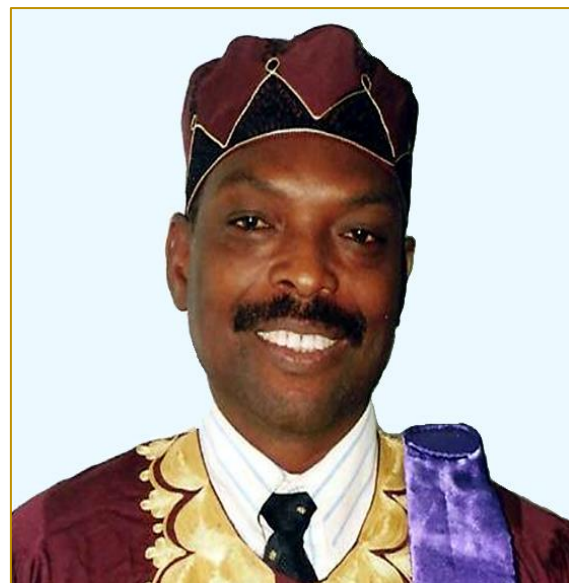




## The University of Abomey-Calavi (Benin): A modern transformative University for sustainable development



Prof Nelly KELOME, Vice Rector in charge of cooperation University of Abomey-Calavi



Prof Félicien ALESSI, Rector University of Abomey-Calavi

The COVID-19 pandemic, the current socio-economic crisis that several countries in the world, including African countries, are going through, and the impacts of the war in Ukraine have reinforced the socio-economic challenges (poverty, food insecurity, lack of health coverage, etc.) that African countries, including Benin, were already facing. The race to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals is becoming more and more of an ultimate challenge for these countries. This challenge requires African universities, especially Francophone ones, to go through a process of transformation, structuring and reform in order to better position themselves on the SDGs and to respond to the development priorities of each country. For this reason, the University of Abomey-Calavi (Benin) has chosen to be part





of the modernity, to mobilize for more equity and to strive for the excellence of training, real drivers of its commitment, especially as it is the Benin's leading university and the largest in terms of student numbers, teacher-researchers, training establishments and courses of study.

### ***UNIVERSITY OF ABOMEY-CALAVI: A UNIVERSITY BORN TO ACCELERATE THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICA AND BENIN***

Established on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1970 under the name of University of Dahomey, it became University of Benin in 1975. It was later renamed as the University of Abomey-Calavi in 2001. The University of Abomey-Calavi's vision is to build a more modern, autonomous and, radiant university that trains quality human resources and offers all users a friendly and harmonious working space for the development of Benin and other nations. The University of Abomey-Calavi (UAC) comprises six (06) university centers, across the country, each housing a variable number of faculties, schools or institutes, and chairs. To date, UAC counts a total of 40 Training and Research Entities (TRE), including 20 schools or institutes, 6 faculties with large numbers of students, 2 faculties with low enrolment status, 3 chairs and 9 doctoral schools.

The University of Abomey-Calavi understood very early on the importance of evolving with the world and adapting to contemporary national and international changes in order to better respond to the development needs of Benin and West Africa. The higher education sector has, for example, shown resilience in the face of the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic through the promotion of e-learning. The University benefits from a political environment favorable for good governance and institutional reforms (e.g. appointment of leaders on merit, promotion of excellence in the university's programmes and projects). Moreover, higher education has a priority status in the government's action programme. This is illustrated by courageous reforms promoting good governance of the university (appointments of leaders on merit, promotion of excellence in university programmes and projects). Since 2021, in Benin and particularly at the University of Abomey-Calavi, the government has introduced a new merit-based process for appointing rectors and deans. Specific programs are established by a rigorous Board of Directors. The University now operates like a corporate entity, with an obligation of results. In addition, a relentless fight against corruption and sexual harassment, especially in training organizations, is being promoted (adoption of laws, creation of cells to protect victims and denounce predatory teachers). All this stimulates the University in terms of academics, research and international cooperation.

### ***HIGH IMPACT FIELDS OF STUDY AND RESEARCH FOR STUDENTS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD***

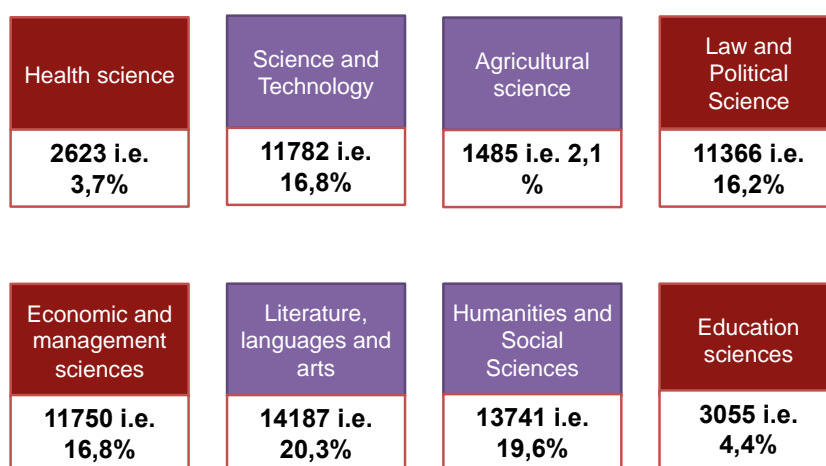
The training offers of the University of Abomey-Calavi cover a wide diversity of fields, from sciences and technologies to humanities. Currently, many reforms, evaluation actions and



measures are taken for a better adaptation of the training offers to the employment markets and the needs of the society.



At the University of Abomey-Calavi, 68472 students were enrolled in 2021 of whom 33% are women and 1175 international students. The number of students enrolled by field of study is as follows:

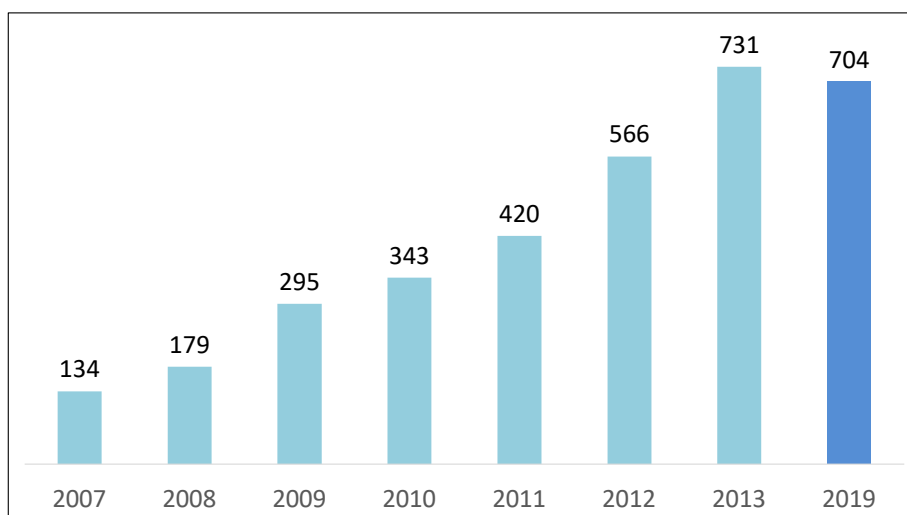


The University is serviced by 944 teachers including 888 statutory teachers (ratio of 1 teacher to 73 students), 892 administrative, technical and support staff (Statistics from 2020).



## BEING COMPETITIVE AND PRODUCTIVE IN RESEARCH: ONE OF OUR PRIORITIES

### Number of publications in 2019 and from 2007 to 2013



The dynamism of our research is one of our main assets. Our scientific productivity has been constantly evolving for several years. From 134 publications in 2007, we went to 731 publications in 2013 and 704 publications in 2019. To face the challenge of the lack of quality lecturers and researchers, UAC has initiated, since 2007, the Competitive Research Fund Programs (CRFP) that operate on self-funding. In 2007 and 2014, this initiative resulted in 120 publications, 4 patents and 135 researchers and Masters trained.

The RFCP: third phase of implementation			The CRFP: Impact from 2007 to 2021			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Duration of each phase: 3 years</li> </ul>			Deliverables	Number (2007-2010 and 2012-2014)	Underway 2019-2021	Total
Implementation phases	Overall amount of funding (FCFA)	Number of projects funded	Number of doctors/assistants trained	40	47	87
2007 – 2010	281 624 400	05	Number of Master students trained	95	141	236
2012 – 2014	894 054 152	16	Number of teacher-researchers promoted to CAMES	37	-	-
2019 – 2021	904 972 800	16	Number of publications produced by the teams	120	-	-
Amount allocated per project: 55 000 000 – 60 000 000 FCFA			Patents	04	-	-

## AN ACTIVE COOPERATION WITH OTHERS INSTITUTIONS

We have a very dynamic and very open international cooperation system. Each year, several dozen national and international partnership agreements are signed. We also have an





innovative resource mobilization system that allows us to apply for competitive calls for projects and win cooperation projects, including international mobility.

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Category of partners					
Public universities and university centers	01	02	22	05	30
Universities and private institutions of higher learning	06	01	01	05	44
Local communities	00	00	00	00	05
Public and parapublic structures	00	02	04	18	31
Private organizations	06	01	03	12	70
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>06</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>180</b>

**Table 1: Number of agreements signed by UAC Rectorate by categories of partners at the national level from 2008 to 2021**

**Cooperation agreements: Tools for formalizing international relations**

Evolution of international cooperation agreements between 2014 and 2021

462 agreements signed between 2014 and 2021

**Projects Designing**

Presence of a Division in charge of strategic intelligence and resource mobilization to enable the UAC to capture and take advantage of all international funding opportunities

Establishment of consortia with other academic institutions to submit projects for funding to international organizations

### Assessment of some Institutional Support projects

**Table 2: Assessment of some Institutional Support projects**

Project Name	Technical and financial partner	Implementation period	Impact created at the University
Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program at UAC	The Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program	2017 –2023	Funding for university and business creation scholarships for 300 young graduates from impoverished families with support for leadership development and transition to employment
Belgian Institutional Support Program	ARES (Belgian Cooperation)	2017 - 2022	Improvement of the professionalization of training offers at the UAC (undergraduate level)
Mobility program with the University of Münster	University of Münster	Since 2015	Sending four students to the University of Münster Reception of students from the University of Münster in 2018





The University of Abomey-Calavi maintains strong partnerships with universities in the West African sub-region through research partnerships, mobility and exchanges at the academic, administrative and research levels. It is a member of the Network for Excellence in Higher Education in West Africa (REESAO), a member of the African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education (CAMES), and a member of the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM). The University of Abomey-Calavi, through several programmes of cooperation and support to higher education and research, maintains solid partnership relations with universities and teaching and research institutions in the North and South. The Capacity Building programme funded by the Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education (NUFFIC), the Development of mobility programmes through the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF), Support to Research, Training and Mobility with Gansu Institute of Political science and Law of China (China), Mobility Programme (CARIBU-be) (Belgium), Support to Training, Research and Mobility of The Graduate School\_USAID (USA) are some of the non-exhaustive examples.

For the past four months, the University of Abomey-Calavi (UAC) has adopted a new mechanism to boost its international cooperation policy. **Monthly webinars are organized the first Friday of each month by the service of the international cooperation of the Vice Rectorate in charge of the Interuniversity Cooperation, Partnerships and Professional Integration (VR-CIPIP) of the University.** Through this initiative, UAC uses digital opportunities to strengthen its visibility and impact the national and international scientific community. The initiative is in its fourth issue, with more than 250 people impacted.

### *AN INTEGRATION OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES*

Digital technology has set the academic world on fire in most countries around the world. Benin was no exception. At the University of Abomey-Calavi, structural efforts have been made to create an environment where digital technology is valued in the service of training, and where Information and Communication Technologies are at the heart of the University dynamic. Student registration is digitized, with the use of OKAPI software which was developed in Java. UAC WEBTV and Web-Radio are university communication structures set up to strengthen the communication and visibility of the University of Abomey-Calavi. The University of Abomey-Calavi has shown itself to be resilient with COVID-19 with the establishment of an E-learning platform which has allowed students to have access to online courses. The University has also The Microbes MOOCs (Online Microbiology Courses) developed with funding from the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie during the pandemic. All this illustrates our university's strong desire to open up to the world through the exploration of digital opportunities.





## ***SOME INNOVATIONS ON EMPLOYABILITY***

The University of Abomey-Calavi prioritized very early on the employability of young people and introduced entrepreneurship as a key component of professional skill development. It has therefore worked on the implementation of innovative devices that can serve these interests. This is the case of the Autonomous Center for Volunteerism, Entrepreneurship, Research and Innovation of the UAC which work to facilitate the professional integration of young graduates. These structures promote entrepreneurship among students by acquiring professional skills through local volunteer involvement. The mission of the centre is to equip not only Benin, but also the countries of the sub-region and the world with new types of young people, committed, hard-working, dedicated citizens with integrity and ethical values and skills that promote development by providing them with solid practical vocational training based on volunteerism for entrepreneurship. Through this programme, thousands of students have strengthened their vocation, found their way to entrepreneurship and honed their skills, enabling them to enter business and sustainable employment.

In addition to this scheme, the Rectorate of the University of Abomey-Calavi has also initiated the UAC STARTUP VALLEY, the first university incubation program in Benin to help young people create and develop their businesses. This programme was initiated in 2014 with three strategic objectives: to coach young graduates to create at least 30 innovative businesses per year for at least 1,000 direct jobs and 5,000 indirect jobs by 2025; to sensitize all actors in the university community on the need to promote business creation to solve the problem of unemployment; To contribute to reducing unemployment rate of UAC graduates to less than 20% by 2025. This programme has made it possible to set up and support hundreds of start-ups, and nests for job creation.

## ***CHALLENGES FOR ACHIEVING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS***

The University of Abomey-Calavi wishes to better adapt to the changes in the world by improving the quality of its training offer, by strengthening its research and international cooperation policy and by making professional integration a reality. Several challenges must therefore be addressed. In the field of education, the concept of "lifelong learning" must be given full meaning, with the inclusion of gender-related concerns and the introduction of a system for the recognition of prior learning. The pedagogical reinforcement of the teaching staff in a competence-based training approach must be intensified, in order to improve teaching practices and optimize the training of learners. Research needs a big boost. The ambition to develop state-of-the-art research and development laboratories that allow researchers to flourish, where interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary are expressed, and in a synergy of South-South and South-North collaboration, is omnipresent. But this will require strengthening the governance of academic and research institutions with a strategic focus on



themes related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Other challenges relate to the monitoring of the integration of graduates and the establishment of a framework for dialogue between the university and the world of work, in conjunction with the management of the massification of student numbers. Optimizing the use of information and communication technologies in education (ICT) could be a way of relieving congestion in auditoriums, hence the keen interest of the UAC and its teaching staff in the production of MOOCs.

### **About the Authors**

**Prof. Félicien AVLESSI** is, since October 15, 2021, Rector of the University of Abomey-Calavi. As such, he was elected "Rapporteur of the General Advisory Committee (GAC)" on March 2, 2022, for a term of 3 years, renewable once. Recruited in 1995, as Assistant Professor at the National University of Benin, he made his career as a Lecturer-researcher specifically at the Laboratory of Study and Research in Applied Chemistry (LERCA) where he proved himself. He was appointed from 2007 to 2021 Vice-Rector in charge of university research at the University of Abomey-Calavi, a position he held from 2019 until 2021, with that of Vice-Rector in charge of inter-university cooperation, partnerships and professional insertion. Deputy Secretary General of the Société Ouest-Africaine de Chimie (SOACHIM) in Benin, he is since 1999 Head of the Research Unit on Plant Extracts and Natural Flavors (UREV) of the Laboratory of Study and Research in Applied Chemistry. He was appointed in December 2021 to the Vice Presidency of the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM).

**Prof Nelly KELOME** is the current Vice Rector in charge of Interuniversity Cooperation, Partnerships and Professional Insertion (VR-CIPIP) of the University of Abomey-Calavi (UAC). Holder of a doctoral thesis in Earth Sciences, she was recruited to the Department of Earth Sciences of the Faculty of Science and Technology of the University of Abomey-Calavi in 2006 as a teacher-researcher. Her research work focuses on the impact of human activities on soils, groundwater, hydro-sedimentary dynamics and pollution of aquatic systems. In 2021, she was nominated to the rank of Knight of the International Order of Academic Palms of the African and Malagasy Council of Higher Education (CAMES).

This is our twenty-Sixth issue in a series of articles we are releasing as part of the RUFORUM Seventh Africa Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Triennial Conference Digests. More information about the conference is available at <https://www.ruforum.org/Triennial2021/>. Join the Conversation on Social Media using our Official hashtag #AfricaHEWeek2021.

