

Belgium

Priorities and approaches

Agricultural Research for Development (ARD) support from the Belgian federal government follows the guidelines set out in two recent policy notes. Research and innovation (R&I) was highlighted as one of the three fields of action within the Strategic Policy Note [From Subsistence to Entrepreneurship – ‘Agriculture and Food Security’ for the Belgian Development Cooperation](#) adopted in 2017. In 2021, the [Areas of Focus within the Agriculture and Food Security Strategy](#) was adopted whereby “Investing in research, improving knowledge and access to innovations” was one of the three new focus areas. This focus area highlights the need to encourage and finance participatory research on the many challenges around the transition towards sustainable and inclusive food systems, with the aim of

- enabling farmers – in particular women – to provide their families with better and affordable nutrition;
- increasing the productivity and resilience of food systems so that farmers can contribute to and participate in economic growth; and
- managing natural resources in the light of climate change and other challenges. Research areas are broad and comprise sustainable land and water management, market links, technological innovation with a particular focus on climate change adaptation and mitigation, agroecology, inclusive and fair value chains, and nutrition and healthy diets.

Participatory research, with a systemic approach, is encouraged to yield innovations that are identified and designed in co-creation with relevant actors from the public and private sectors, the research community, and civil society including farmers. Research is aimed at analysing and removing the obstacles for innovation and supporting levers that allow scaling up of innovative solutions. This should be also based on both scientific knowledge obtained from research and local/traditional knowledge from farmers. Training, knowledge exchange and advice adapted to local/regional contexts is of great importance in strengthening the capacities of all actors for sustainable food systems, especially those that are the poorest and most vulnerable.

Belgium has great expertise in research and innovation in agriculture and food security and valorisation of research results should be strengthened. Close cooperation already takes place between several Belgian knowledge institutions and civil society, as well as with the CGIAR. Significant focus is also placed on symbiosis between expertise from the South and the North through partnerships with local knowledge institutions.

Organisation of ARD

Funding for ARD is mostly the responsibility of the Belgian Development Cooperation where it is supported through different channels. Belgian Development Cooperation’s multilateral funding currently supports [CGIAR](#). As an EU Member State, Belgium contributes also to the funding of the European Union’s (EU) Horizon Europe research programmes (and Belgian Centres of Excellence can

receive funding from these programs). Belgian Development Cooperation's bilateral support is given to Belgian universities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and scientific institutions such as the [Royal Museum for Central Africa](#) and the [Institute for Tropical Medicine](#).

The [Belgian Federal Science Policy Office \(BELSPO\)](#) also contributes to elements of ARD, organising networks for information exchange between scientific institutes in Belgium and abroad and supervising federal institutes working on veterinary and biodiversity research.

[Enabel](#), which is the development agency of the Belgian federal government responsible for executing the country's international development cooperation, implements various agricultural and rural development projects but ARD activities within these projects are often limited.¹

The regional governments of the Brussels Capital, Flemish and Walloon Regions are also funding ARD activities, although their overall support is relatively small and focuses on projects implemented by Belgian organisations – mostly universities – in their respective regions.

ARD support to Belgian universities is provided through the Belgian Development Cooperation, the regional governments, and various organizations:

- the [Académie de recherche et d'enseignement supérieur \(ARES\)](#) supports partnerships between higher education institutions in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, Belgium, and institutions in the South to strengthen the latter in their missions of training, research and service to society, and in their role as development actors; and
- the [Flemish Interuniversity Council \(VLIR\)](#) supports partnerships between Flemish universities and universities in partner countries that are exploring responses to global and local challenges including those related to ARD.

Various NGOs are also involved in rural development and execute various projects in the Global South that have an ARD focus and are mostly funded by the Belgian Development Cooperation. For example, [Rikolto](#) collaborates with various research and higher education institutions in the Global South to strengthen selected commodity sectors such as cocoa, coffee, fruits, pulses, rice and vegetables.

Key ARD programmes and beneficiaries 2021-2024

- A considerable share of federal support to ARD is channelled to the CGIAR in form of *undesignated portfolio funding* to its 2022-2024 business cycle (€6,0m/3 yrs) as well as
 - Designated funding as part of the 2022-2024 business cycle to two Initiatives of the newly developed Research Portfolio, *Transformational Agroecology across Food, Land and Water Systems* (€2,1m /3 yrs) and *Transforming Agri Food Systems in West and Central Africa* (€3m/ 3 yrs). In 2022, additional funding to two additional CGIAR initiatives was channelled through the government's climate budget envelope, *Building*

¹ An exception are projects that fall under the Development of Smart Innovation through Research in Agriculture (DeSIRA) program, but these are supported mainly through EU funding and additional Belgium funds.

Systemic Resilience against Climate Variability and Extremes (€1,35m/ 1 yr) and Nature-Positive Solutions: Enhancing Productivity and Resilience, while Safeguarding the Environment, and Promoting Inclusive (€2m/ 1 yr).

- Bilateral funding for the *More Fruit Diversity for Food Security* project, which aims to conserve local agricultural diversity and increase the adaption of newly introduced climate smart bananas for different agro-ecozones in the African Great Lakes Region (€0,9m/3 yrs). This project builds on earlier Belgian funded research to identify drought-resistant banana cultures and continues to be funded bilaterally.
- The *Royal Museum for Central Africa* receives federal funding for various projects for the 2019-2023 period (€3,2m/4 yrs) including capacity building and research around freshwater fisheries in Africa and the Congo Basin and agroecological methodology for vegetable crops, which includes also capacity strengthening and research activities in Mozambique and Tanzania.
- The *Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences (RBINS)* received federal funding for the Capacities for Biodiversity and Sustainable Development project (2019-2023) that aims to strengthen capacities for biological diversity conservation and sustainable use. It particularly focuses on interventions that bridge science with policy and development practices in more than 15 countries (€7m/5 yrs).

This country profile has been prepared by EIARD with contributions from staff of various Belgian organisations involved in ARD, complemented by information collected from internal and online databases and websites. The findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed in this profile do not necessarily reflect the views of the Belgian organisations involved in ARD.