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## Effect of supporting electrolyte concentration on one-step electrodeposited CuInS<sub>2</sub> films for ZnS/CuInS<sub>2</sub> solar cell applications

C. A. Rodríguez<sup>a,b,\*</sup>, A. Delgadillo<sup>b</sup>, J. Nuñez<sup>c</sup>, G. Cabello-Guzmán<sup>d</sup>, Adriana C. Mera<sup>a,b</sup>, M. P. Delplancke<sup>e</sup>, B. Villacampa<sup>f</sup> and C. Carrasco<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *Multidisciplinary Research Institute for Science and Technology, Universidad de La Serena, 1015 Juan Cisternas Av., La Serena, Chile*

<sup>b</sup> *Department of Chemistry, Faculty of Sciences, University of La Serena, Campus Andrés Bello, 1305 Raúl Bitrán Av., La Serena, Chile*

<sup>c</sup> *Thin Films and Electrochemical Process Laboratory, Departamento de Ingeniería de Materiales, Universidad de Concepción, Edmundo Larenas 270, Concepción, Chile*

<sup>d</sup> *Department of Basic Sciences, Faculty of Sciences, University of Bío-Bío, Campus Fernando May, Chillán, Chile*

<sup>e</sup> *4MAT, Université Libre de Bruxelles, 50 Roosevelt Av., CP 165/63, Brussels 1050, Belgium*

<sup>f</sup> *Department of Condensed Matter Physics, ICMA, Universidad de Zaragoza-CSIC, 50009, Zaragoza, Spain*

\*Corresponding author. E-mail address: [arodriguez@userena.cl](mailto:arodriguez@userena.cl). Tel.: +56-51-233 4881

## Abstract

1  
2 A one-step electrodeposition process is used to obtain  $\text{CuInS}_2$  (CIS) films on a  
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4 molybdenum substrate by varying the supporting electrolyte (lithium chloride, LiCl)  
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6 concentration. The as-deposited samples are characterized by scanning electron  
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8 microscopy, energy dispersive spectroscopy, profilometry and diffuse reflectance  
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10 spectroscopy. It is found that different concentrations of LiCl mainly lead to a  
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12 morphological change and that the chemical composition of the obtained CIS films shifts  
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14 to the stoichiometric composition for high concentrations of supporting electrolyte. After  
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16 annealing, the structural analysis from X-ray diffraction reveals that all samples  
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18 crystallized in the tetragonal phase of CIS. In addition, it is found that the crystallite size  
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20 increased for samples grown at higher concentrations of LiCl. Optical studies carried out  
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22 by diffuse reflectance spectroscopy reveal that the band gap values increase from  $\sim 1.40$   
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24 to  $\sim 1.45$  eV (average) after the annealing process. Finally, zinc sulfide (ZnS) thin films  
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26 are chemically deposited onto electrodeposited CIS films in order to evaluate the  
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28 photovoltaic response of ZnS/CIS bilayer systems. We discover that ZnS thin films cover  
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30 the surface of CIS more effectively for the highest concentration of LiCl and that only the  
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32 ZnS/CIS bilayer with the CIS film obtained at the highest concentration of LiCl shows a  
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34 photovoltaic response.  
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46 **Keywords:**  $\text{CuInS}_2$  films, electrodeposition, electrolyte; thin film solar cells  
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## 1. Introduction

CuInS<sub>2</sub> (CIS) is a ternary semiconductor with excellent potential as an absorbent material for thin film solar cells (TFSCs) [1–5]. Experimentally, CIS-based solar cells exhibit a limited energy conversion efficiency when compared with other chalcopyrite ternary semiconductor-based photovoltaic devices, such as CuXSe<sub>2</sub> (X = In, Ga) and Cu(In,Ga)Se<sub>2</sub> [6–7]. However, the low cost and toxicity of CIS make it a promising candidate as an absorbent layer in solar cells.

Although the highest efficiency currently achieved for CIS-based solar cells is only 13% [8], there is still potential to continue increasing the conversion efficiency based on the optical properties of the material and its theoretical energy conversion efficiency of 32% [9]. CIS has a direct band gap of ~1.5 eV and a high absorption coefficient ( $10^5 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ), which ensures absorption of most of the visible solar spectrum [10,11]. This compound also has good radiation stability and environmental compatibility, which should allow CIS photovoltaic devices to maintain performance even in adverse conditions [12].

So far, several methods, such as co-evaporation, sputtering, spray pyrolysis and electrodeposition, have been used for the fabrication of CIS thin films [13–15]. Among these methods, co-evaporation and sputtering are the most used to synthesize CIS films for TFSC applications. However, expensive equipment is needed for vacuum environments and high purity targets must be used in these deposition techniques. Therefore, these two methods are expensive for the production of large-area CIS thin films. In contrast, electrodeposition is an attractive method that can be used to fabricate large-area thin films at a lower cost.

Currently, there are two routes for the electrodeposition of CIS: one- and two-step routes [10,16,17]. In the two-step route, a layer of Cu-In is deposited first and the layer is then subjected to a thermal sulfurization process to form CIS. Accordingly, in the two-step

1 route, the procedure becomes more complicated and the subsequent sulfurization process  
2 at high temperature requires the usage of a H<sub>2</sub>S or S atmosphere, which are harmful,  
3 corrosive and flammable [2,18]. In the one-step route, a sulfur source (commonly sodium  
4 thiosulfate) with metallic copper and indium ions are deposited simultaneously on the  
5 substrate surface. Since greener fabrication processes are increasingly required, efforts to  
6 exclude H<sub>2</sub>S throughout the synthesis of semiconductor thin films have to be utilized  
7 [2,19,20]. Thus, the one-step electrodeposition process has arisen as a less toxic, simpler  
8 and cheaper route to fabricate large-area CIS thin films.

9 The effect of different experimental conditions on the one-step electrodeposition of CIS  
10 films has been thoroughly investigated. So far, the influence of deposition time [17],  
11 concentration of precursors [21], applied potential [22] and complexing agents [2] has  
12 been studied. However, the effect of supporting electrolyte concentration on one-step  
13 electrodeposited CIS film properties has so far not been addressed.

14 Supporting electrolytes are normally used during electrodeposition of a film to increase  
15 the conductivity of the solution and to keep the ionic strength and pH constant [23]. It has  
16 been shown that increasing the concentration of the supporting electrolyte leads to an  
17 increase in the values of minimum activation resistance of the electrode reaction and a  
18 decrease in the standard rate constants of the first electroreduction step [24]. Accordingly,  
19 film properties can be affected and modified by varying the supporting electrolyte  
20 concentration. The usage of supporting electrolytes has been widely reported for the one-  
21 step electrodeposition process because it favors codeposition [25]. Chloride- and sulfate-  
22 based electrolytes are the most used for electrodeposition [2,25–27]; however, in acidic  
23 conditions, sulfate-based electrolytes are not sufficiently inert, resulting in reduction to  
24 SO<sub>2(g)</sub>. Accordingly, LiCl has been widely used as a support electrolyte in one-step  
25 electrodeposited CIS films [2,19,28,29].

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In this work, CIS films are fabricated through a one-step electrodeposition method. The effect of the supporting electrolyte concentration on the morphological characteristics, chemical composition and the optical and structural properties of the CIS films are analyzed. Furthermore, ZnS/CIS bilayers are fabricated using the one-step electrodeposited CIS films, in order to investigate their ability as absorbent layers in TFSCs. The morphological characteristics, chemical composition and photovoltaic response of the bilayers are reported.

## 2. Experimental

### 2.1 Polarization curves and electrodeposition of CIS

Prior to the deposition process, in order to investigate the effect of the supporting electrolyte concentration on the reduction potential of CIS, potentiodynamic measurements were performed. An Amel 2549 potentiostat/galvanostat in a three-electrode cell configuration was used. A molybdenum (Mo) foil with an exposure surface of 0.5 cm × 0.5 cm, a platinum wire and a saturated calomel electrode (SCE) were used as the working, counter and reference electrodes, respectively. Mo substrates (Sigma-Aldrich, 99%, 0.1 mm thick) were cleaned with soap and rinsed with distilled water and alcohol. Subsequently, the Mo substrate was dried at room temperature.

The electrolytic bath contained 7.8 mmol CuCl<sub>2</sub>, 6.25 mmol InCl<sub>3</sub>, 23 mmol C<sub>8</sub>H<sub>5</sub>KO<sub>4</sub> (KHP), 23.4 mmol Na<sub>2</sub>S<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> and X mmol LiCl (X = 50, 100, 150, 200 or 250). The metallic sources, complexing agent and source of the sulfur ions were kept constant, while the LiCl concentration added to the electrolytic bath was changed, resulting in five different electrolytic baths. The pH was adjusted to 2.5 by adding diluted HCl and the bath temperature was kept constant at 30 °C. The electrolytic bath was deaerated with N<sub>2</sub> gas for 20 min to remove any dissolved oxygen in the solution. The potentiodynamic

1 curves were scanned from 0 to -1.8 V vs. SCE with a constant scan rate of 10 mVs<sup>-1</sup>.  
2 Polarization curves for each individual ionic specie were also performed; It should be  
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4 noted that the main findings are similar to the reported elsewhere [2], reason why they  
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6 are not shown here.  
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9 The electrodeposition process for CIS thin films was carried out potentiostatically  
10 following the same experimental details for the polarization curves. The one-step  
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12 electrodeposition process was started by applying a constant potential of -1 V vs. SCE  
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14 for 30 min. Then, the electrodeposited samples were removed from the solution and  
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16 cleaned with distilled water to remove any non-well-adhered material and dried at room  
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18 temperature. All the obtained CIS thin films were uniformly dark and well covered the  
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20 surface substrate. The as-deposited samples were labelled as CIS-X, where X = 50, 100,  
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22 150, 200 or 250 mmol, which represented the LiCl concentrations added to the electrolytic  
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24 bath, respectively. Finally, the deposited films were annealed in a 95% N<sub>2</sub> + 5 % H<sub>2</sub>  
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26 atmosphere for 1 h at 400 °C . Before heating, air was purged for 90 min and then the  
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28 program was started with a heating rate of 10 °C/min. The annealed samples were labelled  
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30 by adding the letter 'a' to the previously defined labels (a-CIS-X).  
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34 For all the as-deposited samples, the morphological characteristics and chemical  
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36 composition were investigated by scanning electron microscopy (SEM, Hitachi Su 70)  
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38 coupled with energy dispersive spectroscopy (EDS). The film thickness was measured  
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40 using a Bruker Stylus profiler model Dektak XT. The optical properties were studied by  
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42 means of diffuse reflectance spectroscopy using an ultraviolet-visible spectrophotometer  
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44 ThermoScientific Evolution 220 with an integrating sphere for solid samples. The band  
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46 gap values were estimated at the wavelength where a sharp increase in reflectance was  
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48 observed [30]. After the annealing process of the CIS films, the measurements of the  
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50 surface characteristics, EDS and optical band gap were carried out again. In addition, the  
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1 structural properties were measured by means of X-ray diffraction (XRD) using a D5000  
2 Bruker diffractometer with Cu K $\alpha$  radiation at 40 kV and 40 mA.  
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## 7 *2.2 ZnS/CIS heterojunction*

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9 In order to investigate the ability of the one-step electrodeposited CIS films as absorbent  
10 materials in solar cells, three different ZnS/CIS bilayers are fabricated. A schematic  
11 representation of the fabrication of the ZnS/CIS/Mo solar cells is shown in Figure 1. For  
12 construction of the solar cells, after electrodeposition of CIS on the Mo substrate (see Fig.  
13 1(a)), the ZnS thin film was chemically deposited on the obtained CIS layer. The solution  
14 for depositing the ZnS thin film has been reported elsewhere [31]. Once the non-toxic  
15 solution was prepared and the pH adjusted to 10.5 (total volume of 100 mL), CIS/Mo  
16 substrates were immersed in the reactor (see Fig. 1(b)). Subsequently, the reactor was  
17 transferred to a thermoregulated bath for 90 min at 75 °C. After this time, samples were  
18 removed from the solution, rinsed with deionized water and dried at room temperature.  
19 The upper Sn contact was made using a hot ultrasonic soldering unit model Sunbonder  
20 USM-5 from Kuroda Techno Co., Ltd. (see Fig. 1(c)).  
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38 The morphological characteristics of the obtained ZnS/CIS bilayers were investigated by  
39 field emission SEM (MERLIN<sup>TM</sup> Carls Zeiss). The semi-quantitative chemical  
40 composition was measured by EDS attached to SEM. Finally, the photovoltaic response  
41 was measured using a solar simulator (Abet Technologies model 10500) as an irradiating  
42 source at 1 sun of irradiating power (1 sun = 1000 W/m<sup>2</sup>) and a 2401 Source Meter  
43 Instrument (Keithley). A silicon reference cell equipped with a KG5 filter was used.  
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### 3. Results and discussion

#### 3.1 Cathodic polarization curves

In order to study the effect of the concentration of LiCl on the reduction process of ions to form CIS, cathodic polarization curves were measured. Figure 2 shows the cathodic polarization curves for electrolytic baths with different concentrations of LiCl as a supporting electrolyte. The solution pH was adjusted to 2.5 by adding appropriate amounts of HCl. KHP was used as an effective complexing agent to bring the reduction potentials of  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  and  $\text{In}^+$  closer [2]. Cathodic polarization curves for each ionic species are not included because they can be found elsewhere [2].

In Fig. 2, it is seen that the polarization curves exhibit similar behavior for all the different LiCl concentrations. Three clear reduction peaks can be observed and are located at  $-0.62$ ,  $-0.90$  and  $-1.1$  V vs. SCE. The first peak is attributed to the reduction of  $\text{Cu}^{2+}$  to  $\text{Cu}^+$  and  $\text{In}^{3+}$  to  $\text{In}^+$  [2,21]. The second one is ascribed to the reduction of  $\text{In}^+$  to  $\text{In}^0$  [2] and the last one corresponds to the formation of  $\text{Cu}_x\text{In}_y\text{S}_z$  species (due to the reduction of  $\text{Cu}^+$  to  $\text{Cu}^0$  and  $\text{In}^+$  to  $\text{In}^0$ ) [2]. In addition, the slight drop in the current density between  $-0.70$  and  $-0.85$  V vs. SCE can be attributed to the reduction of  $\text{S}_2\text{O}_3^{2-}$  to  $\text{S}^0$  and  $\text{S}^0$  to  $\text{S}^{2-}$  [2,21].

Concerning the effect of the LiCl concentration, it can be clearly seen that as the LiCl concentration increases from 50 to 250 mmol, the reduction potential for the formation of  $\text{Cu}_x\text{In}_y\text{S}_z$  species shifts to more positive potentials, from  $-1.17$  to  $-1.05$  V vs. SCE. Nieszporek et al. suggested that the easier reduction of ionic species as the supporting electrolyte concentration increases is caused by a diminution of the hydration level of metallic ions, as well as the number of water molecules at the electrode surface [24]. In addition, it was experimentally observed that applied potentials more negative than  $-1$  V vs. SCE results in inhomogeneous films, even for slightly more negative potentials (such



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as  $-1.05$  V vs. SCE) . In this sense, the applied potential to deposit the CIS film was set at  $-1$  V vs. SCE.

### 3.2 Characterization of as-deposited samples

As-deposited samples were first characterized by SEM and EDS to select the CIS films, which exhibit morphological characteristics and chemical compositions similar to the stoichiometric characteristics and compositions, to be used as an absorbent layer in solar cells. Figure 3 shows the SEM images for as-deposited CIS films grown at different concentrations of LiCl. The films exhibit a dense and uniform surface with well-defined particles. It can be also observed that the morphology of the CIS samples is affected by the concentration of the supporting electrolyte. For sample CIS-50, irregular-shaped particles with agglomerates of  $\sim 1$   $\mu\text{m}$  are observed. A noticeable change in morphology is observed for sample CIS-100, where a compact layer is obtained on which agglomerates with larger sizes are seen (up to  $2$   $\mu\text{m}$ ). The agglomerates clearly tend to grow up to  $\sim 3.5$ – $4.0$   $\mu\text{m}$  as the concentration of LiCl increases from  $150$  to  $250$  mmol. The presence of agglomerates at the surface in the electrodeposited CIS films has been reported previously [2,21]. Additionally, the measured thickness for all obtained CIS films produced was  $2$ – $3$   $\mu\text{m}$  (see Fig. 3(f)) and no clear trend was observed as a function of the LiCl concentration.

Table 1 shows the EDS results for as-deposited samples, where it is clear that the composition for sample CIS-50 is quite far from the stoichiometric ratio and a high atomic concentration of In and S was obtained. This is because the reduction potential for the  $\text{Cu}_x\text{In}_y\text{S}_z$  species with  $50$  mmol LiCl is less negative than  $-1$  V vs. SCE (see Fig. 1), resulting in a favorable deposition of  $\text{In}_x\text{S}_y$  on the Mo surface.

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2 For CIS-100, the atomic concentration of Cu increased as a result of the shift to a less  
3 negative reduction potential for  $\text{Cu}_x\text{In}_y\text{S}_z$  species. For the other samples, the Cu/In ratio  
4 is closer to the stoichiometric composition for CIS (i.e. 1); however, a slightly lower  
5 atomic concentration of S was obtained, where  $\text{S}/(\text{Cu}+\text{In})$  is always below 1. The lower  
6 sulfur content in the one-step electrodeposited CIS films has also been reported  
7 previously [9].  
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14 Figure 4 shows the diffuse reflectance spectra of the as-deposited CIS films obtained at  
15 different concentrations of LiCl. From the spectra, a sharp increase in diffuse reflectance  
16 at wavelengths above 850 nm is observed, which agrees well with the absorption edge of  
17 the CIS films. As shown in Fig. 4, the edge is shifted from 876 to 894 nm as the  
18 concentration of the supporting electrolyte increases, leading to a slight reduction in the  
19 band gap values from 1.41 to 1.38 eV, all of which are in good agreement with those  
20 reported previously for CIS films [32,33].  
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31 From the above characterization, it can be observed that the optical properties of the  
32 obtained films are not strongly affected by the LiCl concentration; however, CIS-150,  
33 CIS-200 and CIS-250 are closer to the expected stoichiometric Cu/In and  $\text{S}/(\text{Cu}+\text{In})$   
34 ratios. Furthermore, the as-deposited samples did not show any peaks in their XRD  
35 patterns (not shown here), confirming the amorphous nature of the as-deposited samples.  
36 For applications in solar cells, annealing is normally performed to crystallize  
37 electrodeposited CIS films, which will improve the electron mobility, charge transport  
38 and reduce recombination at the interface between the absorbent and the buffer layer.  
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50 In this sense, CIS-150, CIS-200 and CIS-250 are the most suitable to be used as  
51 absorbent layers in solar cells (composition close to the stoichiometric one) and therefore  
52 only these samples were subjected to annealing.  
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### 3.3 Characterization of annealed samples

Figure 5 shows the SEM images for annealed samples (a-CIS-150, a-CIS-200 and a-CIS-250), where a decreased size of aggregates is observed when compared with the as-deposited samples (see Fig. 3), with sizes in the range of 1–2  $\mu\text{m}$ . Since electrodeposition is a non-equilibrium technique used to obtain films, the decreasing size of aggregates could be a consequence of the surface diffusion and crystallization during the annealing process. It is also observed that the particle size tends to decrease as the LiCl concentration increases. This characteristic indicates that, as the LiCl concentration increases, the non-equilibrium conditions for CIS deposition augment, resulting in unstable larger size agglomerates that after annealing decrease in size. To explain this, we consider CIS-250 as an example: the as-deposited sample showed the largest size of agglomerates (Fig. 3(e)) and after annealing showed the lowest size of agglomerates (Fig. 5(c)). In addition, for all the annealed samples, some cracks were also seen, which can be attributed to residual stresses from the electrodeposition process.

The band gap values of the annealed samples were found to be between 1.42 and 1.49 eV, with no clear trend observed as a function of LiCl concentration. After annealing, a slight increase in the average band gap can be observed, which could be attributed to the appearance of the  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  phase discussed below (the band gap for  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  can be found between 3.0 and 3.5 eV [34,35]). In this sense, it has been reported that the presence of secondary phases with wider band gaps leads to a slight increase in the CIS band gap [36]. Figure 6 displays the XRD patterns for the annealed CIS samples. For all films, a strong peak located at  $2\theta = 40.5^\circ$  was observed, which is ascribed to the plane (1 1 0) of the cubic phase of Mo (Powder Diffraction File (PDF) N° 04-0809). Two other peaks are identified located at  $2\theta = 27.87^\circ$  and  $46.31^\circ$ , which are attributed to the reflection of the (1 1 2) and (2 0 4) planes, respectively, of the tetragonal phase of CIS according to PDF

1 N° 32–0339. Another peak close to  $2\theta = 55^\circ$  can be observed, which is due to the  
2 contribution of two different peaks located at  $54.73^\circ$  and  $55.09^\circ$  ascribed to the (1 1 6)  
3 and (3 1 2) planes, respectively, of the tetragonal phase of CIS (see Fig. 7(a)). There are  
4 also two weak peaks positioned at  $2\theta = 30.48^\circ$  and  $52.76^\circ$ , which correspond to the (2 2  
5 2) and (4 3 3) planes, respectively, of the cubic  $\text{In}_2\text{O}_3$  phase. The presence of secondary  
6 phases in electrodeposited CIS films has been previously reported and is a consequence  
7 of the annealing process [3,20].  
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10 A detailed inspection of the diffractograms reveals a reduction in the intensity of the peaks  
11 as the concentration of LiCl decreased. This is clearly seen in Fig. 7(b), where a reduction  
12 in the intensity of the (1 1 6) and (3 1 2) planes of the CIS phase as the LiCl concentration  
13 increases is observed. In order to estimate the crystallite size for the CIS phase, the  
14 Williamson-Hall analysis was carried out [37]. Figure 7(c) shows the crystallite size as a  
15 function of the LiCl concentration, where an increase in the crystal size is suggested. The  
16 supporting electrolyte has a direct impact on the electrolytic bath conductivity, with the  
17 higher the LiCl concentration, the greater the conductivity (and current density). It is  
18 known that in electrodeposition, the deposited mass is directly proportional to the current  
19 density. Therefore, as the LiCl concentration increases, a greater mass is deposited for the  
20 same deposition time. Thus, higher LiCl concentrations lead to morphological disorder  
21 that causes an increase in crystallite size after the annealing process.  
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#### 48 *3.4 ZnS/CIS bilayers for solar cell applications*

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50 The annealed CIS samples were used to fabricate bilayers for potential application in  
51 TFSC devices. Figure 8 shows the surface of the CIS films without and with the ZnS thin  
52 film layer. A change in the surface characteristics is clearly observed when the ZnS thin  
53 film is deposited on the surface of the CIS films. The ZnS thin films cover the surface of  
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1 the CIS layer, especially between the particles and aggregates (see red highlighted  
2 circles). Additionally, for all the obtained bilayers, it is also observed that ZnS deposition  
3 leads to an increase in the aggregate size. This can be clearly seen in a-CIS-250, where  
4 the aggregates size increased from 1.0–1.5  $\mu\text{m}$  before ZnS deposition to 3.0–3.5  $\mu\text{m}$  after  
5 ZnS deposition. This could be due to the higher growth rate of aggregates and larger  
6 particles, which act as preferential nucleation sites.

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14 When comparing the surface characteristics of the three ZnS/CIS bilayers, it is possible  
15 to observe that the amount of aggregates tends to decrease for higher LiCl concentrations.  
16 This could be associated with the decreased particle size of the annealed CIS samples, as  
17 the LiCl concentration increases. Additionally, some cracks can be seen that could be  
18 related to the deposition rate that induces stress at the interface between ZnS and CIS  
19 [38].

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29 The EDS analysis for the ZnS/CIS bilayers, summarized in Table 2, reveals the presence  
30 of small amounts of Zn, which is consistent with the expected film thickness (lower than  
31 100 nm). No significant changes in the Cu/In and S/metal ratios were observed after the  
32 ZnS film deposition.

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39 Concerning the ability of one-step electrodeposited CIS as an absorber layer in solar cells,  
40 the photovoltaic response of the ZnS/CIS bilayers were measured by recording the  $J$ - $V$   
41 curve under simulated solar radiation. Figure 9 shows the  $J$ - $V$  curve for the ZnS/a-CIS-  
42 250 bilayer, which was the only sample that exhibited a photovoltaic response. This can  
43 be a consequence of the surface characteristics of annealed CIS samples and the low  
44 growth rates for ZnS thin films deposited from non-toxic solutions [39]. Since the particle  
45 size of a-CIS-250 sample is lower, this could lead to better coverage of ZnS and therefore  
46 the formation of a homogeneous bilayer. In this sense, further studies need to be carried  
47 out to find the experimental conditions that result in better coverage of ZnS on the CIS  
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1 surface. For instance, in the present work, deposition of ZnS thin films was performed at  
2 75 °C and it was observed that deposition times higher than 90 min were impractical  
3 because of solution evaporation. Therefore, different paths could be evaluated to solve  
4 this issue, such as changes in reactant concentration, solution pH or deposition of ZnS in  
5 several layers (to increase the ZnS film thickness and coverage).  
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10 From Fig. 9, it can be determined that the best values for the photocurrent ( $J_{sc}$ ) and open-  
11 circuit potential ( $V_{oc}$ ) were quite low ( $J_{sc}$  below  $10 \mu\text{A}/\text{cm}^2$  and  $V_{oc}$  of 8.6 mV). The best  
12 fill factor value reached was 23.7% and the efficiency of the device was lower than 1%.  
13  
14 The linear like behavior shown in the  $J$ - $V$  curve may be observed for solar cells with  
15 lower values of FF and efficiency [40,41]. As for the low efficiency reported in the  
16 present article, is likely the result of several factors, for example, the presence of cracks  
17 on the surface has been reported as a detrimental characteristic in solar cells that reduces  
18 the  $J_{sc}$  in solar cells [42,43]. In addition, the low fill factor value indicates that there is  
19 still an opportunity to noticeable optimize the device manufacturing process. In spite of  
20 the low photovoltaic response of the ZnS/CIS bilayer obtained, it was shown that ZnS/CIS  
21 is a heterojunction that can convert solar energy into electricity. It should be noted that  
22 this is the first attempt to obtain a ZnS/CIS heterojunction, where the ZnS film was  
23 deposited by a non-toxic chemical solution and the CIS layer was grown using one-step  
24 electrodeposition.  
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#### 49 **4. Conclusions**

50 CIS thin films with a chemical composition close to the stoichiometric one were obtained  
51 in this work using a one-step electrodeposition process. The effect of different LiCl  
52 concentrations as a supporting electrolyte was investigated and it can be concluded that  
53 higher concentrations of LiCl resulted in larger agglomerates of CIS and a Cu:In:S ratio  
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1 close to the stoichiometric composition for CIS films. After the annealing process, a  
2 reduction in the agglomerate size and a decrease in particle size as the supporting  
3 electrolyte concentration increased were observed. Regarding the structural properties  
4 after annealing, larger crystallite sizes were obtained because of the disorder as the LiCl  
5 concentration increased. Concerning the ZnS/CIS bilayer, it can be concluded that ZnS  
6 better covers the surface of the a-CIS-250 sample due to the smaller particle size. From  
7 photovoltaic characterization, it was shown that the bilayer system composed of a ZnS  
8 buffer layer synthesized by a non-toxic solution and a CIS absorbent layer prepared by  
9 one-step electrodeposition with a LiCl concentration of 250 mmol has potential for thin  
10 film solar cell applications.  
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## 27 **Declarations**

28  
29 **Fundings:** This work was financially supported by the *Comisión Nacional de Ciencia y*  
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33 Spain.  
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42 **Conflict of Interest:** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.  
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45 **Availability of data and material:** All data generated or analyzed during this study are  
46 included in this published article. For any other datasets generated during and/or analyzed  
47 during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable  
48 request.  
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54 **Code availability:** Not applicable.  
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## List of Tables

**Table 1** Semiquantitative chemical composition from EDS of the as-deposited samples

**Table 2** EDS results for annealed CIS samples and ZnS/CIS heterojunctions

(Metal=Zn+Cu+In, Zn=0 for samples a-CIS-250, a-CIS-200 and a-CIS-150)

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## List of Figure Caption

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3 **Fig. 1** Schematic representation of the fabrication of ZnS/CIS/Mo solar cells  
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6 **Fig. 2** Cathodic polarization curve for the  $\text{Cu}^{2+}+\text{In}^{3+}+\text{KHP}+\text{S}_2\text{O}_3^{2-}+\text{LiCl}$  systems at  
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8 different concentration of supporting electrolyte (pH = 2.5)  
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11 **Fig. 3** SEM images for as-deposited samples grown with a) 50 mM, b) 100 mM, c) 150  
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13 mM, d) 200 mM and e) 250 mM of LiCl. f) Perfilometric scan of the as deposited CIS-  
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15 100 sample  
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19 **Fig. 4** DRS spectra of the as-electrodeposited CIS samples for different LiCl  
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25 **Fig. 5** SEM images for annealed  $\text{CuInS}_2$  grown with (a) 150 mM, (b) 200 mM and (c)  
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27 250 mM of LiCl  
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31 **Fig. 6** Diffractograms for annealed  $\text{CuInS}_2$  films  
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35 **Fig. 7** (a) Deconvolution of XRD peak corresponding to (1 1 6) and (3 1 2) planes, (b)  
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37 close up of the XRD patterns between angles  $53^\circ$  to  $56^\circ$ , and (c) crystallite size for  
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39 annealed  $\text{CuInS}_2$  films  
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43 **Fig. 8** Surface view of the annealed  $\text{CuInS}_2$  samples without and with ZnS layer  
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46 **Fig. 9** Current density-voltage (J-V) curve of ZnS/a-CIS-250 sample.  
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Sample	Cu (at. %)	In (at. %)	S (at. %)	(Cu/In)	S/(Cu+In)
CIS-250	27.02	26.29	46.51	1.03	0.872
CIS-200	29.65	27.04	43.31	1.10	0.763
CIS-150	26.90	27.29	45.81	0.99	0.845
CIS-100	27.73	32.14	40.13	0.86	0.670
CIS-50	19.63	33.73	46.63	0.58	0.873

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Sample	Zn (at. %)	Cu (at. %)	In (at. %)	S (at. %)	(Cu/In)	(Sulfur/Metal)
ZnS/CIS-250	3.20	25.82	21.16	49.83	1.22	0.993
ZnS/CIS-200	1.16	25.79	25.89	47.21	0.996	0.893
ZnS/ CIS-150	5.22	23.06	24.82	46.90	0.929	0.883

Table 2/2 C.A. Rodríguez et al.

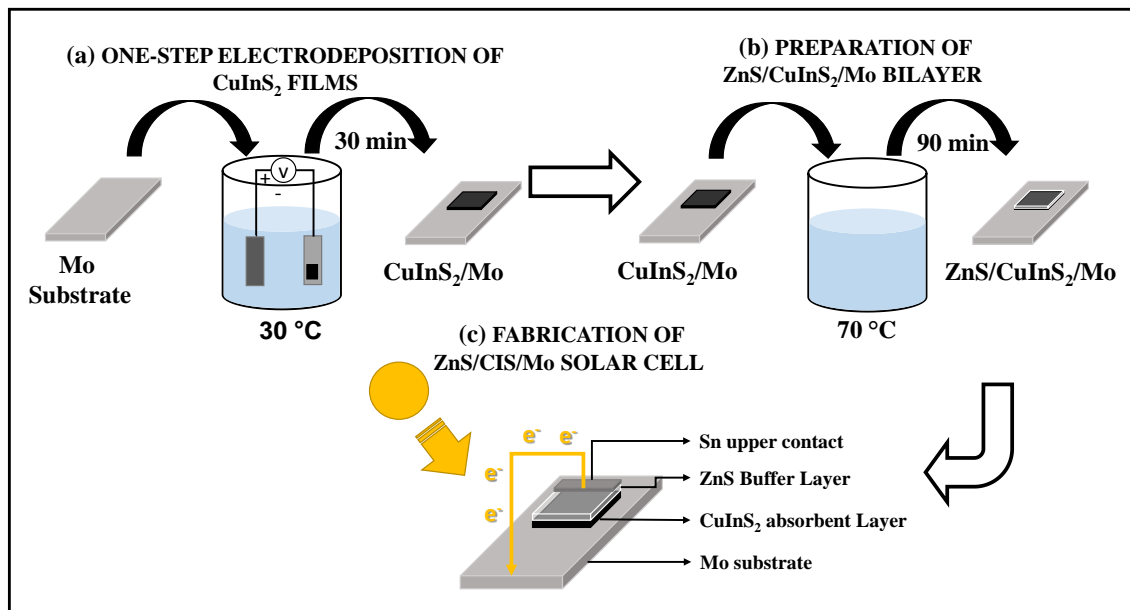


Figure 1/9 C.A. Rodríguez et al.

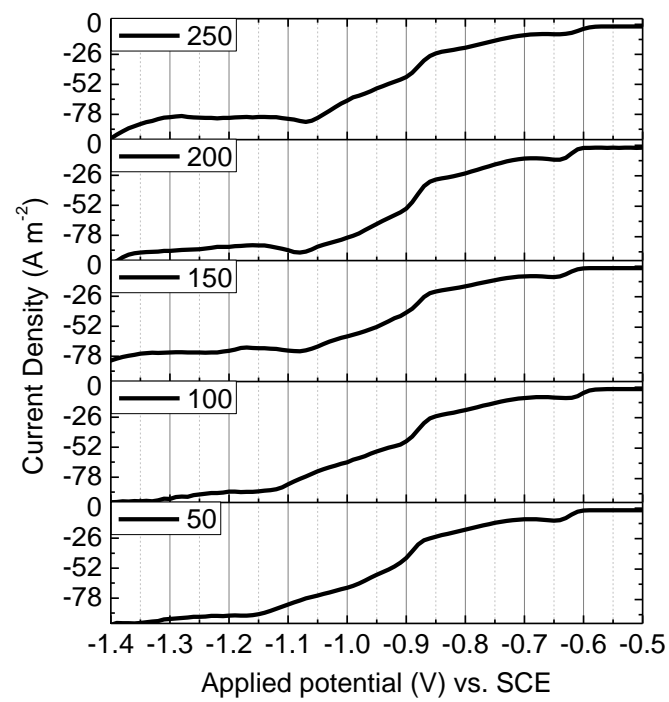


Figure 2/9 C.A. Rodríguez et al.

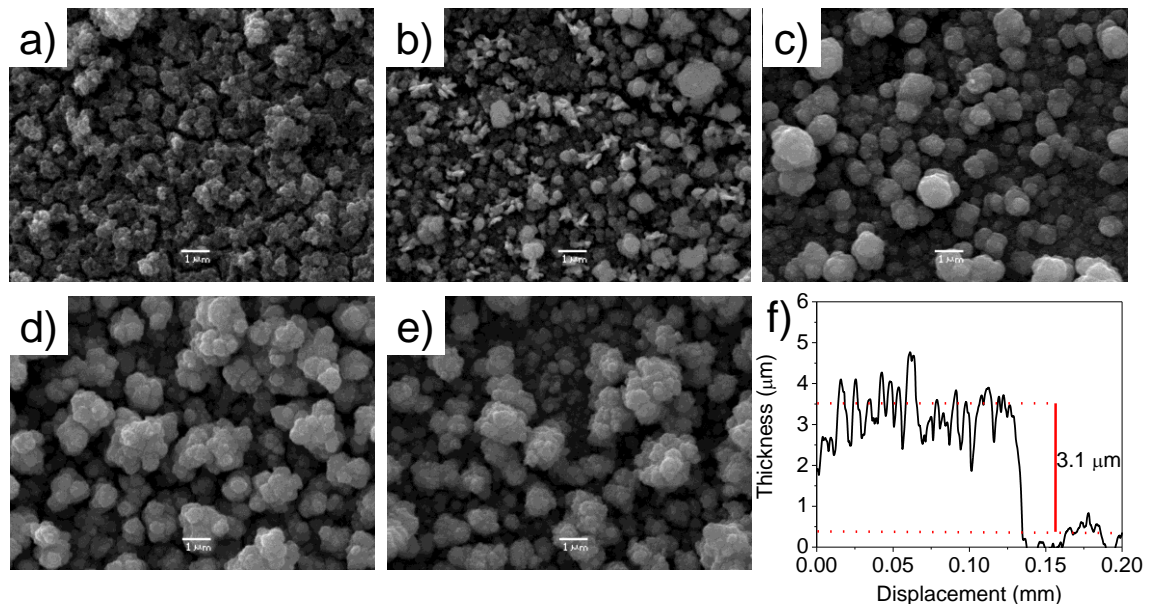


Figure 3/9 C.A. Rodríguez et al.

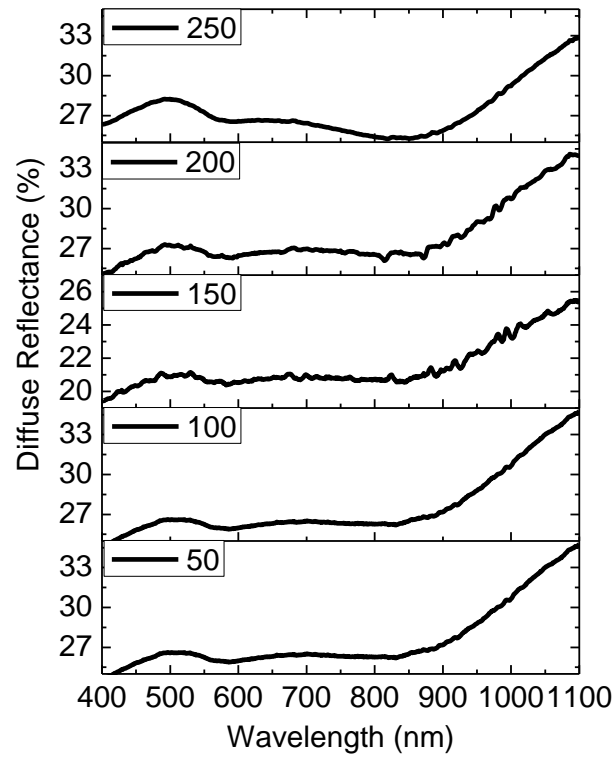


Figure 4/9 C.A. Rodríguez et al.

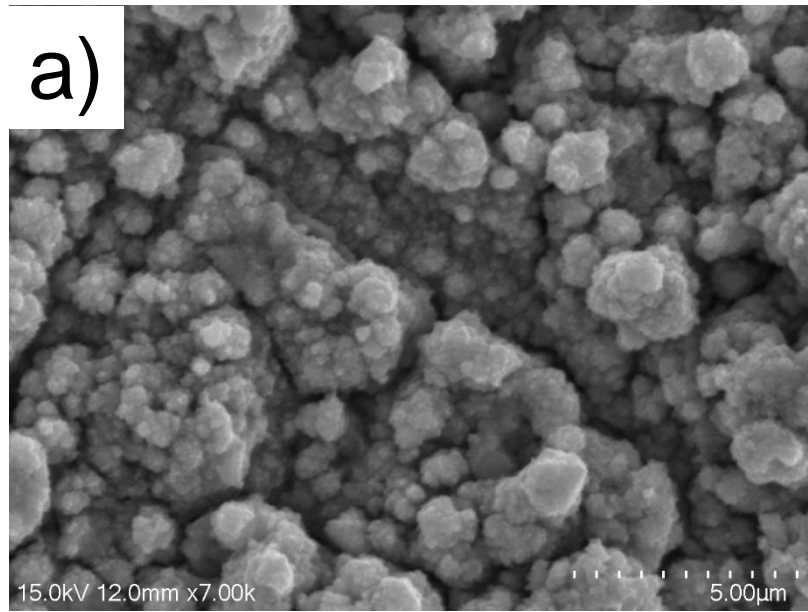


Figure 5 (a)/9 C.A. Rodríguez et al.

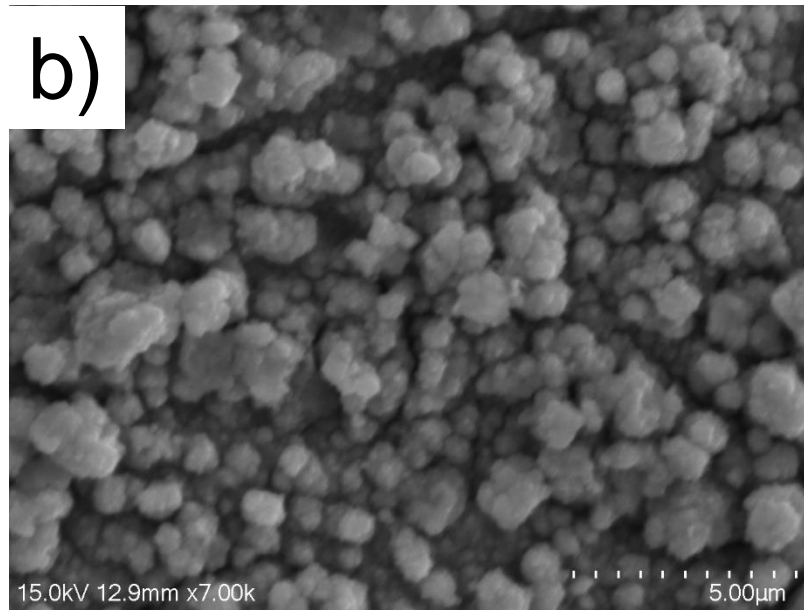


Figure 5 (b)/9 C.A. Rodríguez et al.

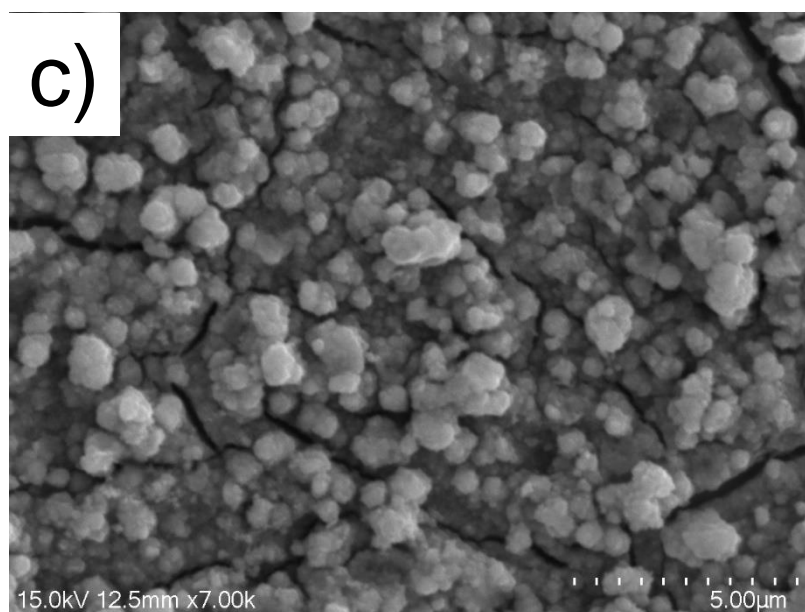


Figure 5 (c)/9 C.A. Rodríguez et al.



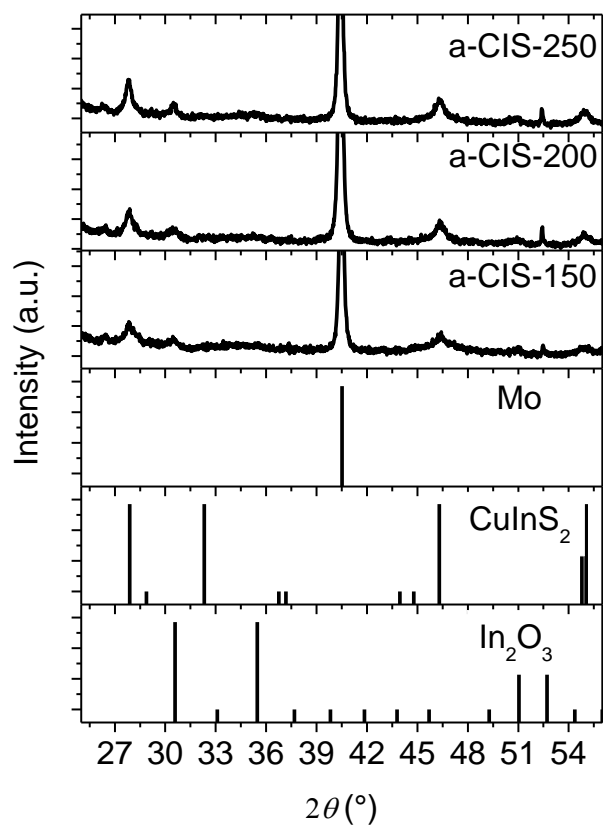


Figure 6/9 C.A. Rodríguez et al.

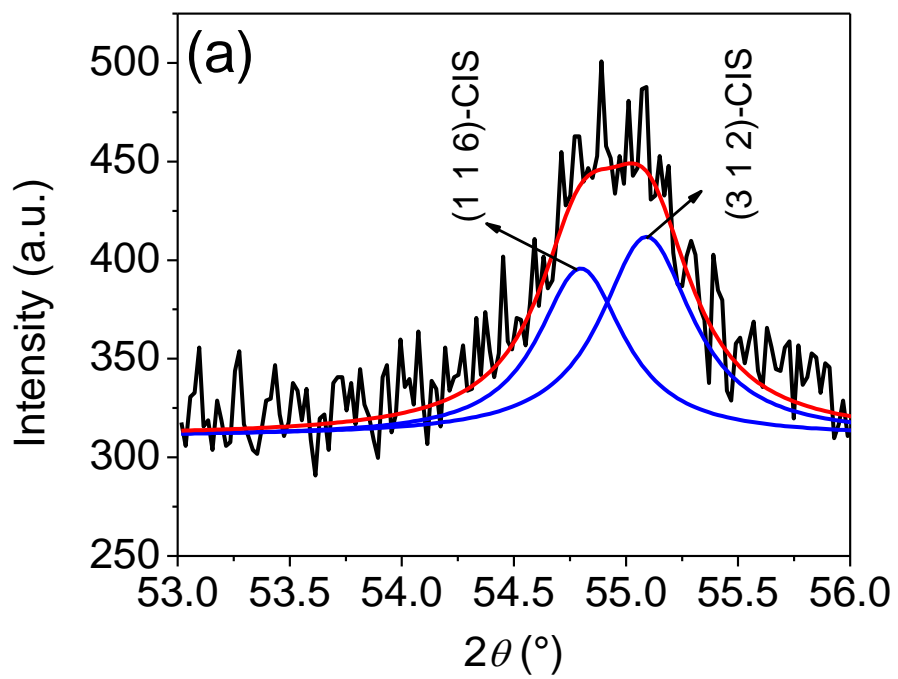


Figure 7 (a)/9 C.A. Rodríguez et al.

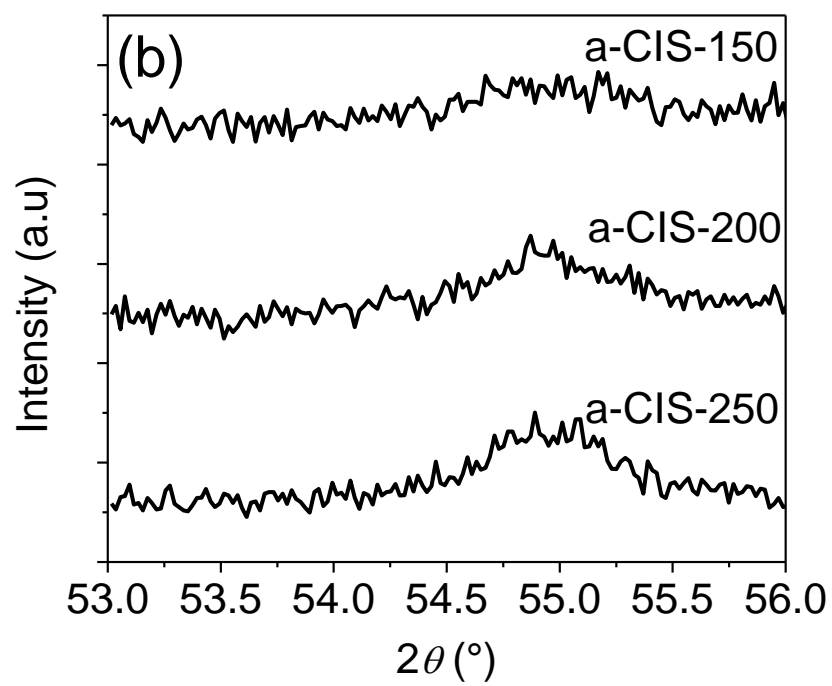


Figure 7 (b)/9 C.A. Rodríguez et al.

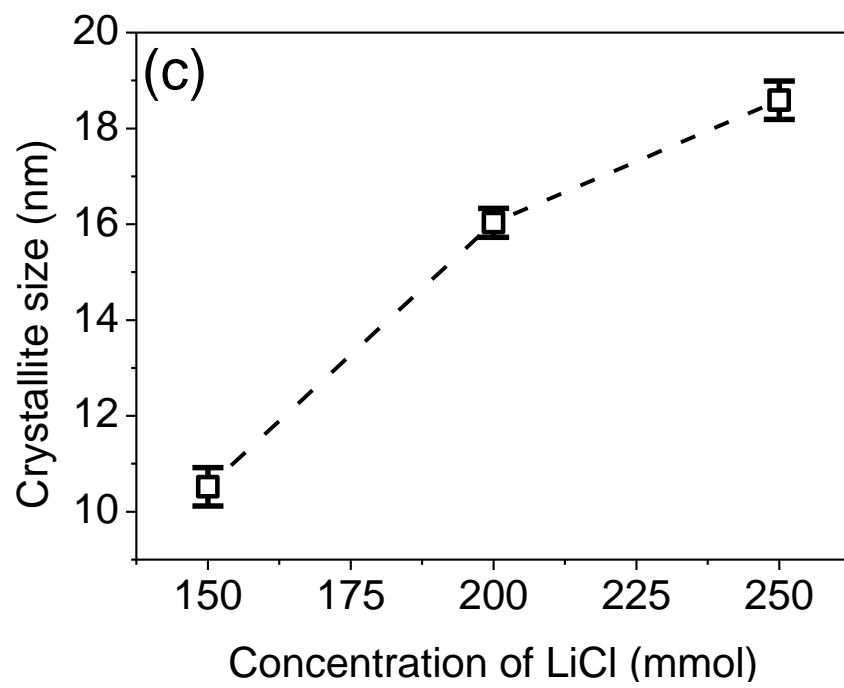


Figure 7 (c)/9 C.A. Rodríguez et al.

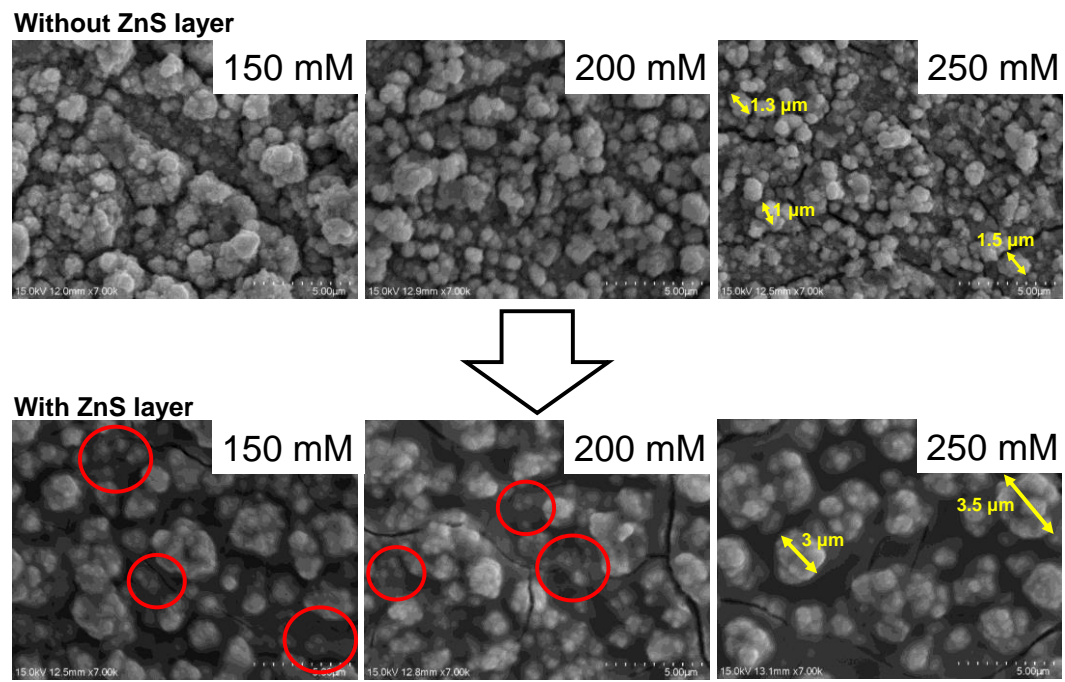


Figure 8/9 C.A. Rodríguez et al.

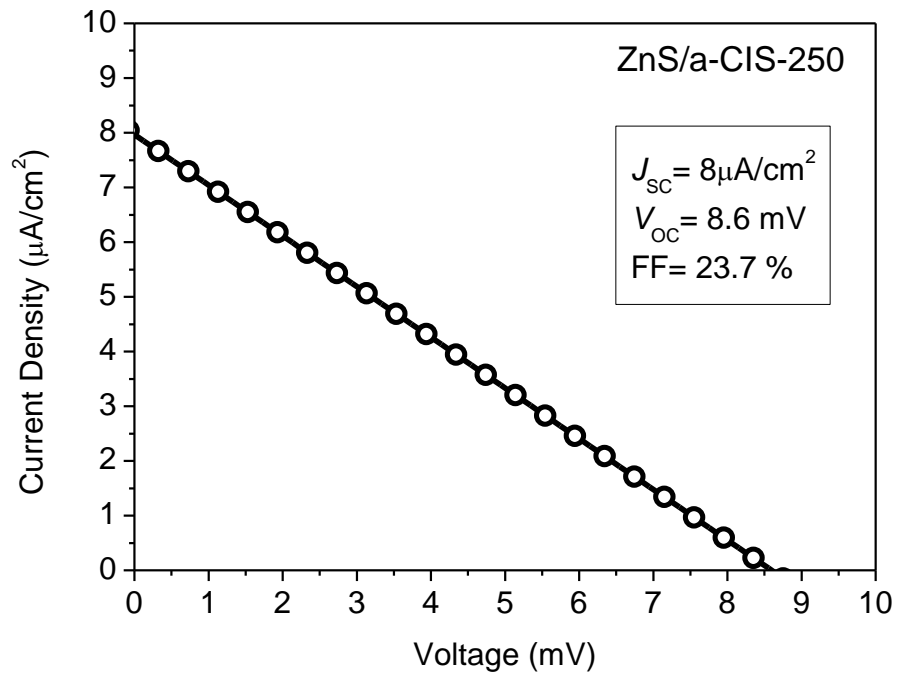


Figure 9/9 C.A. Rodríguez et al.