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Morocco

Country Reference Framework

(Updated version of March 2026)

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Background

In FYP1 the VLIR-UOS country strategies presented the strategic niche for future VLIR-UOS 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 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 VLIR-UOS projects in the country;
(ii) context analysis focused on the Agenda 2030 framework and the higher education sector;
(iii) overview of Belgian 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 VLIR-UOS funded projects or scholarships. Synergy and complementarity will be integrated as an element in the selection of project proposals, more in particular 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 VLIR-UOS, to be compatible and responsive to evolving/emerging needs and priorities of academic and international cooperation actors active in the country/region/sector.

1. VLIR-UOS in Morocco

1.1. Overview projects & scholarships (2003 – 2025)



Legend

- Université Hassan II
- Université Mohammed V
- Université Moulay Ismaïl
- Université Abdelmalek Essaadi
- Ecole Nationale Forestière d'Ingénieurs de Rabat - Salé
- Ecole Nationale d'Agriculture de Meknès
- Université Internationale de Rabat
- Université Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah
- Moroccan Foundation for Advanced Science, Innovation & Research
- Institut Agronomique et Vétérinaire Hassan II
- Université Cadi Ayyad
- Université Mohammed Premier

Projects 2003-2025				scholarship Type	Finished	Ongoing	Total
Type	**Budget (€)**	**Number**		**ICP**	8	1	9
Total	***7.617.454***	***28***		**ITP/KOI**	6		6
IUC	3.708.603	1		**SRS**	3		3
TEAM	2.919.085	10		**Total**	17	1	18
SI	965.742	15					
ITP	24024	2					

Morocco is an important country in the VLIRUOS portfolio. Between 2003 and 2025, the project cooperation between VLIRUOS and Morocco represented approximately € 7,6 millions. The IUC partnership **with Moulay Ismaïl University of Meknes**, started in 2017 and had a successful first phase. However, due to institutional changes, the 2nd phase never started and a phase out of IUC Phd Scholars was foreseen and still ongoing. Next to the IUC, also TEAM, SI, and ITP projects took place.

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

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1.2. Ongoing projects and future calls (2022-...)

Type	Runtime	Title	Flemish promoter	Local promoter	Local institution	Total budget (€)
IUC	2022- 2026	Institutional University Cooperation with Université Moulay Ismaïl (UMI) (transition, phase out and completion phase)	J.-M. Rigo (Hasselt University)	S. El Jaafari	Université Moulay Ismaïl	Approx. €720.000
Subproject 1		*Renforcement de la gouvernance et des capacités de gestion de l'UMI dans une démarche qualité*	*J.-M. Rigo (Hasselt University)*	*Tbd.*		
Subproject 2		*Institution et renforcement des capacités de formation, de recherche et de service à la société d'un cluster de compétences en santé environnementale à l'UMI*	*L. Godderis (KU Leuven)*	*S. El Jaafari*		
Subproject 3		*Adaptation de l'offre de formation et renforcement des capacités de recherche et de service à la collectivité d'un cluster de compétences en agroalimentaire et sécurité sanitaire des aliments à l'UMI*	*G. Haesaert (Ghent University)*	*H. Hajjaj*		
Subproject 4		*Institution et renforcement des capacités de formation, de recherche et de service à la société d'un CC en gestion intégrée des ressources en eau (GIRE) à l'UMI*	*A. Van Rompaey (KU Leuven)*	*A. Essahlaoui*		
Subproject 5		*Institution et renforcement des capacités de formation, de recherche et de service à la société d'un cluster de compétences en environnement et développement territorial à l'UMI*	*B. Vanheusden (Hasselt University)*	*A. Baguare*		
Subproject 6		*Institution et renforcement des capacités de formation, de recherche et de service à la société d'un cluster de compétences en valorisation des composés naturels et synthétiques des ressources végétales de la région et leurs effets thérapeutiques*	*V. Bito (Hasselt University)*	*A. Zaid*		
TEAM	2024-2028	Exploring the Potential of Hemp for the Creation of High-Value Textile products in Morocco" HEMP-TEX	A. De Raeve (HoGent)	O. Cherkaoui	Higher School of Textile and Apparent Industries - ESITH	299.895
TEAM	2024-2028	Microalgae as growth and immunity biostimulants for a sustainable poultry industry in Morocco	K. Muylaert (KULeuven)	N. Merghoub	UM6P-MASCIR	297.612
SI	2023-2025	Lowering financial and market barriers for women entrepreneurs: Application in the Marrakech-Safi Region	K. Bonne (Artevelde HS)	D. Sahraoui	Université Cadi Ayyad	62.272
SI	2025-2027	STELLAR : Science, Technology, Education, Learning, Leadership, Astronomy, and Resilience	K. Kolenberg (UA)	A. Benhida	Université Cadi Ayyad	69.984,88

Abbreviations (type): IUC= Institutional University Cooperation.

Abbreviations (Flemish institutions): UH=University of Hasselt, UA: University of Antwerp, KULeuven = Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, HoGent = Hogeschool Gent, Artevelde HS = Artevelde Hogeschool.

Competitive calls for new projects will be launched and announced on our website. Nationals of Morocco 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. Morocco and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

2.1. Morocco and the Sustainable Development Goals

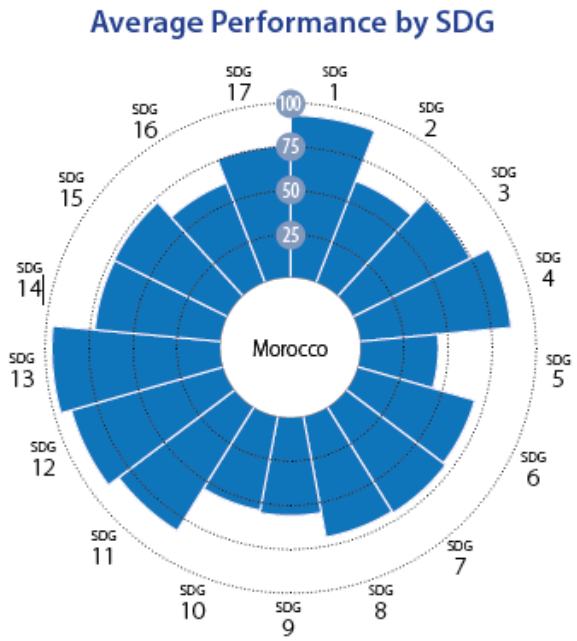
Morocco has been committed since the early 2000s in major societal sustainable development projects as outlined in Morocco's Voluntary National Review 2020 and ODD Morocco (French). These have been elaborated into a Morocco Action Plan 2024-2028. Morocco's third action plan continues a positive trend toward increasingly collaborative development and ambitious commitments. The plan seeks to strengthen civic participation and inclusion, with promising commitments to amend the Right to Access Information Law, strengthen civic space, amend the Press and Publishing Code, and ensure equal access to government services and information for Amazigh speakers.

This Action Plan features four commitments with particular promise to address key open government opportunities in Morocco. Commitment 1 aims to improve access to information by amending the Right to Information Law through broad consultations. Commitment 4 seeks to address Moroccan civil society's legal funding, and capacity challenges and better enable civil society to operate and engage the government. Commitment 5 seeks to amend the Press and Publishing Code through a participatory approach. Commitment 6 aims to strengthen equal access to information and public services for Amazigh speakers, providing linguistic inclusivity in governance. The Government of Morocco has submitted Commitments 1, 4, and 5 to the Open Gov Challenge which is an initiative whereby Morocco aims to enhance transparency, accountability, and civic participation across 10 key policy areas, including access to information, anti-corruption, and digital governance .

In 2024, Morocco is undergoing a major digital transformation of its statistical systems (Digital 2024) highlighted by the digitalization of the 2024 General Population and Housing Census by the High Commission for Planning. Key platforms include a new gender-sensitive SDG data hub and extensive digital data for economic analysis.

Taking into account the global aspect of the SDGs, the sustainable development report assesses where each country stands with regard to achieving the SDGs. The Morocco Country Profile shows that some challenges still exist but that the country is well under way to achieve the majority of goals. Morocco ranks 68th out of 167 countries included in the report.





As an umbrella organization that works with calls for proposals, VLIR-UOS 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 VLIR-UOS can be found in a large variety of sectors. In line with its major intervention area, VLIR-UOS positions itself within the education sector, especially focused on higher education, research and innovation (SDG 4 and 9). However, through its interventions, VLIR-UOS intervenes in different sectors as well. VLIR-UOS 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 VLIR-UOS in Morocco covered mainly, apart from SDG 4 and 9, SDGs 2, 3, 6, 7, 14 and 15. Top sectors for VLIR-UOS in this country for the past decade are health, sustainable agriculture and food security, biodiversity/environment and natural resources, energy, education and technology transfer.

More background information and context analysis on Morocco can be found in the **geographic Joint Strategic Framework** for Morocco, 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 Morocco

The Moroccan Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation oversees all aspects concerning higher education in Morocco. It regulates public and private universities and coordinates national policies for scientific advancement.

The report entitled "Reform of higher education: strategic perspectives" relates directly to the Strategic Vision of the 2015-2030 reform. Higher education is anchoring its development to digital transitions and the appropriation of technological innovation to better adapt to the profound transformations that economic and social life is undergoing. The reflection on the reform of higher education responds to many relevant considerations, among which 1/ the linkage of higher education to scientific research and innovation; 2/ the higher education system, characterized by a certain number of dysfunctions and problems relating to the imbalance between the demographic evolution of enrolled students (still increasing) and the slow increase in the capacity of establishments, 3/ the stagnation of the number of pedagogical and administrative supervision and the insufficient financial resources granted to the various higher education entities; 4/ the many imperfections that characterized the implementation of the LMD (licence-master-doctorat) system which is the backbone of the organization of the national higher education system; 5/ the inadequacy of the profiles formed with the needs and ongoing changes in the labour market.

However, the quality of this transition and its impact on teaching and learning require evaluation and monitoring. Likewise, the differences between rural and urban, between public and private education, between social categories must be taken into account to avoid exclusion.

Following the ESRI Pact 2030 (Plan National d'Accélération de la Transformation de l'Ecosystème), various reforms have affected the Moroccan education system.

The objectives of the ESRI 2030 Pact are to transform the university ecosystem into a driver of economic development, with a focus on graduate employability and academic excellence. Its strategic priorities are pedagogical reform, high-level scientific research, effective governance, and local integration of innovation. Its implementation relies on a participatory approach, on digital transformation, regulatory adaptation, and the mobilization of partnerships, including pathways of excellence within universities. It further envisions to reform curricula, particularly through tailored Bachelor's and Master's programs of excellence and to meet the needs of productive sectors.

The Moroccan government has created the National Agency for Evaluation and Quality Assurance of Higher Education and Scientific Research (ANEAQ). The purpose is to improve the quality, competitiveness and diversity of training programmes, to promote scientific research and to adapt training to market requirements, to create a favourable environment for the development of the Moroccan HEI & research.

According to the Webometrics, the first ranked Moroccan university worldwide is the University of Cadi Ayyad in Marrakech with a 1420th 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 endeavour 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.

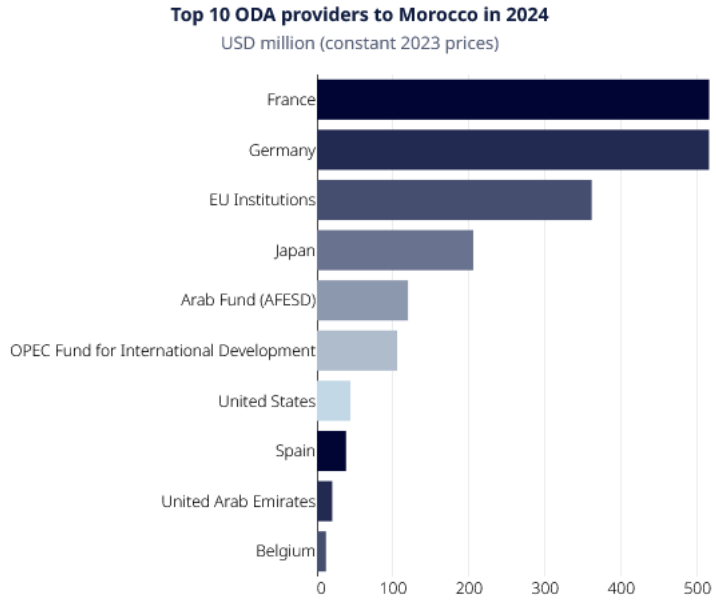
According to the Morocco Action Plan 2024-2028, a certain number of equality and inclusion measures are being taken. The most important ones are the 1/ Promotion of inclusive access to public services for Amazigh-speaking users; 2/ Enhancing transparency in the disability evaluation system and ensuring participation in its implementation; 3/ Supporting civil society organisations in creating provincial child protection units and 4/ National volunteering program in order to encourage young people to participate in activities and events that allow them to express themselves freely and debate youth issues and public policies that concern them.

The action plan further entails the transparency and participation in the development and implementation of the new version of the National Sustainable Development strategy, the strenthening of anabling environments for civil society associations, enhancing the transparency in the disability evaluation system, enhancing inclusive access to justice services while respecting regional specifities and promoting women's access to legal and judicial information.

2.4 Multistakeholderpartnership - Stakeholder analysis

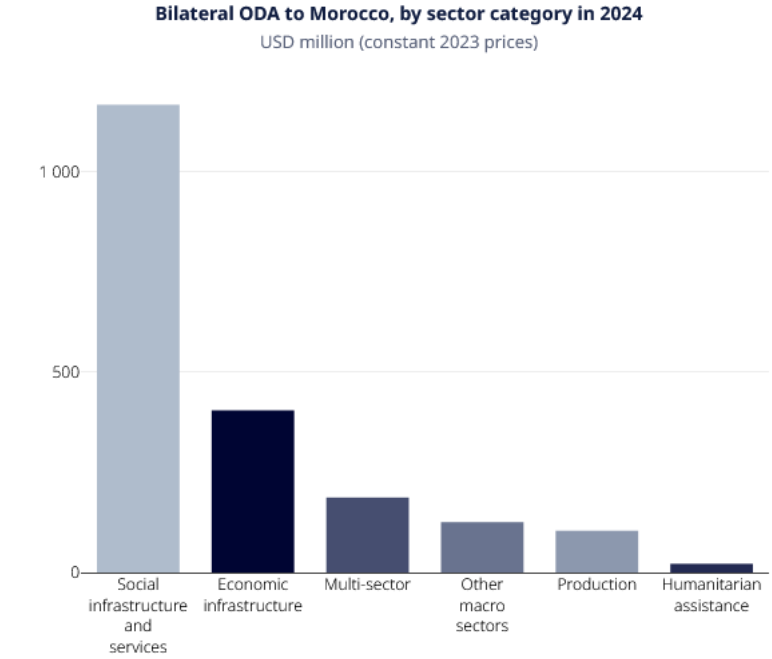
The complexity, scale, and interconnectedness of the current societal challenges that the SDG framework is seeking to address, requires a concerted effort of a wide variety of different stakeholders. As such, the principle of multistakeholder partnership – which promotes cooperation and partnerships 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 Morocco, France and Germany represent the main donors of gross official development aid (ODA) in Morocco. With the withdrawal of USAID funds since the Trump administration took over in 2025, this situation is expected to change in the following years.



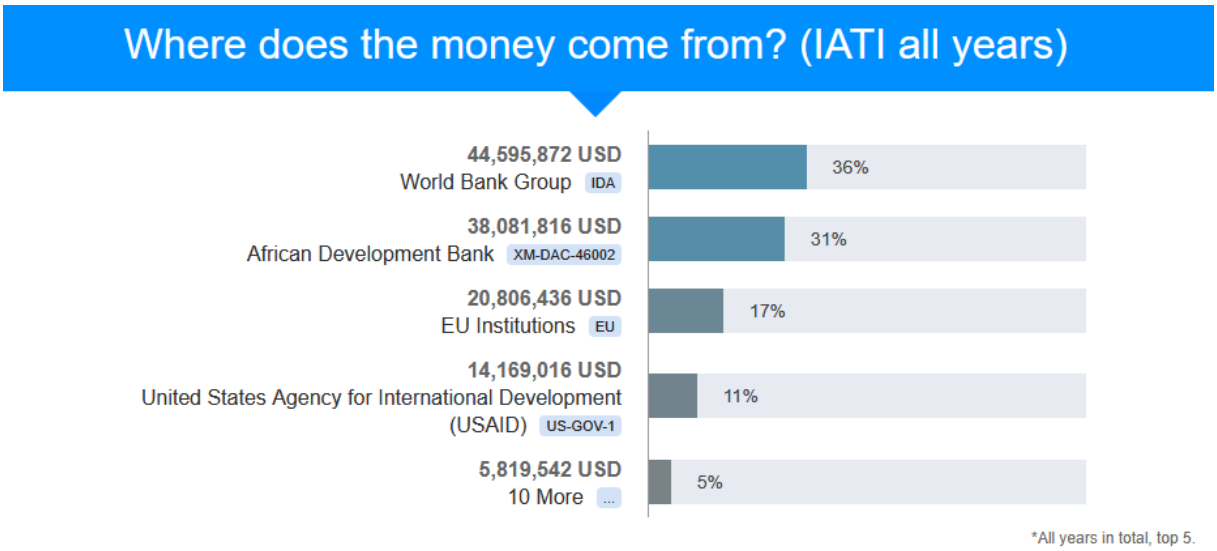
es: OECD (2025), Aid (ODA) disbursements to countries and regions [DAC2a]

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



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

Based on data from the IATI D-Portal the World Bank and the African Development Bank are the main donors in the higher education sector.



VLIR-UOS 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 VLIR-UOS envisages to support through *its interventions*.

Actor	Role and interest/influence
Higher Education Institutions	HEIs in Morocco are important boundary partners in the realization of VLIR-UOS 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 VLIR-UOS selection commissions and follows-up on the VLIR-UOS portfolio and the thematic JSF on Higher Education and Science for Sustainable Development. The Belgian Embassies 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 VLIR-UOS-projects will be important stakeholders in connecting VLIR-UOS 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	VLIR-UOS, 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 Morocco, both ARES and VLIRUOS 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.
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.

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

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 Morocco will feed into to 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 Morocco

Belgium ranks 10th on the ODA overview for Morocco, meaning that Morocco is an important partner of the Belgian Cooperation. Belgium has been cooperating with Morocco since 1965. That is nearly 60 years at the service of development in areas such as human mobility, digitization, gender equality and entrepreneurship, agriculture, triangular cooperation between states and participatory governance. The 2023-2028 cooperation with Enabel also includes initiatives to strengthen the human potential and the economic inclusion of young people and women. Within the field of agriculture, Enabel works with date producers in the oasis areas and provides support throughout the value chain; concerning digitization Enabel works with Moroccan institutions to improve the way they operate and guarantee a high-quality public service; concerning migration Belgium supports Morocco in implementing its migration policies by sharing its experience as a country of immigration as well as by using the competencies of Moroccans living in Belgium. For entrepreneurship and with a view to improving the economic inclusion of young people and women, there is a programme of tailored support to stimulate the development of innovative private initiatives. Moreover, Belgium is supporting the Moroccan services concerned to improve assistance to women and girls who are victims of violence.

[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 Morocco

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

However, ITM has no projects in Morocco. More info specifically about ARES in Morocco can be found on Moove ARES

Collaboration with the geographic JSF of Morocco 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).

3.3.2. Morocco Joint Strategic Framework - JSF

	Description of the strategic goal	ANGCs (active members)
SG1	Citoyenneté, droits et services essentiels pour toutes et tous : Renforcer la culture de la citoyenneté active, la connaissance et l'accès équitable aux droits et services essentiels afin de contribuer à une société plus juste, inclusive, durable et solidaire	All : CD/K, MdM, CRB, ASF, RCN, J&D, Solsoc, Echos Communication, APEFE, VVSG, Brulocalis
SG2	Acteurs territoriaux et gouvernance participative : Renforcer le pouvoir d'agir, la cohésion et la légitimité des acteurs de l'écosystème territorial pour une gouvernance plus représentative, inclusive, participative et ancrée localement	Idem
SG3	Co-production et évolution des politiques publiques : Encourager la co-production des politiques publiques et des cadres juridiques afin d'assurer un processus pleinement inclusif et représentatif des besoins locaux	Idem

3.3.3. Other Thematic Joint Strategic Frameworks

Besides collaboration with the thematic JSF on Higher Education and Science, there is also collaboration with the thematic JSF of Decent Work (JSF DW).

While the Moroccan JSF structures work around a continuum extending from individuals to local stakeholders and then to public policies, the JSF DW provides crucial thematic expertise on social inclusion and decent work. In a country where territorial inequalities, youth unemployment, precarious informal employment, gender disparities, and gaps in social protection remain significant concerns, the convergence between the two frameworks appears both natural and strategic. It is rooted in the needs expressed by the ACNGs and their Moroccan partners, who are calling for both strengthened economic and social rights and increased participation in local and national governance processes.

The JSF DW contributes directly to the three objectives of the Moroccan JSF. The actions carried out by the members of the JSF DW present in Morocco, in particular Solsoc, IFSI-ISVI and their local partners, fully illustrate this complementarity: support for workers towards forms of collective organisation, support for vocational training, promotion of community health, strengthening of mutuals, mobilisation around social rights, participation in the definition of more inclusive employment and social protection policies and social dialogue.