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Benin

Country Reference Framework

(Updated version of February 2026)

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Country reference framework Benin

Background

In FYP1 the VLIRUOS country strategies presented the strategic niche for future VLIRUOS cooperation in a specific country, leading to strategy-based calls for proposals.

In FYP2, however, we shift towards an approach whereby a country reference framework provides information rather than strategic guidance. The country reference frameworks will be used mainly to 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 cooperation actors, their ongoing projects and partners in that country in view of exploration of opportunities for synergy and complementarity.

The country reference frameworks consist of three components:

(i) overview of VLIRUOS projects in the country;
(ii) context analysis focused on the Agenda 2030 framework and the higher education sector;
(iii) overview of Belgian cooperation actors (ANGCs involved in thematic or geographic JSFs & Enabel), their local partners and their regional/thematic focus.

The frameworks have been elaborated based on information available at the time of drafting this actor programme and through consultations with both Flemish and local project promotors, and with geographic JSFs, when applicable, to ensure relevant information for coherent project formulation is included.

Prior to the launch of competitive calls, the ANGCs active in the country/region will be invited to list a number of research themes/questions that can be addressed by HE&SIs in the framework of VLIRUOS funded projects or scholarships. Synergy and complementarity will be integrated as an element in the selection of project proposals, more when discussing the (developmental) relevance and coherence of the proposals and the extent to which the multi-stakeholder partnership principle has been reflected in the project's implementation set-up. By this mode of operation, the thematic JSF on Higher Education and Science for Sustainable Development links up with the other geographic JSFs.

Evidently, the frameworks will be updated regularly in consultation with the HEI&SI stakeholders and with the respective geographical JSFs and, where appropriate, also with ARES, and especially prior to the launch of competitive calls by VLIRUOS, to be compatible and responsive to evolving/emerging needs and priorities of academic and cooperation actors active in the country/region/sector.

1. VLIRUOS in Benin

1.1. Overview projects & scholarships (2002 – 2025)



Legend

- University of Abomey-Calavi
- University of Parakou
- Centre des Recherches Agricoles Sub-Bénin
- International Institute of Tropical Agriculture
- Laboratoire de Référence des Mycobactéries

Projects 2002-2025				Scholarship Type	Finished	Total
Type	**Budget (€)**	**Number**		**ICP**	19	19
Total	***2.366.930***	***12***		**ICPPHD**	1	1
TEAM	1.763.195	6		**ITP/KOI**	16	16
SI	158.726	4		**SRS**	2	2
ITP	445.008	2		**Total**	38	38

Benin has been 'in' and 'out' as partner country for VLIRUOS cooperation but is again included in the partner country list since 2022. From 2002 to 2025 VLIRUOS spent about € 2,4 million in project cooperation with Benin, including 12 projects (TEAM/SI/ITP). There are currently 3 ongoing International Training Programme (ITP) projects, 3 TEAM projects and 1 SI.

More detailed information can be found on the VLIRUOS website vliruostats (statistics) .

1.2. Ongoing projects (2022-...)

List of projects since start FYP 2022-2027						
Type	**Runtime**	**Title**	**Flemish promoter**	**Local promoter**	**Local institution**	**Total budget (€)**
TEAM	2024-2029	Actionable knowledge co-creation for sustainable development in floating and flood-prone communities in Benin	M. Verpoorten (UA)	G. Koto N'Gobi	Université d'Abomey-Calavi	299677
TEAM	2024-2029	Developing sustainable grazing management practices for ruminant farmers in the drylands of Benin using an integrated system dynamics	T. Norton (KUL)	A. Assani Seidou	Université de Parakou	300.000
TEAM	2024-2029	Valorization of pineapple residues for sustainable agriculture and renewable energy needs in Benin	B. Horemans (KUL)	E. Agbangba	Université d'Abomey-Calavi	299937
ITP	2023-2026	Antimicrobial resistance containment in hospital settings in Francophone West Africa	E. André (KUL)	D. Affolabi	Laboratoire de Référence des Mycobactéries	149.966
ITP	2023-2026	Mycoblitz in Benin : A lab in a backpack	A. Verbeken (UG)	N. S. Yorou	University of Parakou	146.692
ITP	2024-2027	Enhancing rehabilitation in sub Saharan African by means of continuous professional training and the use of technology-supported	B. Bonnechère (UH)	Oyéné Kossi	University of Parakou	148350
SI	2025-2027	Advancing food safety culture in West Africa: insights and improvements from the case of Benin's food processingindustry (WAFoSaC)	L. Jacxsens (UG)	Sylvain Dabadé	Université Abomey-Calavi	69.997,40

Abbreviations (type): IUC=Institutional University Cooperation; SI=Short Initiatives.

Abbreviations (Flemish institutions): KUL=KU Leuven; UA=University of Antwerp, UH: University of Hasselt.

Competitive calls for new projects will be launched and announced on our website. Nationals of Benin are eligible[1] to apply for scholarships for the International Master Programmes (ICP).

[1] Admission requirements, application procedures and selection procedures differ across the programmes and host institutions.

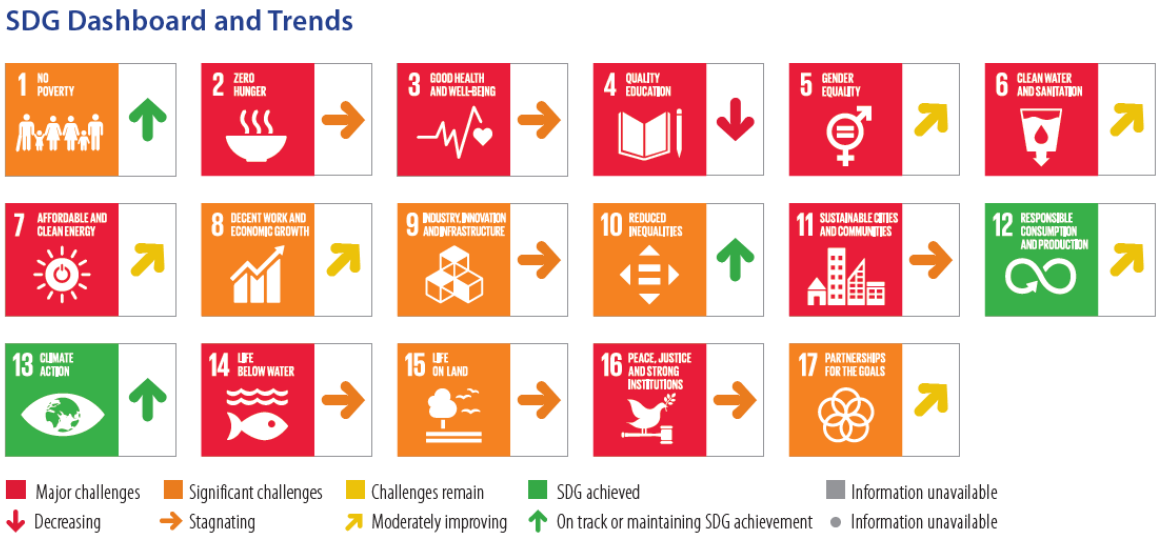
2. Benin and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

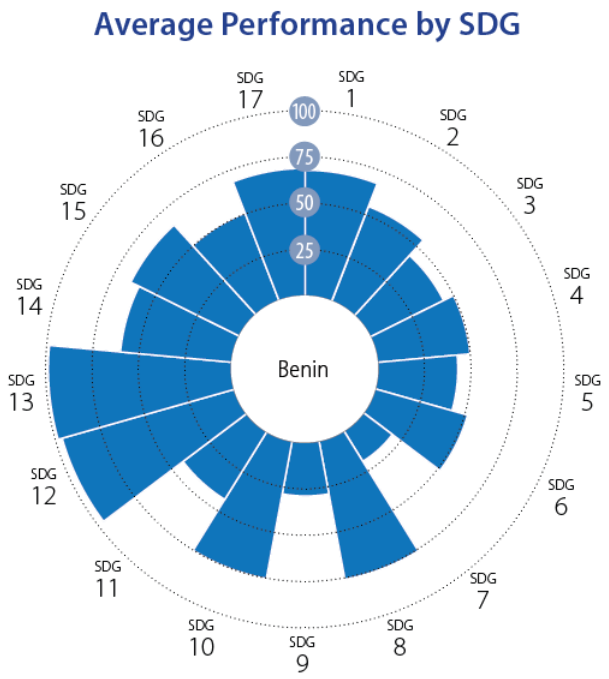
2.1. Benin and the Sustainable Development Goals

By joining the global dynamic of adoption and ownership of the 2030 agenda, Benin is committed to integrating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as outlined in the voluntary national review 2024. These have been elaborated into a National Development Plan 2018-2025. Its general objective is to: "achieve sustained, inclusive and sustainable growth of at least 10% by 2025 focused on the development of agro-industry, services and tourism within a more efficient national and local governance by focusing on the development of human capital and infrastructure".

Meanwhile, there has been an action plan 2021-2026 to accelerate and sustain 3 pillars: 1/the reinforcement of democracy, rule of law and good governance; 2/the structural transformation of the economy; and 3/the improvement of social well-being for all. These pillars are subdivided into 7 axes which are: Reinforcement of democracy and rule of law; Consolidation of good governance; Reinforcement of the macro-economic frame and stability; Acceleration of the economic growth; Promotion of quality education; Improved access for populations to basic social services and social protection; Strengthening the balanced and sustainable development of the national territory.

Taking into account the global aspect of the SDGs, the sustainable development report assesses where each country stands with regard to achieving the SDGs. Benin ranks 134th out of 167 countries included in the report. The Benin Country Profile shows that there are still some challenges.





As an umbrella organization that works with calls for proposals, VLIRUOS supports interventions for and through higher education institutes, supporting them in the areas of education, research and uptake and thereby strengthening them in their role as development actor. Doing so, the impact of the interventions supported by VLIRUOS can be found in a large variety of sectors. In line with its major intervention area, VLIRUOS positions itself within the education sector, especially focused on higher education, research and innovation (SDG 4 and 9). However, through its interventions, VLIRUOS intervenes in different sectors as well. VLIRUOS recognises that given the complexity, scale and interconnectedness of current societal challenges, meaningful social, economic and ecological transformations can only be realised by starting from a holistic and integrated approach to the SDGs. When translated into SDGs, the projects that were financed by VLIRUOS in Benin covered mainly, apart from SDG 4 and 9, SDGs 3 and 15. Top sectors for VLIRUOS in this country for the past decade are sustainable agriculture and food security, natural resources and health.

More background information and context analysis on Benin can be found in the **geographic Joint Strategic Framework** for Benin, which will be shared with (potential) project promotors when new calls are launched.

Additional sources on progress related to higher education & science (SDG 4)

- UNESCO-UIS: overview data resources indicators related to SDG4
- Our World in data:
  - Indicators related to educational mobility and inequality
  - Indicators related to tertiary education
  - Indicators related to projections of future education (demand)
  - Indicators related to science and research

2.2. Higher education landscape in Benin

According to the 'Plan sectoriel de l'éducation' (2018-2030), the higher education, scientific research and innovation sector envisions 1/Implementation of a governance system for public universities, a special status for teaching staff including a mechanism for career advancement outside the hierarchical structure and continued employment after the retirement age (emeritus status); 2/ Implementation of a scholarship program favoring scientific fields; 3/ Establishment of specific measures to incentivize research and innovation; 4/ Delegation of university social services to the private sector; 5/ Establishment of an incentive-based legislative and regulatory environment adapted to the system of the International City of Innovation and Knowledge (Sèmè City).

These reforms are being implemented through the Development of Higher Education; the Support for research and innovation; the Skills development for the application of scientific subjects in higher education; the Construction and equipping of university centers and social infrastructure; and the African Center of Excellence for Development Impact and the International City of Innovation and Knowledge.

Other planned measures are Strengthening professionalization and the university guidance system in synergy with secondary education and vocational training; Incentive measures for promising training programs; Incentives for girls' access to and retention in higher education (scholarship and social welfare system); Specific measures for girls' enrollment and retention in promising fields of study (Science, Technology, etc.); Quality improvement with a focus on professional skills and pedagogical support for teachers; Strengthening the employability of graduates and promoting the value of research and innovation products; Implementation of a sector-specific quality assurance system by building on existing achievements and by proposing innovations.

The Beninese higher education institutions also take part in CAMES (Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Supérieur) that coordinates higher education and research systems in order to harmonize programs and recruitment levels in different higher education and research institutions, promotes cooperation between different institutions, as well as information exchanges.

According to the Webometrics Ranking, no Beninese University falls within the 2000 ranking worldwide. The first ranked within this system is the University of Abomey-Calavi which takes the 3232rd place. This is followed by the University of Parakou with a 11316th place.

2.3. Leaving no one behind

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the international community pledged to leave no one behind and to endeavor to reach the furthest behind first. The principle of leaving no one behind can be defined as a three-part imperative: to end absolute poverty in all its forms, to stop group-based discrimination that results in unequal outcomes for disadvantaged populations, and to take action to help the furthest behind.

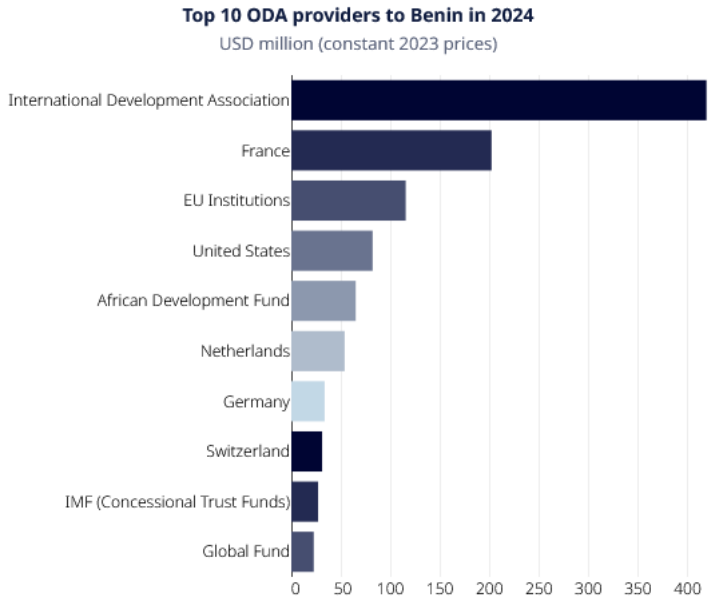
According to the Integrated SDG insights and as part of the Governments's action plan 2021-2026, the national authorities are placing good governance, socio-economic transformation and improving the well-being and the living environment of populations at the heart of public development policies. This is reflected in both the projected reduction of poverty and in the favorable land-use change. Yet there are still some challenges in the fight against poverty, especially when using more stringent poverty thresholds.

To provide sustainable growth and social protection solutions for the people of Benin, the Government has initiated the implementation of the Insurance for Strengthening Human Capital (ARCH), and specific measures to protect vulnerable groups, promote women's economic empowerment, and advance gender equality. Six actions have been identified to strengthen and accelerate social protection: 1/The continuation and strengthening of Insurance for the Reinforcement of Human Capital (ARCH); 2/Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment; 3/The modernization of public spaces for social protection and the promotion of gender; 4/Support for the socio-economic integration of vulnerable people; 5/Women's Empowerment and the Demographic Dividend in the Sahel; and 6/Strengthening mobile microcredit.

2.4. Multistakeholderpartnership - Stakeholder analysis

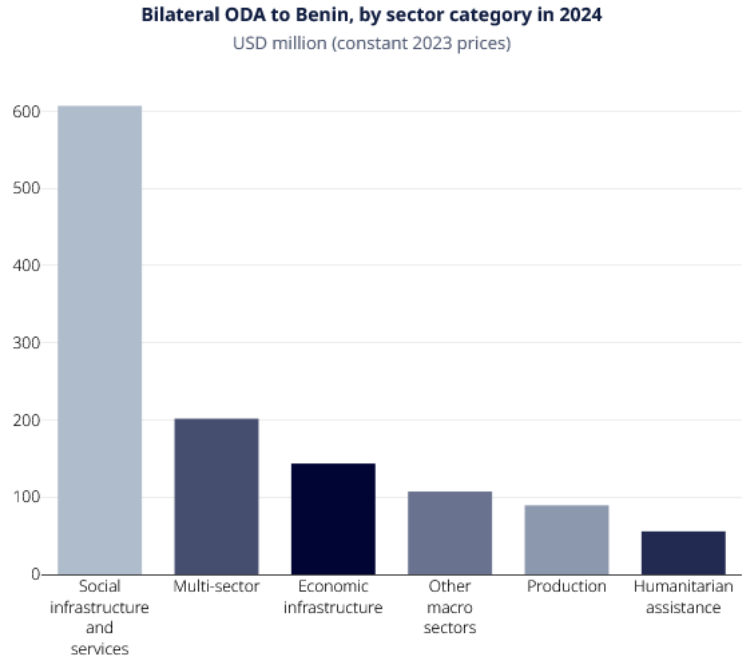
The complexity, scale, and interconnectedness of the current societal challenges that the SDG framework is seeking to address, requires a concerted effort of a wide variety of different stakeholders. As such, the principle of multistakeholderpartnership – which promotes cooperation and partnerships at different stages and spanning the boundaries of civil society, private sector, government, and academia – is ubiquitous across the 2030 Agenda. An analysis of these stakeholders is essential for each partnership.

Looking at the international partners of Benin, the International Development Association is by far the main donor of gross official development aid (ODA) in Benin. With the withdrawal of USAID funds since the Trump administration took over in 2025, this situation is expected to change in the following years.



rces: OECD (2025) , Aid (ODA) disbursements to countries and regions [DAC2a]

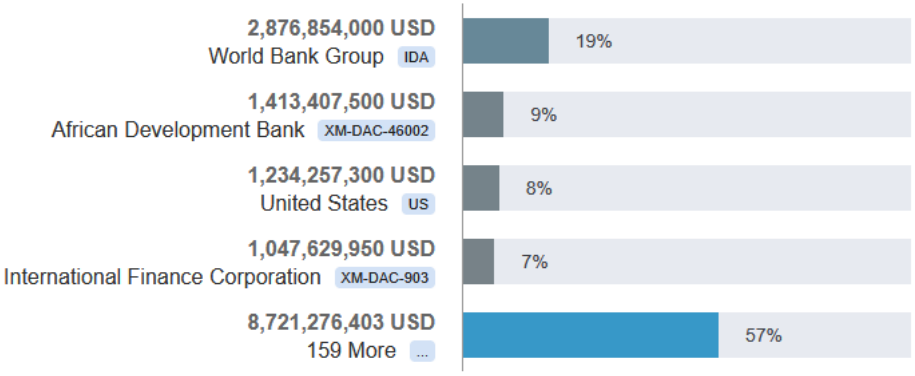
The sector receiving the biggest funding is social infrastructure and services.



ɔurces: OECD (2025) , CRS: Creditor Reporting System (flows)

Based on data from the International Aid Transparency Initiative IATI D-Portal, the World Bank is the main donor in the higher education sector.

Where does the money come from? (IATI all years)



*All years in total, top 5.

VLIRUOS contributes to the 2030 agenda by realizing a societal impact, implying an impact on local communities, civil society, governments, private sector or other higher education institutions. In what follows we list the role and the desired change among the main actors involved in the change process that VLIRUOS envisages to support through *its interventions*.

Actor	Role and interest/influence
Higher Education Institutions in Benin	HEIs in Benin are important boundary partners in the realization of VLIRUOS outcomes in terms of its contribution to Agenda 2030, and the potential contribution to local sustainable development. As project owners they are expected to contribute to HEIs' enhanced institutional performance in the core tasks relating to education, research and societal service delivery strengthening, the HEI's visibility and recognition as a centre of excellence. In the long-term, partner HEIs are also expected to have a multiplier effect on the higher education system and development sector in the country or region through their engagement in (global) knowledge-driven partnerships with academic and non-academic stakeholders.
DGD (incl. Belgian embassies in partner countries)	DGD has an advisory role in the VLIRUOS selection commissions and follows-up on the VLIRUOS portfolio and the thematic JSF on Higher Education and Science for Sustainable Development. The Belgian Embassy can play a role in facilitating the uptake of knowledge, the identification, mobilisation and relation building with other stakeholders (e.g. links with European Union, national government, other donors), the contextual updates etc.
Students, professionals, and alumni	**Students** can be direct (e.g. as a recipient of a PhD scholarship within a project) or indirect beneficiaries (e.g. enjoying improved/innovative didactical approaches) of the projects. As direct beneficiary, their changed role will be about the generation and use of newly acquired knowledge, competences (e.g. global citizenship) and networks in view of sustainable development. Alumni from VLIRUOS-projects in Benin will be important stakeholders in connecting VLIRUOS projects with each other, with other actors, etc.
Academics/researchers	As direct beneficiaries of the projects, academics and researchers affiliated within Flemish and partner HE&SIs play an important role in co-creating, disseminating and creating conditions for uptake of knowledge relevant to the achievement of the SDGs in line with the needs, policies and priorities of the partner HE&SIs, local/national or regional stakeholders.
Members of the thematic JSF on Higher Education and Science for Sustainable Development	VLIRUOS, ITM and ARES have initiated the JSF on HESD4SD to further unlock the developmental potential of higher education and science cooperation for sustainable development and make it accessible to other local, Belgian and international partners as scientific advisor to other partners' projects, partners or policy bodies, as a platform for sharing state of the art scientific results, information, expertise and experience and for exploration of possibilities for synergy and complementarity. In Benin, all three actors are present.

Belgian Actors of the Non-governmental Cooperation	VLIRUOS continuously tries to identify and encourage synergy and complementarity between Belgian ANGCs and academic stakeholders. Through the uptake of research results, mobilisation of local stakeholders, participation in trainings or courses, identification and communication of relevant research questions/opportunities, hosting of international internships, facilitating student mobility… these actors play a critical role.
Belgian bilateral cooperation (BIO & Enabel)	VLIRUOS will regularly exchange with Enabel and BIO to identify and communicate opportunities for synergy and complementarity with academic projects of the partner HEIs (e.g. through country reference frameworks, JSF platform).
International organizations and other donors (e.g. WHO, UNESCO, World Bank, European Commission…)	Interventions undertaken by international organisations like UN agencies such as FAO or international donors active in higher education cooperation can be complementary in the achievement of the objectives of projects. They can, for instance, play a role in the use and upscaling of new knowledge or practices or serve as seed money for bigger interventions financed by these international organisations.
Academic/science (inter)national and regional networks	Regional or (inter)national academic/science networks (e.g. CAMES, IUCEA) are among the potential indirect beneficiary as targeted HE&SIs strengthened in their research/educational capacities can improve the functioning of the networks they are part of through the co-creation, exchange and uptake of knowledge among academic stakeholders. Similar effects can be realized in the case of alumni and scholarship networks/associations when former scholarship students act as agents of change within these networks.
Public sector: Local or central government and political community	Engage in evidence-based governance that puts knowledge to the test by being a stakeholder in the co-creation of inclusive (innovative) solutions and effective user of research results to foster good governance for sustainable and coherent policies.
State owned/ Private sector	Individuals and companies who operate for profit within the boundaries of the specific country situation and emerging private sector development can play a role within projects as users of the knowledge, applications and services (co-)created as result of the project and therefore contribute in particular but not only to SDG 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure.
Civil society, social movements and local communities	Civil society actors, social movements and local communities are expected to co-create, access and use the knowledge and research products generated within the framework of *projects* thereby making a potential contribution to the entire range of SDGs. Although Benin has made tremendous efforts in respecting democracy and human rights, some challenges remain. According to Amnesty International, rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly continued to be routinely curtailed. Opposition leaders were arbitrarily detained. Detention conditions violated international human rights standards for the treatment of prisoners. Armed groups killed people at the borders with Niger and Burkina Faso.

3. Synergy and Complementarity with other (Belgian) cooperation actors in Benin

3.1. VLIRUOS approaches to synergy and complementarity

Drawing upon their longstanding common history, VLIRUOS, ARES and the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM) jointly developed the thematic Joint Strategic Framework on Higher Education and Science for Sustainable Development (JSF HES4SD). Through cooperation with civil society, private and public sector, the JSF initiators[2] aim to further unlock the huge developmental potential of higher education and science cooperation for sustainable development and make it accessible to other Belgian, local and international partners, in different ways: as partner in a multi-actor partnership, as scientific advisor to other partners' projects, partners or policy bodies, as a knowledge broker for sharing state of the art scientific results, information, expertise and experience and for exploration of possibilities for synergy and complementarity. This reference framework for Benin will feed into the **platform** that the initiators of the JSF HES4SD plan to create to proactively communicate opportunities and facilitate such cooperation. More precisely, the platform can be used to:

(i) communicate about the launch and results of competitive calls for projects;
(ii) communicate other opportunities for projects or scholarships;
(iii) gather/exchange on collaboration opportunities (e.g. requests for scientific advice);
(iv) share information about ongoing projects, events and seminars in the country/region.

3.2. Bilateral cooperation (Enabel) in Benin

Since 2000 Benin and Belgium are working together through Enabel. Its activities in Benin are particularly focused on the improvement of the well-being of the Beninese population and State entities, in a spirit of partnership and shared responsibility. The approach puts the priority on partnership, the transfer of skills, sustainability and innovation. Concretely, Enabel implements these interventions through mainly three sectors which are agriculture, health and the port sector.

Enabel helps Benin to improve agricultural performance, with a view to ensuring sustainable food and nutritional sovereignty, and contributing to the country's economic and social development. Regarding the health sector, Enabel intervenes at every level of the health system, supporting the Ministry of Health as well as hospitals and health centres, thereby promoting rights and access to sexual and reproductive health services. Concerning the port sector, Cotonou Port is one of the largest ports on the West African coast. Enabel is supporting it with its modernisation efforts, in order to make it more efficient and more competitive.

[2] The three JSF initiators represent 60 Belgian higher education institutions (HEIs), being 11 universities, 32 university colleges, 16 school of arts, and ITM.

3.3. Belgian actors of the non-governmental cooperation in Benin

3.3.1. Thematic Joint Strategic Framework on Higher Education and Science

Together with ARES and ITM, VLIRUOS forms a thematic joint strategic framework on higher education and science for sustainable development (JSF HES4SD): hes4sd.be

More info specifically about ARES in Benin can be found on Moove ARES

Collaboration with the geographic JSF of Benin will be facilitated by systematically sharing information on projects and grants, by allowing Belgian ANGC to submit their needs in applied research or training, and by encouraging multi-stakeholder partnerships through competitive calls for proposals (VLIRUOS/ARES) or partnerships with ITM counterparts.

3.3.2. Benin Joint Strategic Framework

	Description of the strategic goal	ANGCs (active members)
SG1	Paix et institutions fortes	JFW, Rikolto, DBA, VSF, Search for Common Ground, HI, Eclosio, CEBioS, Plan International, MdM, Dynamo International, Via Don Bosco, VVSG, UVCW, Iles de Paix, Trias, Louvain Cooperation
SG2	Bonne santé et bien-être	MDM, LC, RKV, MSV, Memisa, MT, DBA, VSF, HI, Chaine de l'Espoir, Dynamo International, Plan International, Eclosio, Louvain Coopération, IMT
SG3	Ressources en eau	LC, JFW, Eclosio, Iles de Paix, DBA, Rikolto, CEBioS, Louvain Cooperation
SG4	Zéro Faim	Iles de Paix, VSF, DBA, VSF, Eclosio, LC, JFW, Search for Common Ground, Trias West Africa, Rikolto, Trias, RKV, Via Don Bosco, Louvain Cooperation, CEBioS
SG5	Education de qualité	Plan International, Via Don Bosco, Trias, HI, VSF, Rikolto, Louvain Cooperation, DBA, MdM, Dynamo International, MSV, IMT, CBR, CEBioS, APEFE, VVOB
SG5	Emploi décent	APEFE, Iles de Paix, Eclosio, LC, DBA, Rikolto, VSF, JFW, Via Don Bosco, WSM, Plan International, MdM, Eclosio, IDP, IFSI-ISVI, Dynamo International, Trias

3.3.3 Other Thematic Joint Strategic Frameworks

Besides collaboration with the thematic JSF on Higher Education and Science, there will also be collaboration with the thematic JSF of Decent Work through ANGCs in DR Congo that work on 'Decent work' related topics. The ANGCs active in this field are WSM and IFSI-ISVI.

The Decent Work JSF (DW JSF) contributes to the four strategic targets, which correspond to the four pillars of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda. It is important to emphasize that these four pillars are inseparable, interdependent, and mutually reinforcing. In a complementary and synergistic manner, the DW JSF's ANGCs will contribute to all the targets, which in turn contribute to social and climate justice and the UN's 2030 Agenda. The four strategic targets are 1/creation of decent jobs, 2/guarantee rights at work, 3/extend social protection, 4/strengthen social dialogue and other forms of institutionalized dialogue for all.