universidades, CNU). This coordinating and consulting entity is responsible for formulating and coordinating the policy for higher education in Nicaragua. There are ten core public and private non-profit universities that receive state funding, and these constitute the members of the CNU, together with the teachers' union and students' representatives. They also regulate accreditation to other universities (49 private universities between 1990 and 2014) and technical higher education institutions. Nicaragua HEI are spread throughout the country, with 31 regional campuses and 10 central campuses.

Between 2002 and 2003, a total of 100.363 Nicaraguan students (on a population of 5 million people) attended universities and other institutions of higher learning. In 2005, almost 400.000 (7%) of Nicaraguans held a university degree. In 2011, about 160.000 students attended higher education institutions of which 75% were in state-subsidized universities. The retention rate of students has improved in the recent years and increased the number of graduates, with 37 graduates for 100 new enrollers. In 2015, 55.2% on a total of 27.500 first year students were female, a difference that is also reflected in graduation numbers (bachelor level: 54%, master level: 62%). Following requirements are expected from graduated students: solid knowledge of the content, mastering ICT, English language proficiency, entrepreneurship, people with values, teamwork and initiatives.

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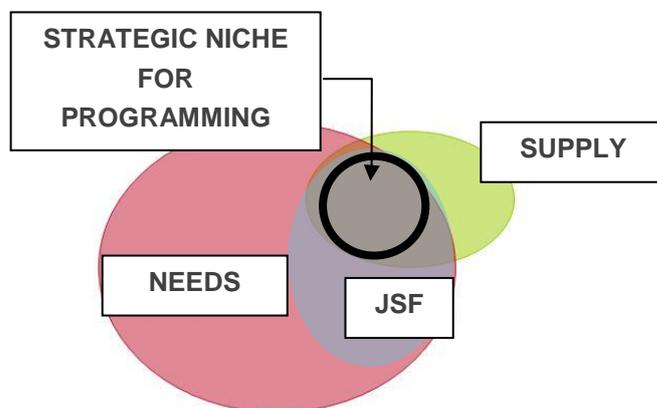
The function of research does not have the priority it deserves in institutions of higher education in Nicaragua. Traditionally, there has been a lack of proper appreciation of the importance of research activities and an absence of national policies to promote it, although this is changing in recent years. In 2004, there were 64 researchers per million inhabitants. Nicaragua's public universities perform 90% of the research being done in the country, but scientific research is at an early stage of development in Nicaraguan institutions of higher education.

2. Country Strategy development

2.1. Background

2.1.1. Nicaragua country strategy formulation process

The Country Strategy Identification process started with the development of a desk study in which the Flemish areas of interest in working with Nicaragua have been captured (supply side), the Joint Strategic Framework (JSF) for Belgian non-governmental development cooperation¹ in Nicaragua has been taken into account and Nicaraguan higher education and development priorities have been analysed (needs).



The results of the desk study were presented in the Country Fact Sheet, that was made available on the [Nicaragua Country Page](#) on the VLIR-UOS website. This document provides a general introduction to the country, presenting statistics, a country profile, an overview of the education system, analysis of development aid in the country, and a review of university development cooperation. The desk study was used as input for the organisation of the Northern seminar, organised on the 4th of July 2016 in Brussels to listen to the experiences and interest in future cooperation with Nicaragua and the Flemish partners.

2.1.2. Higher education and research: policy environment

In line with the development priority of quality education for all, the government made the following engagements for education policies in higher education for the period 2012-2016:

¹ In 2015, the Belgian government started to prepare a reform of the sector of non-governmental development cooperation. All actors active in a country were asked to elaborate a Joint Context Analysis (JCA). This analysis made it possible to make a Joint Strategic Framework (JSF) for 31 countries in 2016.

- Continue to strengthen the communication with the sector to agree on further strategic actions to improve higher education and to raise the quality and relevance of the public institutions.
- Strengthen the institutions and their educational capacity, with different sectors of society, seeking greater efficiency and effectivity in their work.
- Create a culture of social accountability, including the contributions of universities to resolve national problems, especially those that reproduce the vicious circle of exclusion and poverty for the majority.
- Strengthen higher education in the Caribbean Coast, by improving the quality of education, promoting national and regional interculturality and strengthening the autonomy of the Caribbean Coast.
- Enrol 200.000 students in private and state universities in 2016 and grant 766.500 scholarships from 2012 to 2016.

The main challenges for Nicaragua higher education are the following:

- Permanent actualisation of curricula and programmes
- Introduction of ICT
- Modernisation of management and leadership systems
- Integration of public and private education and formal, informal and distant learning
- Improvement of education as a promise for the population
- Linking entrepreneurial sector with education

The importance of higher education institutions to implement the development plan, is recognised by the government. Education and training needs to create the national capacities in the field of public administration, climate change, agro economy, social participation, innovation and other projects for the transformation of Nicaragua.

Another Nicaragua development priority states that **science, technology, innovation and entrepreneurship** will be the driving force for the socio-economic transformation of Nicaragua in the medium and long term. Technological innovations are the product of knowledge development, and generate increased competitiveness of companies and countries, adding value to products and services. The government sees the low involvement of scientific and technological development in the domain of agriculture and livestock as a major force in the low returns of the sector as compared to other Latin American countries. Since climate change is also a big threat for Nicaragua, the government is counting on the sector to help deal with this problem. Still, Nicaragua only spends 0.05% of its GDP on research (Costa Rica is at 0.32%, Brazil at 1%) and is dependent on imported technologies.

The Nicaragua Council of Sciences and Technology (CONICYT, see also 2.3.2) is the responsible body for the sector of science, technology and innovation. To improve the indigenous capacity of the generation, adaptation and transfer of knowledge, the **government policy in the domain of science, technology and innovation** is to:

- Strengthen academic education in different levels (e.g. sciences in basic education) and sponsor programs of universities to reach a large population
- Create mechanisms to promote formal exchange between technical and vocational training institutes, universities and companies
- Open programmes to exchange professionals between universities and companies to promote the incorporation of young investigators in companies and vice versa.
- Generate a degree in management of research to promote a culture of innovation and networking in organisations.
- Evaluate within universities and research centres of the public and private sector the way to realise the process of professional promotion in each area and organisation, through progressing in successive degrees, evaluated by national and international pairs.
- Carry out a programme of researchers from universities, producers and entrepreneurs favouring the actualization of knowledge, the development of multidisciplinary research and the access to sources of support and the promotion of their efforts

2.2. Views and themes expressed

A first step in the data collection is the desk study completed by the VLIR-UOS secretariat to produce a country fact sheet on Nicaragua. This document, which is currently in draft form, has informed all subsequent activities. It will be finalized as part of the process of developing the final country strategy. The desk study made it possible to present information for discussion during the North Seminar.

Another important source of information is the Joint Context Analysis (JCA) Nicaragua and the Joint Strategic Framework (JSF) Nicaragua. In the JCA, 9 actors made an in depth analysis of civil society, the administrations and public institutions and the conditions which enable their strengthening. The actors presented this for the sectors of agriculture, health, human rights, education and decent work. This analysis made it possible to make a Joint Strategic Framework (JSF) for Nicaragua in 2016 with 8 actors who want to be active in Nicaragua from 2017 to 2021 (1 actor in JSF Decent Work – FOS, socialist solidarity).

Actores Participantes en el MEC	
BD	Broederlijk Delen
EF	Entraide et Fraternité
OS	Oxfam Solidarité
VE	Vredeseilanden
VVSG	Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten
VLIR-UOS	VLIR University Development Cooperación
FD	Fundación Damián (Damiaanactie-Action Damien)
GM	Geomoun

The JSF presents 5 common strategic goals (+1 in JSF Decent Work) on which the actors want to work as of 2017 that are in line with the development priorities of the Nicaragua government as stated in the NPDH.

- Strengthen the capacities of rural and urban populations and local authorities for sustainable management of **natural resources**, conservation of biodiversity and the promotion of public policies for the preservation and protection of natural resources.
- Support the development of the **agricultural and food industry** in a dynamic, inclusive and sustainable way to ensure a dignified life for small producers
- Sustain political advocacy of social organizations and / or strengthen the institutional capacity of local governments to promote democratic mechanisms and respect for **human rights**, especially for women and youth.
- Ensure and improve access to **knowledge**, improve the quality of scientific research and stimulate innovation in order to contribute to sustainable development
- Support social initiatives and public actors to qualitatively improve **health** systems, particularly for infectious diseases
- Promote **decent work** for sustainable, equal, solidary and inclusive development by guaranteeing workers' rights and enlarging social protection (in JSF decent work)

The JSF also mentions possible synergies and complementarities between Belgian NGO, as it is a priority for the Belgian government.

2.2.1. Expressions of interest by the Flemish (academic) stakeholders

During the presentations at the northern seminar that took place on the 4th of July 2016, the following findings were raised:

1. The changing context of Belgian non-governmental cooperation was explained. There is a strong focus on more synergy with other Belgian actors through the elaboration of a Joint Context Analysis and a Joint Strategic Framework. There are quite some Belgian actors active in Nicaragua, they are seeing the Joint Strategic Framework as an opportunity for exchange.
2. An overview of higher education institutes in Nicaragua was given and some facts on the number of academics, students, programmes, graduates, research centres... were presented. The priority axes and challenges were also mentioned.
3. At the IOB, there is already a 30 year cooperation partnership with a Nicaraguan university. A number of VLIR-UOS projects and scholarships are also linked to this partnership. Findings of that experience, based on an evaluation which was organised in 2014, were shared with the audience. Special attention was given to the lack of a real research culture in Nicaragua, because of the strong dependency on project funding (confer "the consultancy mode", as developed by J.P. Olivier de Sardan).
4. Next to this strong partnership, there are also some small scale links between Flemish HEI and Nicaragua. There is an interest from the stakeholders to work in Nicaragua, but experience has to be built up. Also for VLIR-UOS, up to now it is a rather small country for cooperation, so the coming 5 years will give the possibility to develop more activities.

5. Remarkable improvements have been made in the domain of academic English within the last ten years. This is related to the fact that this was given special attention by the Nicaraguan government within the requirements for students after graduating. Also ICT has been given big importance by the government in the field of higher education.
6. There are opportunities for regional cooperation, as VLIR-UOS already has built up expertise in other Latin American countries. Different participants were already active in VLIR-UOS projects in the region and are now looking for possibilities to link up with Nicaragua.

The seminar was attended with more than 20 participants. Four Flemish universities and a university college were represented, two representatives of the Embassy of Nicaragua in Brussels and the country officer of the Directorate-General of Development Cooperation also participated. All contributed to the discussions following the presentations in the morning session and in the seminar discussion groups after the coffee break.

After the group discussions, each group was provided an opportunity to present its feedback to the plenary session, following which there was a general open discussion. During this feedback session, the following key issues were raised:

1. **Thematic areas**

Bringing together the different domains of interest of current academic cooperation, considering built up expertise within the VLIR-UOS framework and taking into account the Joint Strategic Framework (see also annex 2), following clusters were identified during the group discussions:

- Environment: environmental (climate) change, effects on disease, agriculture, biodiversity, natural resources, link with economy, link with eco-tourism/eco-labels/entrepreneurship, waste management
- Territorial development: land transition, local development, local governance, productive landscapes, link with agroforestry (cacao, pine forest, etc.), spatial contexts (rural & urban condition), concept of rurality, zones of conflict, agricultural development, economical agriculture, sustainable development, possible link with public health/disease control
- Society: inclusive governments, democratic governance, human rights, social & community development, education, local governance, migration, transitional justice, intercultural issues, land rights, gender & violence, youth & violence, possible link with public health/disease control

In line with the remark that it is difficult to look at themes separately when facing development problems, groups chose to bring different themes that were closely related, together into a broader cluster. As an example, in Nicaragua, economy is closely linked to agriculture, because of the export-oriented agriculture which is of course also related to environmental issues. This results in a clear demand for

more multidisciplinary research and to bring together different types of expertise, which is not always easy to organise.

The proposed clusters can all be linked to the goals that are put forward in the JSF.

2. Crosscutting elements

Specific attention for: research strategy/thinking, problem based / hypothesis driven research and innovation, academic English, proposal writing, open library & access systems, gender mainstreaming and balances, intercultural diversity, multidisciplinary research.

As for digitalisation, it is clear that Nicaragua has good infrastructure for initiatives like e-learning.

3. Geographical focus

No limitations, Nicaragua is a small country which makes it possible to work in the three different areas. However it is clear that in the Pacific lowlands and the North central highlands there are quite some coinciding project opportunities. The difficult access to the Caribbean Coast should also be kept in mind for future cooperation. When working in the Caribbean Coast, a good understanding of the Nicaragua development priority in that area is necessary.

4. Partner institutions

For the moment, it is difficult to limit the type of partner institutions, because there is not much expertise with different partners. Existing cooperation is mainly with UCA, other former cooperation was with UNAN. Prioritising institutions of CNU seems to be a consensus but no formal limitation will be made in this first phase of exploration, as to broaden cooperation in this first five year plan 2017-2021. Existing links (e.g. presence of alumni) can be important in setting up new partnerships. The level of autonomy of universities can also be an important factor to take in consideration when setting up partnerships.

University members of the CNU:

- 4 public universities: National Agrarian University (UNA), National Autonomous University of Nicaragua-León (UNAN – León), National Autonomous University of Nicaragua-Managua (UNAN – Managua), National University of Engineering (UNI)
- 4 private universities of public service: Catholic University of Dry Tropic Farming and Livestock (UCATSE), Central American University (UCA), Polytechnic University of Nicaragua (UPOLI), International University of Agriculture and Livestock (UNIAG)
- 2 community universities: Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University (BICU), University of the Autonomous Regions of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast (URACCAN)

5. Modalities/tools of intervention

TEAM and SI are in the context of the new cooperation with Nicaragua preferred. This gives the chance to get to know each other before expanding to larger, long-term cooperation engagements. Academic partnership cooperation with Nicaragua is not very institutionalised (e.g. UA only signed a MoU after 30 years of partnership), so working on department level is in fact more logical because of the importance of personal relationships. Given budgetary constraints related to the reform of non-governmental cooperation, national or institutional modalities were not put forward.

There are possibilities for synergies with other Belgian actors in line with the JSF and with other international donors that are present in academic cooperation. It was made clear however that although everybody supports the idea of synergy, it is in reality not always easy to create strong synergies. Even though there are thematically points of interest, actors still are not well informed on what actors are really doing. The JSF will hopefully serve as a base for realizing this, because there are interesting opportunities (e.g. potential participants for a Master programme).

The conclusions of this seminar were put together in a strategic niche framework (see annex 1) and presented at the Bureau of VLIR-UOS for approval, to serve as a base for elaborating the country strategy.

2.2.2. Expressions of interest by the South (government and academic stakeholders)

For Nicaragua, the decision has been made by the Bureau of VLIR-UOS to develop a “light” country strategy. Taking into account the lacking juridical framework because of the reform of non-governmental development cooperation, the time pressure to develop a country programme for 2017-2021 and the limited current interventions and experience of VLIR-UOS in Nicaragua, the focus was put on an elaborated desk study and a North seminar. This would result in listing the main development priorities and exploring initial interest from the Flemish stakeholders for cooperation in a first phase. In a second phase, this would evolve in a more complete country strategy after acquiring more experience in Nicaragua during the 2017-2021 programme and by organising a full south consultation during that period.

3. Country Strategy framework – conclusions

3.1. Areas of focus (thematic, regional, partners)

Regional and institutional focus

Basically, there are no limitations of regional or institutional nature in possible future cooperation models in Nicaragua. Experience with Nicaragua should be built up in the short term, which makes it important to leave all possibilities open.

Nicaragua is a small country which makes it possible to work in the three different areas. However it is clear that in the Pacific lowlands and the North central highlands there are quite some coinciding project opportunities. The difficult access to the Caribbean Coast should also be taken in mind for future cooperation.

Prioritising institutions of the Consejo Nacional de Universidades (CNU) seems to be a consensus but no formal limitation will be made in this first phase of exploration, as to broaden cooperation in this first five year plan 2017-2021.

Themes

As put forward during the consultancy moment, and taking into account the JSF, it turned out that most of the involved stakeholders, are concentrating on the same interventions areas, namely:

- Environment: environmental (climate) change, effects on disease, agriculture, biodiversity, natural resources, link with economy, link with eco-tourism/eco-labels/entrepreneurship, waste management
- Territorial development: land transition, local development, local governance, productive landscapes, link with agroforestry (cacao, pine forest, etc.), spatial contexts (rural & urban condition), concept of rurality, zones of conflict, agricultural development, sustainable development, possible link with public health/disease control
- Society: inclusive governments, human rights, social & community development, education, local governance, migration, transitional justice, intercultural issues, land rights, gender & violence, youth & violence, possible link with public health/disease control

Crosscutting elements

Special attention should go to cross-cutting and supporting issues related to the domain of higher education, research and innovation :

- Research strategy/thinking
- Problem based / hypothesis driven research and innovation
- academic English
- proposal writing
- open library & access systems
- gender mainstreaming and balances
- intercultural diversity
- multidisciplinary research

3.2. Partnership modalities (portfolio of intervention types)

Taking into account the built up experience with academic cooperation in Nicaragua and the budgetary constraints related to the reform of non-governmental cooperation, following modalities are defined:

Level	Remarks
National	Given the limited interventions of Flemish academic institutions, this is not a preferred modality in this framework. This can be considered after building up experience with academic cooperation in Nicaragua.
Institutional	Given the limited interventions of Flemish academic institutions, this is not a preferred modality in this framework. This can be considered after building up experience with academic cooperation in Nicaragua.
Departmental	In the short term, preference should be given to small seeding projects, type South Initiatives and TEAMS. This gives the chance to get to know each other before expanding to larger, long-term cooperation engagements.
Individual (scholarships)	Individual scholarships remain crucial and should be continued while linking up with national scholarship schemes.
Interventions in synergy with other actors	Interventions in synergy with other Belgian actors will be of growing importance. In Nicaragua, there are possibilities for synergy with other Belgian actors in line with the JSF.

3.3. Possible synergies with the activities of Belgian actors in Nicaragua

The themes of intervention that have been put forward in this country strategy, are in line with the joint strategic goals from the JSF. This enlarges the possibilities for future synergies with the other Belgian actors in Nicaragua. Synergies with Broederlijk Delen were already present in the past in the field of rural development.

3.3.1. SWOT analysis of (academic) cooperation with Nicaragua

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biodiversity • Existing academic cooperation with Flemish HEI • ICT infrastructure • Importance of higher education and research acknowledged by the Government • Access to and supply of HEI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Consultancy mode” • “Projectitis” • Dependent of project financing • Limited research incentives for academics
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved English language proficiency • Potential for regional cooperation with Cuba, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Suriname • Ambition “pensamiento propio” • Joint Strategic Framework: opportunities for synergy with other Belgian donors • Presence of other international donors in scientific cooperation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diminishing autonomy of the institutions • Limited budget allocation to higher education • Lack of interest from Flemish HEI? • Official Belgian partner country after 2021?

ANNEXES

- 1. Strategic niche framework – summarized overview
strategic conclusions**
- 2. Country Strategy Grid – intervention themes**
- 3. Country Fact Sheet (see VLIR-UOS website – Nicaragua
Country info)**

Annex 1 – Strategic niche framework – summarized overview strategic conclusions (confirmed by the Bureau UOS of 6 July 2016)

Strategic Niche Framework for Nicaragua	
Geographical focus	No limitations, Nicaragua is a small country which makes it possible to work in the three different areas. However it is clear that in the Pacific lowlands and the North central highlands there are quite some coinciding project opportunities. The difficult access to the Caribbean Coast should also be taken in mind for future cooperation.
Partner institutions	<p>Prioritising institutions of the Consejo Nacional de Universidades (CNU) seems to be a consensus but no formal limitation will be made in this first phase of exploration, as to broaden cooperation in this first five year plan 2017-2021.</p> <p>University members of the CNU:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4 public universities: National Agrarian University (UNA), National Autonomous University of Nicaragua-León (UNAN – León), National Autonomous University of Nicaragua-Managua (UNAN – Managua), National University of Engineering (UNI) - 4 private universities of public service: Catholic University of Dry Tropic Farming and Livestock (UCATSE), Central American University (UCA), Polytechnic University of Nicaragua (UPOLI), International University of Agriculture and Livestock (UNIAG) - 2 community universities: Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University (BICU), University of the Autonomous Regions of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast (URACCAN)
Main (multidisciplinary) THEMES for cooperation	<p>Bringing together the different domains of interest of current academic cooperation, considering built up expertise within the VLIR-UOS framework and taking into the Joint Strategic Framework, following clusters were identified during the group discussions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environment: environmental (climate) change, effects on disease, agriculture, biodiversity, natural resources, link with economy, link with eco-tourism/eco-labels/entrepreneurship, waste management

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Territorial development: land transition, local development, local governance, productive landscapes, link with agroforestry (cacao, pine forest, etc.), spatial contexts (rural & urban condition), concept of rurality, zones of conflict, agricultural development, sustainable development, possible link with public health/disease control - Society: inclusive governments, human rights, social & community development, education, local governance, migration, transitional justice, intercultural issues, land rights, gender & violence, youth & violence, possible link with public health/disease control
Crosscutting & supporting themes	Specific attention for: research strategy/thinking, problem based / hypothesis driven research and innovation, academic English, proposal writing, open library & access systems, gender mainstreaming and balances, intercultural diversity, multidisciplinary research
Instruments/ partnership modalities:	<p>TEAM and SI are in the context of the new cooperation with Nicaragua preferred. This gives the chance to get to know each other before expanding to larger, long-term cooperation engagements. Given budgetary constraints related to the reform of non-governmental cooperation, national or institutional modalities were not put forward.</p> <p>Interventions in synergy with other Belgian actors will be of growing importance. There are possibilities for synergy with other Belgian actors in line with the JSF and with other international donors that are present in academic cooperation.</p> <p>Individual scholarships remain crucial and should be continued while linking up with national scholarship schemes.</p>

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Annex 2 – Country Strategy Grid – intervention themes

THEMES	National development priorities	Belgian actors (JSF)	Other international donors	Previous VLIR-UOS interventions
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social welfare and equity perspectives - Development of the Caribbean Coast 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support social initiatives and public actors to qualitatively improve health systems, particularly for infectious diseases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - US: improve situation of Southern Caribbean at-risk children and youth - SDC: basic infrastructure - AECID: basic social services - GiZ: water and sanitation - JICA: social development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Team: Integration of cervical neoplasia in the curriculum of gynaecologists in Nicaragua - Team: Enhancing qualitative reproductive health care delivery in primary health services in transition - SI: Introducing provider-patient communication as a new topic for training and research at health institutes
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Economic growth and stability, employment and poverty reduction - Improved infrastructure in the domains of production, energy, transport and tourism - Development of the Caribbean Coast - Regional integration with the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) - Science, technology, innovation and entrepreneurship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote decent work for sustainable, equal, solidary and inclusive development by guaranteeing workers' rights and enlarging social protection (in JSF decent work) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EU: inclusive and sustainable economic growth - SDC: promoting small and medium-sized enterprises, strengthening 20 poor rural communities - AECID: economic development - JICA: infrastructure development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Team: Generating Knowledge and Synergies for Rural Development in Muy Muy, Matiguas, Rio Blanco, Nicaragua - Team: Exclusion from Aid resources and Political Change at the Community Level - VLADOC: The role of "Payments for Environmental Services" for a sustainable water management in Central America - VLADOC: Green microfinance and payments for environmental services: From market-based panaceas towards an integrated approach to sustainable and inclusive rural development.
Government and Civil Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alignment of workers, producers and the government - Open foreign policies and international cooperation to fight poverty - Participative and direct democratic public administration - Fight against narcotic traffic and organized crime - Development of the Caribbean Coast 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sustain political advocacy of social organizations and / or strengthen the institutional capacity of local governments to promote democratic mechanisms and respect for human rights, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EU: high quality public services, ensure security conditions - US: strengthen democracy - Russia: fight drug crime, security cooperation - SDC: basic infrastructure - NORAD: good governance and human rights, rights of 	

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		especially for women and youth.	minorities and women, culture	
Food security and agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Food security and sovereignty - Development of the Caribbean Coast 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support the development of the agricultural and food industry in a dynamic, inclusive and sustainable way to ensure a dignified life for small producers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EU: support to the productive sector - AECID: basic social services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ICP-PhD.: Revisiting the agrarian question: family-farming and political arenas around land and natural resources in the context of climate change and changing global food chains
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Natural disaster risk management - Development of the Caribbean Coast 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthen the capacities of rural and urban populations and local authorities for sustainable management of natural resources, conservation of biodiversity and the promotion of public policies for the preservation and protection of natural resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EU: adaptation to climate change, environmental sustainability - SDC: climate change and disaster risk reduction - GiZ: water management, renewable energy - JICA: environmental conservation and disaster risk reduction - NORAD: climate, renewable energy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ICP-PhD.: Population genetics and connectivity of coral reefs in the Caribbean of Nicaragua: A base line for management planning - VLADOC: The role of "Payments for Environmental Services" for a sustainable water management in Central America - VLADOC: Green microfinance and payments for environmental services: From market-based panaceas towards an integrated approach to sustainable and inclusive rural development.
CROSSCUTTING/SUPPORT DOMAINS				
Education, Research and University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social welfare and equity perspectives → for higher education: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o improve higher education and raise the quality and relevance of the public institutions. o Strengthen educational capacity o Create a culture of social accountability o Strengthen higher education in the Caribbean Coast 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure and improve access to knowledge, improve the quality of scientific research and stimulate innovation in order to contribute to sustainable development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EU: TVET, Erasmus+ - US: improve situation of Southern Caribbean at-risk children and youth - SDC: scholarships - AECID: basic education, TVET, scholarships - DAAD: academic partnerships, scholarships - JICA: social development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All previous VLIR-UOS interventions

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	o Enrol 200.000 students in 2016 and grant 766.500 scholarships from 2012 to 2016.		- NORPART: academic cooperation and mobility	
ICT and technology and information culture	- Science, technology, innovation and entrepreneurship	- Ensure and improve access to knowledge, improve the quality of scientific research and stimulate innovation in order to contribute to sustainable development	- NORPART: academic cooperation and mobility	