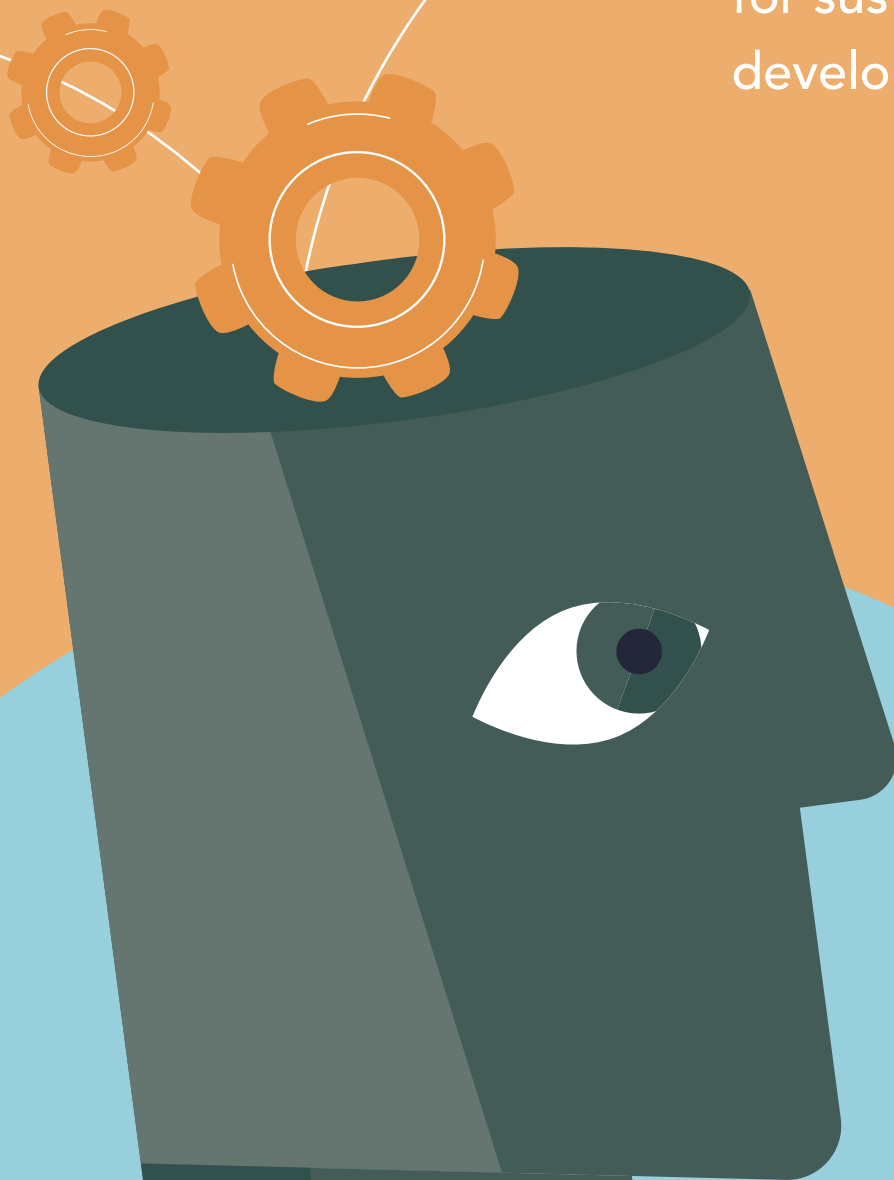


Creating the conditions for uptake

in higher education
partnerships
for sustainable
development



This brochure is conceived as a source of inspiration for VLIR-UOS project promoters, helping them create better conditions for uptake of project results in society.

It is based on success factors identified by external evaluators of VLIR-UOS projects and supported by an academic expert group set up for this purpose.

At the same time, we want to provide greater clarity to the members of the VLIR-UOS community about the uptake concept and the VLIR-UOS expectations and approaches towards realising the conditions for uptake.

The brochure will support you in:

- Understanding the importance of an uptake strategy in higher education (HE) projects
- Appreciating uptake integration in every VLIR-UOS project cycle
- Becoming familiarised with key aspects of a research uptake strategy
- Defining the stages of an uptake strategy in HE projects
- Building a framework to successfully create the conditions for uptake

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Less than a decade remains in which the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to be realised. The associated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) embody the various transformations required to achieve sustainability for people and planet. Higher education institutions are in a unique position to make a direct, decisive impact on sustainable development through research, education and mobilisation of knowledge. Research generates new knowledge and ideas that can facilitate the attainment of Agenda 2030.

As part of the Flemish Interuniversity Council, VLIR-UOS seeks to empower institutions and individuals as critical drivers as well as agents of change through higher education partnerships for sustainable development. We stimulate equal partnerships between academics, lecturers and stakeholders in society focusing on capacity building, we award grants to students and professionals in Flanders and our partner countries, we contribute to strengthening the organisational performance of higher education institutions in partner countries, and we promote sustainable development as a core dimension of the internationalisation efforts of higher education in Flanders.

By funding projects and scholarships, we aim to fund change. We contribute to empowering agents of change who, with great commitment and ambition, will share and use their unique talents and knowledge within local and international networks, to impact future generations and local communities. Shared knowledge and joint commitment and ambition make our world more resilient. This is what drives our world to adapt and to evolve. By sharing minds, we can change lives and inspire future changemakers and leaders to transform communities into safer, more sustainable places to live.

University cooperation for development is all about impact on and change in society.

In 2014 we commissioned a study on how researchers can communicate more and better about their research and its impact on society, to non-scientific actors, being policy-makers, non-governmental organisations, private sectors, and civil society at large. Based on this study a manual was published, titled "How to get it out there". This manual contains the research results, examples of successful communication cases and practical tips for researchers and those involved in international projects to publicise their research collaboration results generated with partners in Africa, Asia and Latin America, targeting a broad audience.

In December 2019, we published the evaluation report 'Creating the conditions for impact'. The evaluation identified a number of (pre-)conditions and mechanisms which are conducive to the uptake of new knowledge, services and applications generated through VLIR-UOS projects outside the academic context. While in 2014 we tried to facilitate academics to better communicate to society at large about their research results, we now want to help them to make sure that their international research really generates societal impact. We will develop a toolbox that will help promoters and projects generating this impact. This brochure is a sneak peek of what is yet to come in the next few years!

Kristien Verbruggen

Director VLIR-UOS

What is uptake?



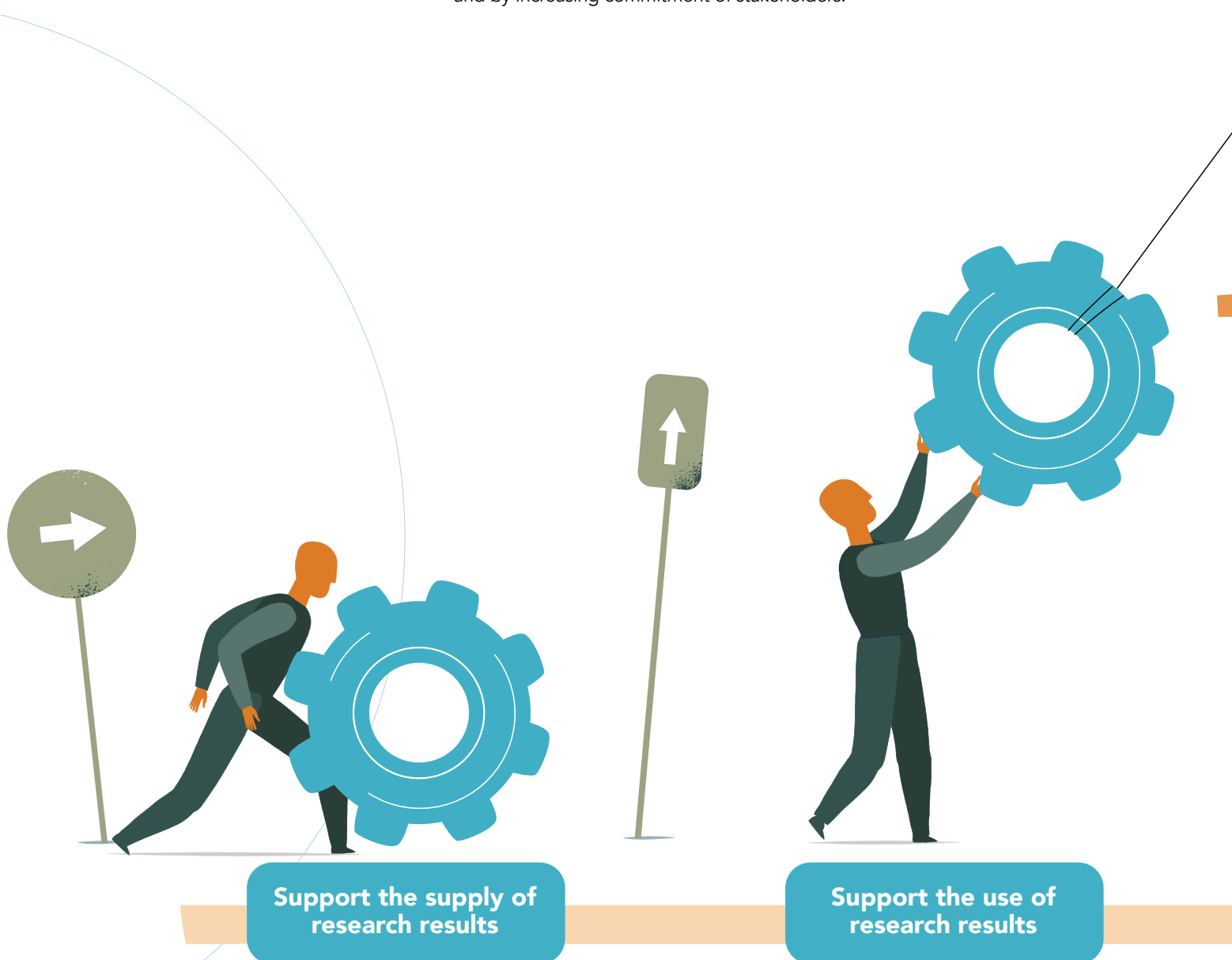
01

Definition

Based on a definition provided by the Department for International Development (DFID, 2016) and the specific VLIR-UOS context, we define uptake as 'the use of research and education results of HEI by non-academic actors (or society at large: policymakers, NGOs, private sector, farmers)' and creating the conditions for uptake as 'all activities that facilitate and contribute to the use of research evidence or other results emanating from the work of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) by policymakers, practitioners and other development actors'.

Research uptake activities aim to support:

- The supply of highly relevant results through continuous engagement with stakeholders (including potential end-users). This involves communicating knowledge effectively and synthesising and repackaging knowledge for non-expert audiences.
- The usage of results by capacity building of both users as well as producers, and by increasing commitment of stakeholders.





Societal impact

Context

Higher education partnerships for sustainable development supported by VLIR-UOS


HEIs play a crucial role in transforming societies and realising the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The underlying principles of interconnectedness and multi-stakeholder partnerships are considered critical to realising the 2030 Agenda, and highlight the importance of uptake (bridging the science-society gap, engaging with stakeholders, etc.).

Though the extent to which projects can realise uptake may vary, VLIR-UOS expects every project to proactively reflect on potential uptake strategies and implement them to the extent possible to maximise its short, medium or long-term impact on society.

In December 2019, we published the evaluation report 'Creating the conditions for impact'. This evaluation was commissioned by VLIR-UOS and implemented by Syspons. It focused on a sample of concluded VLIR-UOS departmental projects and had two main objectives. First of all, it aimed to develop a clear conceptual framework clarifying different potential strategies linked to creating the conditions for uptake of new knowledge, services and/or applications generated through our projects. Secondly, the evaluation assessed the effectiveness and impact of a sample of VLIR-UOS supported departmental projects, including field visits to nine projects. The evaluation identified a number of (pre-)conditions and mechanisms which are conducive to the uptake of new knowledge, services and applications outside the academic context.

By identifying and validating these preconditions and mechanisms, the evaluation has provided us with invaluable input regarding uptake strategies of VLIR-UOS projects. This evaluation will allow us to develop a toolbox – with this brochure as a sneak peek – that will help promoters and projects create conditions for uptake of research results and eventually: societal impact.

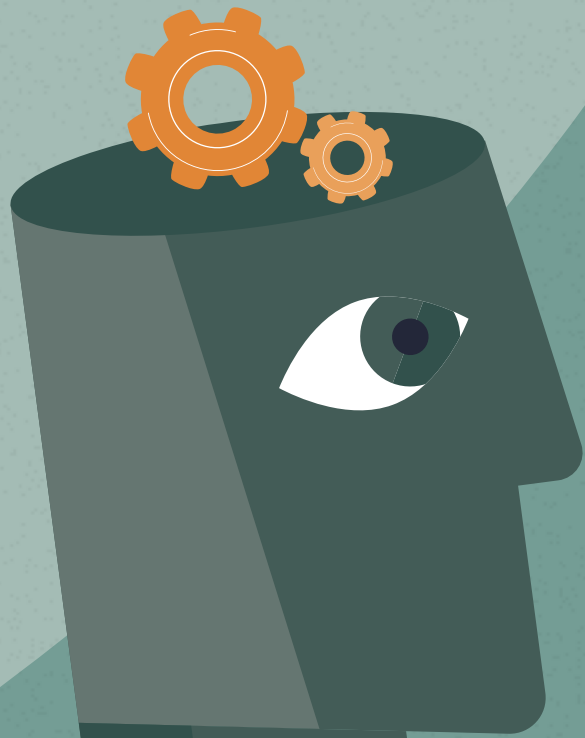
"So we should implement our results in local communities just like traditional development actors?"



Introducing the importance of uptake is often met with many questions with academics highlighting the importance of their core business: research and education. VLIR-UOS acknowledges the importance of high-quality research and education and does not expect all projects to implement results in society or realise the uptake by external stakeholders. The focus is rather on creating the conditions for uptake to happen (in the short or long-term). Depending on the topic, the context, the maturity of the partnerships, etc. the level of ambition can be different. However, a reflection

on uptake and a minimum strategy is needed for all projects. This may include answering basic questions such as: how can my results (now or in the future) become even more relevant for society? Who are the end-users, how could my results benefit (or disadvantage) them (and am I sure about what they actually need)? Which stakeholders can help or hamper this process? How can my project increase the likelihood of the results having a positive impact? What actions can we take? When can I consider my actions to be successful?

Uptake strategy



02

“

Uptake strategies
are an art, not
a science:

there is no single
best way to
promote uptake
in every project

Uptake orientation of projects as the new normal

The increased importance of an uptake orientation in HE projects is not new, nor is it limited to organisations promoting university cooperation for development such as VLIR-UOS (others others include ERASMUS+, NWO, DFID). The complex challenges that our societies are facing require collaboration/co-creation between different stakeholders. Generally, demand for impact is growing (in the public sector) and the HE sector is also looking for ways to go beyond the purely quantitative assessment performance.

In pursuing this ambition, VLIR-UOS supported projects are required to formulate an uptake strategy based on a context-specific reflection/analysis to enable the uptake of their results, in which the attention for the strengthening of the science society interface should also be seen as transversal. This is needed to strengthen the contribution of VLIR-UOS supported projects to actual, real-world change. Moreover, there may even be specific VLIR-UOS supported projects specifically focusing on system level (strengthening the science-society interface).



The mechanisms for creating the conditions for uptake presented in this brochure can be adopted by VLIR-UOS projects with variable degrees of ambition. They are not intended as a simple how-to guide, but rather as a set of recipes one might choose from, depending on context, maturity, ambitions and other factors defining your project.

Who is responsible for the uptake strategy?

Most VLIR-UOS supported projects are led by two promoters, one from a Flemish HEI and one from a partner HEI. As all of our projects require, to a varying degree, creating the conditions for uptake, defining and implementing the uptake strategy should be a **joint responsibility**. Promoters need to reflect on appropriate strategies and steer their project and their staff towards successfully creating these conditions. In the practical implementation of the uptake strategy, the project promoter of the partner HEI is expected to take the lead.

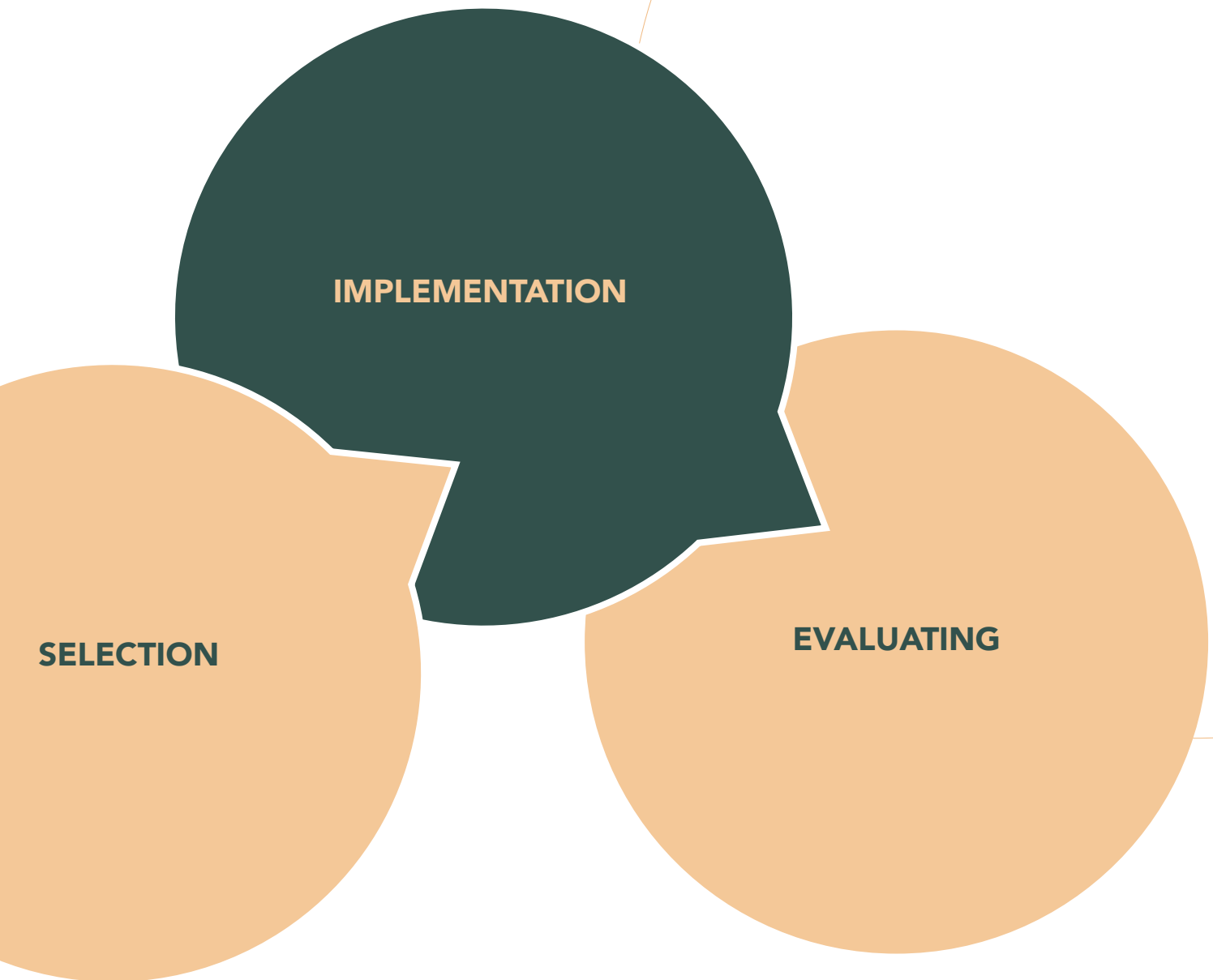
Integration of uptake strategy in project cycle

- 1 Uptake needs to be part of every step in the project cycle (**programming**). Implementing a project and holding a one-off dissemination workshop at the end of a project is not sufficient.
- 2 A project needs to integrate reflections about uptake at the time of the project **formulation** and identify actions to create the conditions for uptake (uptake strategy).
- 3 In the **selection** phase, the suggested strategy should be assessed (appropriate uptake strategy).
- 4 In the **implementation** phase, projects need to continuously pay attention to uptake, implement the planned actions, and look for opportunities to further strengthen the conditions for uptake (e.g. through stakeholder engagement new opportunities may arise).
- 5 When closing a project (or when formulating a follow-up project), projects need to think about ways to take the next step and valorise their results in society (by the partners or stakeholders involved). When **evaluating** projects, looking at the uptake dimension of projects will always be an important focus.



PROGRAMMING

FORMULATION

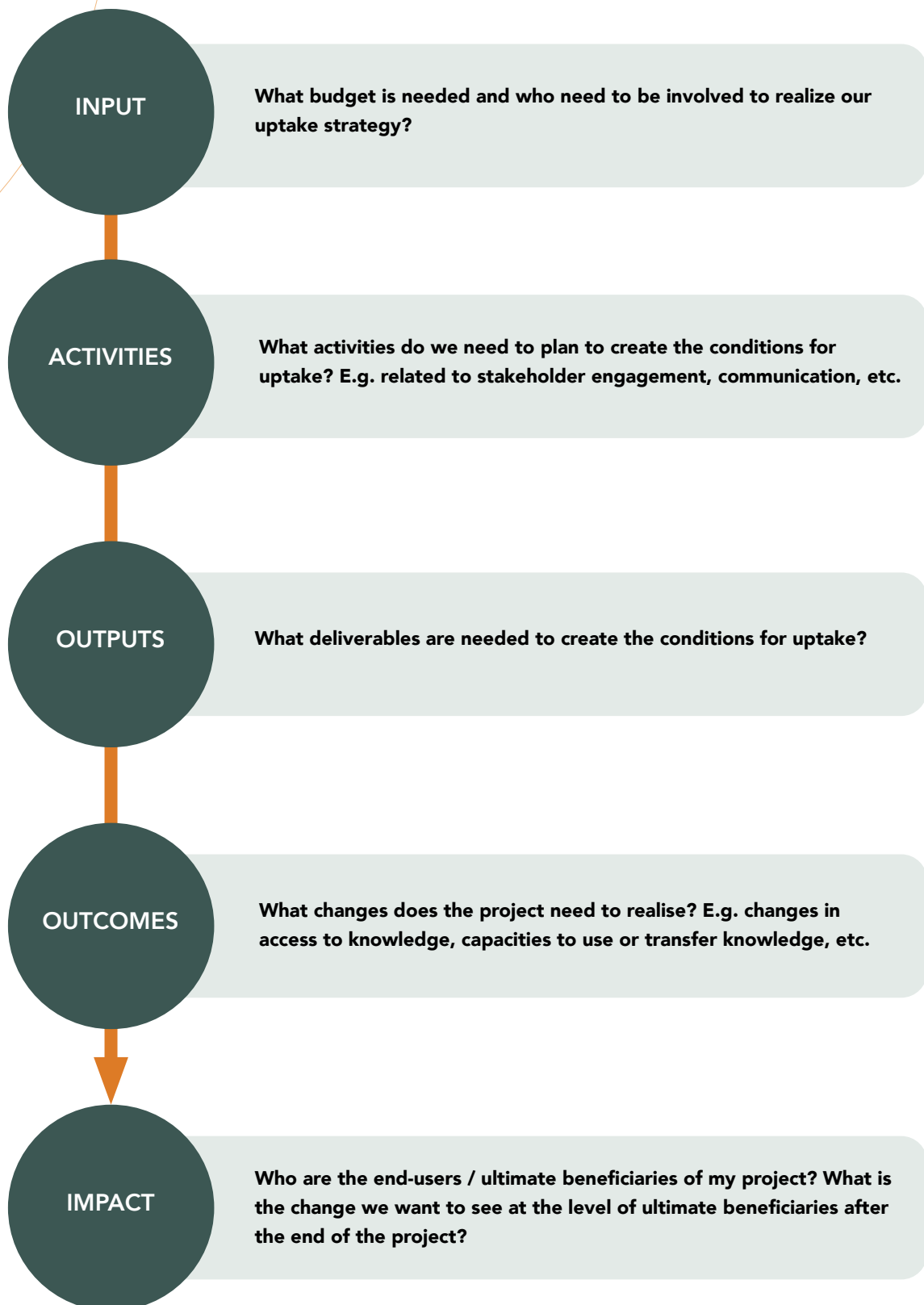


Uptake and Theory of Change (ToC)

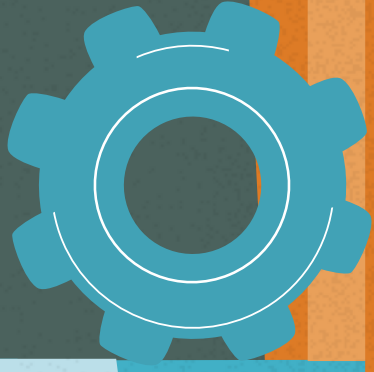
The uptake orientation should also be incorporated in the design of the project, and more specifically, in its Theory of Change (ToC). The main benefit of ToC comes from making implicit assumptions about the change process and its anticipated impact, explicit.

As such, developing an uptake strategy, allows projects to make explicit how one thinks a project can go from producing knowledge, applications or services, to making an actual societal impact.

Some key uptake questions in the results' chain

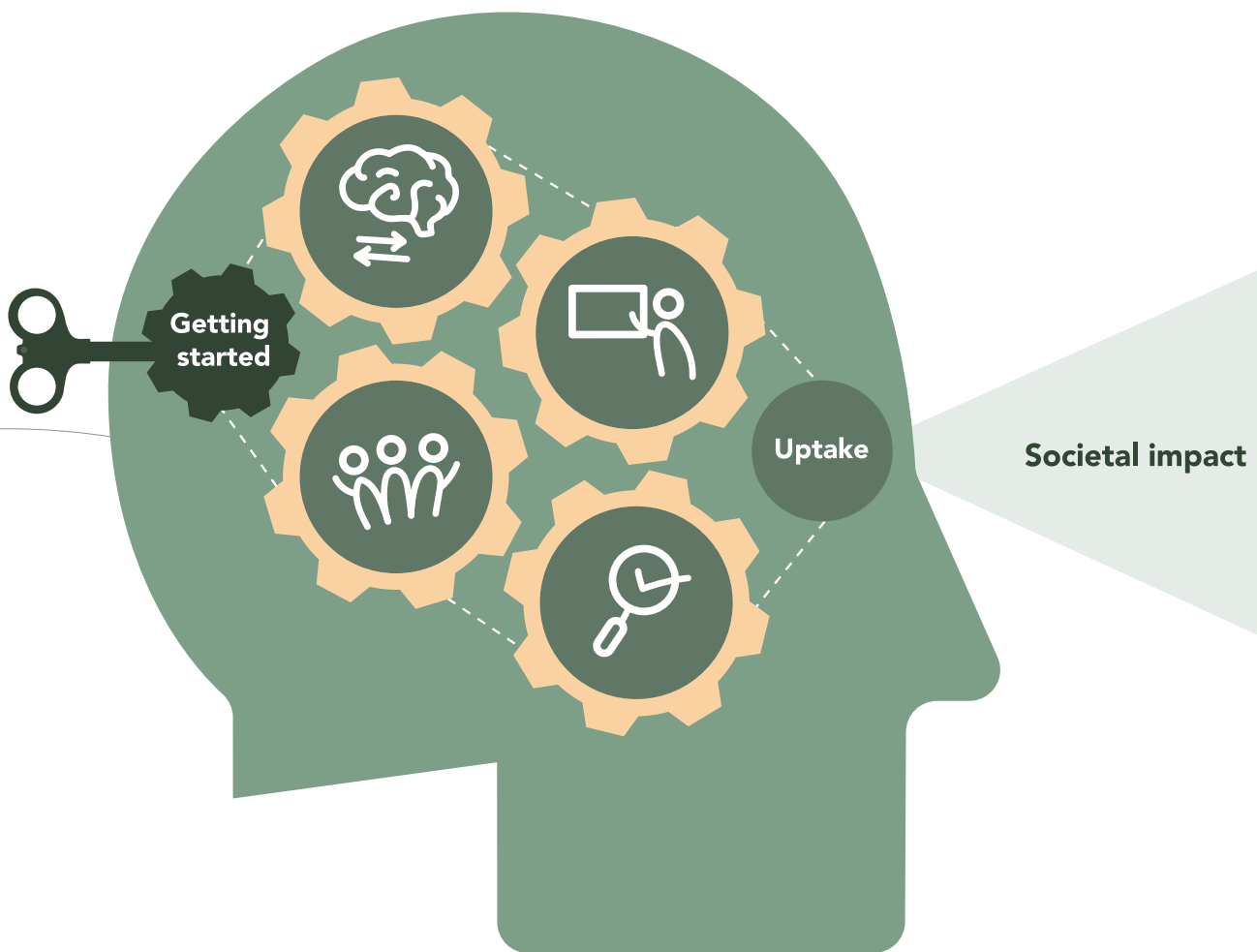


Mechanisms for successful research uptake



VLIR-UOS identifies a number of elements to consider when you want to start a project, and four main mechanisms to successfully create the conditions for uptake. These preconditions (if met) and mechanisms (if used) will increase the likelihood of a successful uptake, and ultimately: impact.

These mechanisms (and “getting started”) are summarized in the diagram below and described in more detail in the following sections.





Getting started

- Knowing the context, the broader system and structural barriers
- Relevance & policy priority
- Knowing stakeholders, potential beneficiaries and/or intermediaries
- Partnership



Knowledge communication

- Targeted & accessible



Stakeholder engagement

- Needs-orientation & participation
- Collaboration with end-users
- Frequency of interaction, trust and mutual respect



Capacity building

- Capacities for uptake of knowledge producers
- Capacities for uptake of knowledge users and intermediaries



Impact oriented planning & monitoring

- Planning for uptake
- Monitoring for uptake





Getting started

VLIR-UOS identifies a number of elements every project needs to take into account when getting started. These are preconditions that, when met, are conducive to realising successful uptake.

1 Knowing the context, the broader system and structural barriers

Projects need to have a good understanding of the broader system/context in which they operate. It is essential not only to understand the broader context of the policy sector but also to identify structural barriers for stakeholders (in uptake) which can, for example, take the form of dominant production regimes, imbalanced power relations, capacity constraints on the side of the relevant stakeholders or existing conflicts between important stakeholders in the sector.

Success factors

- Conducting a context analysis identifying barriers and constraints and options to respond accordingly as well as opportunities where a project is most feasible and likely to promote innovation. This goes well beyond the academic context and includes the local developmental context.
- When local partner institutions have a sense of (co-) ownership of the initiatives for the project.
- Being able to rely on a preceding cooperation, taking into account lessons learned and (potential) hindering and success factors for uptake.

Good practice

Following-up on a predecessor project

In the SI 'Enhancing community-based natural resources and hazard management in Rwenzori Mountains' in Uganda, the needs of the beneficiaries (local authorities and population in hazard-affected areas) to systematically record information about natural hazards in order to inform disaster risk management had been identified in the predecessor TEAM project (Afrislide). These findings and the SI project's strategy to address this need were presented to and validated with local authorities and CSOs during a dissemination meeting at the end of the predecessor project.

2 Relevance & Policy priorities

Projects which showcase a high degree of alignment/correspondence between the targeted actors' capacities and needs and the generated knowledge, technologies, services etc. tend to be more successful in creating the conditions for uptake.

Success factors

- The project addresses highly relevant needs.
- The research addresses political priorities and the team uses the "politicisation" of the problem to reach out to relevant stakeholders.
- End-users capacity to absorb (technical) knowledge is taken into account when they are being identified (at the proposal stage).

Good practice

Sexual education in primary schools

The relevance of the sexual education project stems from the fact that prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and teen pregnancies in Uganda is high. The high share of teenage girls dropping out of school due to pregnancies and Uganda's high population growth constitute significant challenges for the country's development. In addition, many young girls miss school during their menstruation because of a lack of information about body changes, or lack of access to sanitary pads. Moreover, as body changes are not addressed by parents or schools, many young girls feel ill-equipped to react to advances from the opposite sex. Sexual education for adolescents, for which the project developed and tested a curriculum, addresses all these challenges.

3 Knowing stakeholders, potential beneficiaries and/or intermediaries

Already having a good understanding of stakeholders, potential beneficiaries, end-users and/or intermediaries helps projects create the conditions for uptake. It allows projects to identify actual needs, capacities, power relationships, etc. which can be taken into account when designing the project.

Success factors

- Intermediaries (e.g. extension offices), which considers users' demand for new knowledge and their capacities to use such knowledge.
- Identify end-users early on (i.e. at the proposal stage) and plan for targeted dissemination activities and/or products.

Good practice

Bringing people 'on board' to address a sensitive issue

A sexual education project in Uganda carefully considered the sensitivity of providing sexual education to adolescents in the Ugandan context (as evidenced by, among other things, a moratorium on the government curriculum for sexual education in schools). To address this, the project established an advisory board involving the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education as well as religious leaders and other community representatives (e.g. teachers and parents) to open doors for the activities through an elaborate vetting process of survey questions and curriculum contents.

4 Partnership

Pre-existing and strong partnerships are a success factor for uptake, in particular for projects with a short timeframe. These may result from previous/predecessor projects, structural factors or through collaboration with intermediaries.

Success factors

- Make use of existing and already established partnerships as they provide fertile ground for successful uptake and/or build strong relationships early on rather than relying on personal and financial resources for dissemination at the final stage of the project.
- Know your end-users in order to draw in the right organisational structures, consider users' demand for new knowledge and their capacities to use such knowledge, and reach out to intermediaries to access governmental actors and local communities.
- If possible, draw on organisational and logistical support from the university for project management and establish knowledge management structures, e.g. with regard to the implementation of VLIR-UOS funded projects.

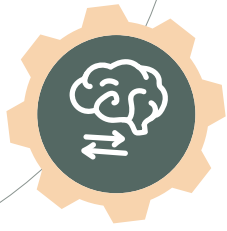
Good practice

Valorising strong relations to stakeholders and strong organisational linkages for uptake

A project in Cuba on "cleaner production" was characterised by very close relations with Cuban companies, which are the intended users of research results on Cleaner Production. This was ensured by the fact that Masters students remained (part-time) employees of their companies during their studies and research. Master students in Cienfuegos, Matanzas and Moa therefore work on problems that often have been prioritised by their companies (e.g. Thermoenergetic Company, Teneria, Empet, CITMA, Fuel Distributor, Citrus, Dairy and Labiofam) through a 'problem inventory' (banco de problemas). Their research findings and solutions are first discussed at the university and then in their companies, with colleagues and relevant stakeholders (superiors,

decision-makers). Research was thus very close to users' (i.e. companies) needs as the formulation of the specific graduate or post-graduate research proposals were based on specific problems of the companies. This was a main success factor in this project as it ensured that the research centred on the companies' core challenges and fuelled their commitment to effectively apply the research results. The practice-oriented research resulted in many concrete examples of adaptations of production processes, which in its turn led to savings (in energy, water, etc.) and diminution of contamination, e.g. in the coffee sector, cement production, oil refineries, etc. The project's success was further facilitated by the fact that Cuban universities in general have strong relations with their environment, the fact that only working students can apply for a Master's degree and that Masters students are financially supported by their employer, as well as the fact that the project could build on the relations and experiences of a predecessor TEAM project on Cleaner Production.

Cuban universities are particularly strongly connected to public companies in the country. As such, the cleaner production project successfully made use of its existing and pre-established (through previous VLIR-UOS projects) relationships with companies, who were convinced to send employees to the Masters programme while working part-time. This strong connection with the target group (i.e. companies) ensured that the researched aligned to/addressed their core challenges and created a strong commitment from the end-users to apply the research results.



Knowledge communication

An imperative mechanism to create the conditions for uptake is related to knowledge communication. Knowledge communication is central to enhancing the availability, relevance and accessibility of research.

Translating the results of HEIs to society is a **two-sided process**. It involves understanding the audience, prioritising and targeting messages, using appropriate means for communication and using feedback to adapt and uptake design and strategies. Knowledge communication goes beyond one-directional 'dissemination' of research findings. It is about engagement and knowledge exchange, brokering, etc. It encompasses a spectrum of knowledge communication activities¹.

Knowledge communication is not something done at the end of a project, but needs to play an **important role throughout the project** (engaging stakeholders, raising interest, etc). Although knowledge communication is intended as a broader term, it is often used interchangeably with science communication or research communication (cf. VLIR-UOS publication "Research: how do you get it out there?").

1 Knowledge communication: targeted & accessible

With regard to knowledge communication, projects need to reflect on the role their project can play considering the nature/type of knowledge

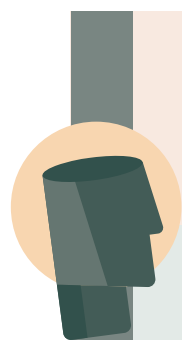
Success factors

- Carefully identify target groups: who will be crucial in realising uptake (can be end-users, intermediary organisations, governments, private companies, etc.).
- Reflect on the capacity of your target group(s) to take up new knowledge and adapt dissemination activities and products accordingly.
- Develop a communication strategy.
- Use dissemination activities and products hand-in-hand / complementary to each other. If possible, address one user group through several channels.

Next, a helpful framework is presented to reflect on the **different types of knowledge roles** a project can play. This may change throughout the project (and will be different for new or existing partnerships), depending on the level of ambition and available budgets.

1. Adapted from Shaxson, L., A. Bielak et al. 2012. Expanding our understanding of K* (KT, KE, KTT, KMb, KM, KM etc). Concept paper emerging from the K* conference, April 2012. Hamilton, Ontario: UNU-INWEH

Information intermediary



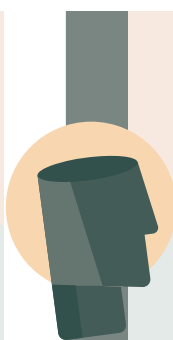
ROLE

Making information available: putting research results into the public domain.

OBJECTIVE

Enabling access to information from multiple sources and informing, aggregating, compiling and signalling information.

Knowledge translator



ROLE

Translating research evidence for non-specialist audiences via seminars, policy briefs, manuals, posters, demonstrations, etc.

OBJECTIVE

Helping make sense of and applying information and engaging in disseminating, translating and communicating knowledge and ideas.

Knowledge broker



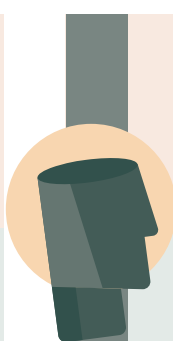
ROLE

Actively engaging in policy and practice debates by taking part in meetings, matchmaking, convening and networking.

OBJECTIVE

Improving knowledge use in decision-making and engaging in bridging, matching, connecting, convening, linking, boundary spanning, networking and facilitating.

Innovation broker



ROLE

Influencing the wider context to reduce transaction costs and enable innovation: build local capacity, change incentive structures to use research.

OBJECTIVE

Changing contexts to enable innovation and engaging in negotiation, building, collaborating and managing relationships and processes.

Good practice

Using networking skills and a comprehensive approach to dissemination to create the conditions for uptake

In the community-based hazard management project, the participation of the project's local promoter (at level of the partner institute) in conferences and further networking activities came to establish important contacts with national authorities such as the Office of the Prime Minister and the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA). This in turn was an enabling factor for research uptake at the national level. Data collected by the project was fed into the national report on the state of the environment produced by NEMA.

An innovative and comprehensive approach to dissemination research results was furthermore applied by the community-based hazard management project: the project involved volunteers to collect data in remote areas and send them to a centralised level (MMU GIS lab established by the project) through smartphones. In addition, sensitization was pursued through local radio talk shows, policy briefs, posters in the local language and a board game to engage officials through active simulation. The involvement of district environmental officers in dissemination meetings and other activities (e.g. board game, breakfast meetings) sensitized the local government to research results – an enabling factor for research uptake.



Stakeholder engagement

Another crucial mechanism for creating the conditions for uptake is **engaging with stakeholders**, right from the start of a project (or better yet: before the start). This means investing in building relationships with relevant stakeholders before, during and after the project.

This stakeholder engagement is key to enhancing the uptake of results. The process starts with mapping out and identification of key stakeholders. Stakeholders may include local communities, private sector, (local) government, civil society organisations, NGOs, etc.

When identifying stakeholders, general terms should be avoided (e.g. not “government” but specific government department). The stakeholders may be users of the research and those who can help/hamper your uptake strategy (e.g. extension office). The mapping should be followed by (further) seeking alignment to stakeholder needs, mutual agreement on engagement strategies and jointly (re)defining desired social change processes. Stakeholder engagement should be a continuous and active process.

VLIR-UOS identifies various mechanisms to engage with stakeholders:

1 Needs orientation and participation

Through stakeholder engagement, successful projects keep a continuous needs orientation and involve stakeholders in the research process. Rather than conducting a single, non-recurring needs assessment, continuous and sincere needs orientation should be aimed at through various mechanisms of collaboration.

Success factors

- Establish an advisory board whose members are carefully selected, and which is truly integrated into the research process through regular exchanges (e.g. on intermediary research results, research design, approaching communities etc.) to ensure continuous and ‘applied’ needs orientation.
- Using participatory (research) methods. Participatory research increases ownership for research results. This requires that research results are shared with participants in an appropriate way. Participatory research can further be combined with trainings and contributes to their effectiveness.
- Conducting a baseline analysis on knowledge/attitudes/behaviours of the beneficiaries in order to target curricula/trainings for end-users accordingly.
- Training of intermediaries (e.g. health workers) and end-users (e.g. local farmers), if possible, applying “hands-on” teaching and exercising (e.g. pilot scale demonstrations, on-site training, participatory research).
- Integration of local partner institutions – companies, community-based organisations, local cooperatives, local authorities (e.g. national parc management), etc. – into the research process, when formulating the research questions, through participatory or action research, or as members of an advisory board (cf. transdisciplinary research).

Good practice**Advisory boards**

Due to the sensitivity of providing sex education to adolescents in the Ugandan context, the respective project established an advisory board involving the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education as well as religious leaders and other community representatives. The project's relative success, however, did not result from the mere existence of an advisory board, but from the fact that the project team had: a) carefully considered who they would invite to join the board, who was progressive enough to share the ideas of the project, but not so progressive that s/he would not be heard in the Ugandan society; and b) because the project team conducted frequent and intensive exchanges with the advisory board (so it was more than a formal reception at the beginning and end of the project).

Good practice**Involving end-users in the development of research outputs**

The elderly care project's main output was a list of indicators on gender mainstreaming in ageing and elderly care, which is adjusted to the Cuban context and specialised into caregiver guidance in formal and informal elderly care. The project worked closely with the intended users of the indicators, mainly NGOs and CSOs (e.g. 'Cátedra del adulto mayor' at Universidad de la Habana (UH)). They participated in three workshops to discuss and adapt the list of indicators. The joint formulation and adaptation of the list of indicators in participatory research workshops with all stakeholders was the project's main dissemination strategy. It also successfully created ownership and a platform for uptake, and thus constitutes an important success factor for uptake (i.e. application of the list by the NGOs/CSOs). The list was shared with all stakeholders who had participated in the workshops, and online via the project team's Facebook page. The fact that the project was implemented together with the stakeholders led to immediate effects among those stakeholders through awareness and acknowledgement of the importance and relevance of what they were doing. It was reported that all actors involved have appropriated the contents and are aware of the indicators of gender mainstreaming in elderly care.

2**Collaboration with end-users**

The right "modes of interaction" during the project can strengthen the collaboration with end-users.

Success factors

- Involve end-users as much as possible via direct relations/interaction and when working with intermediaries, i.e., individuals or organisations external to the project that support a transfer of knowledge between users and producers of knowledge, this is also to be taken into account. This is most effective if there is complementary direct contact between the producers and users of knowledge.

- Meetings or workshops with stakeholders in which final / preliminary research results are presented and discussed; or jointly developed.
- Training of intermediaries (e.g. health workers) and end-users (e.g. local farmers), if possible, applying “hands-on” teaching and exercising (e.g. pilot scale demonstrations, on-site training, participatory research).
- Integration of local partner institutions – companies, community-based organisations, local cooperatives, local authorities (e.g. national park management), etc. – into the research process, when formulating the research questions, through participatory or action research, or as members of an advisory board (cf. transdisciplinary research).

Good practice

Turning end-users into researchers

In the cleaner production project, end-users, i.e. employees of Cuban companies, did research on cleaner production. More specifically, their Masters research targeted problems that were often prioritised by their companies. Ownership and applicability of the research results is, therefore, high, which results in scientific solutions largely being implemented by companies.

Lesson learned

Lacking direct interaction with users

The biofuels project studied the research problems associated with the use of emulsions and/or microemulsions where a vegetable oil is the oil phase. It involved representatives of companies, most importantly the experimental station ‘Indio Hatuey’ as one of the two national oil refineries. Research, however, was mostly done in the academic environment (labs or diesel engine bench), on the basis of the inputs (primary material) provided by the experimental stations. The latter are – in a way – the link between the project team and the end-users who use the blend of biofuel in their machinery. However, no specific activities were undertaken to actively reach out to them. Consequently, uptake of the research results is limited to date.

3 Frequency of interaction, trust and mutual respect

Stakeholders should not only be involved/informed at the end and/or beginning of a project. Regular interactions and mutual trust have been identified as key factors for realising uptake.

Success factors

- Exchange frequently; share and discuss intermediate results instead of only final results.
- Make use of local contacts and/or long-term collaboration to overcome scepticism towards researchers.
- Select collaboration partners purposefully and base their choice on the decision upon the intended users of the project's outputs.
- Build long-term relationships with stakeholders and users, from the early implementation phase to dissemination.

Good practice

Valorising trust for uptake

When drafting the proposal for the CHW project, community health workers (CHWs) were identified as end-users and main stakeholders in the project. As volunteers, CHWs offer basic health care in the villages and are an important provider of healthcare for rural communities in Limpopo province. They were also identified by the promoters as sources of trust: building on these existing structures (i.e. training the CHWs, establishing mechanisms for peer-to-peer learning and exchange) has been found to be a major success factor for the uptake of knowledge on non-communicable diseases (NCDs) by villagers and its transfer to other villages.



Capacity building

Uptake capacities of knowledge producers (and partly also intermediaries) includes being able to demonstrate the relevance of knowledge, making knowledge applicable and usable, networking (e.g. positioning oneself in an intermediary position), and increasing capacities to include new/various perspectives in the knowledge generation process. Uptake capacities of users includes the knowledge, skills, time and attitudes needed to understand and use research information. Strengthening the uptake capacities of producers, intermediaries and users needs to be seen as a process throughout the project (rather than simply organising an isolated workshop).

1 Capacities for uptake of knowledge producers

With regard to the capacities for uptake of knowledge producers, evidence indicates uptake is facilitated when:

Success factors

- Researchers/HE staff are sensitised and receive guidance on how to integrate uptake into the research process.
- Researchers/HE staff have/acquire (soft) skills in storytelling, networking, communication, stakeholder engagement, translating research results, etc.

2 Capacities for uptake of knowledge users and intermediaries

With regard to the capacities for uptake of knowledge producers, evidence indicates uptake is facilitated when:

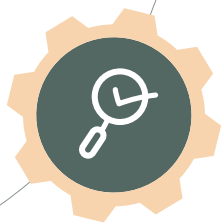
Success factors

- Users and/or intermediaries receive training/guidance on how to use projects' specific research results (or more broadly: general skills for evidence use).

Lesson learned

Lacking capacities for a wider roll-out of the project's approach

The small-scale fish farmers' project focused on conducting training for fish farmers, comprising the 'Enabling Rural Innovation' (ERI) approach. In addition, the farmers themselves were invited to participate in data collection for market research. Linkages with District Fisheries Offices and fish-farmer platforms were established to access beneficiaries and mobilize them to participate in project activities. With regard to uptake, interviewed farmers reported that they had adopted practices on which they had been trained. These include conducting market research, keeping records, and calculating profits and losses. Moreover, this creates conditions for a broader use of the project's approach as local authorities are convinced of its worth. However, a wider uptake did not occur due to a lack of mandate and capacities at the local authorities to implement/roll-out the approach. This as well as personnel turnover at the local authorities were a hindering factor.



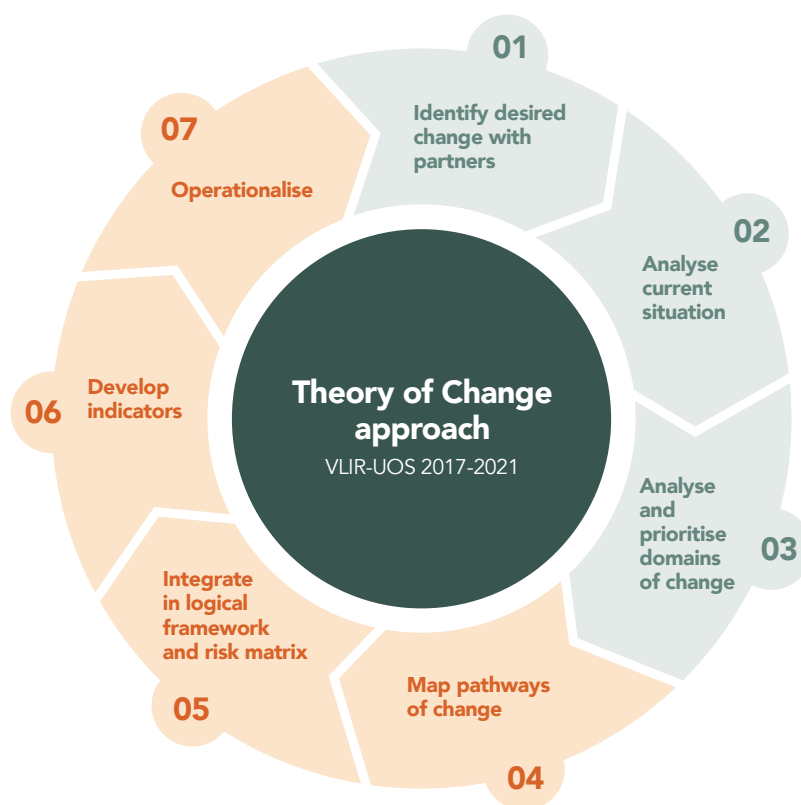
Impact oriented planning & monitoring

As mentioned earlier, VLIR-UOS interventions are expected to integrate in research both the planning and monitoring of the intervention. This is part of the impact-oriented planning and monitoring approach proposed by VLIR-UOS.

1 Planning for uptake

VLIR-UOS proposes a Theory of Change (ToC) approach, outlined in its formulation guidelines (to be revised in 2021). At the heart of these guidelines are various elements already mentioned in this document: the **identification** of long-term desired impact, stakeholder management, **context** analysis, etc. The formulation guidelines also invite projects to develop a “Theory of Change” in which the envisioned change process is mapped out, actors and factors influencing the **change process** are identified, and implicit assumptions and **hypotheses** are made explicit. This approach in general helps projects in developing a sound, impact-oriented, project **strategy**. It motivates projects to ask the right questions: How do I think change will happen? How will actor x adopt the knowledge produced by our research? Does the actor have the right access? Capacities? Resources? Incentives? etc.

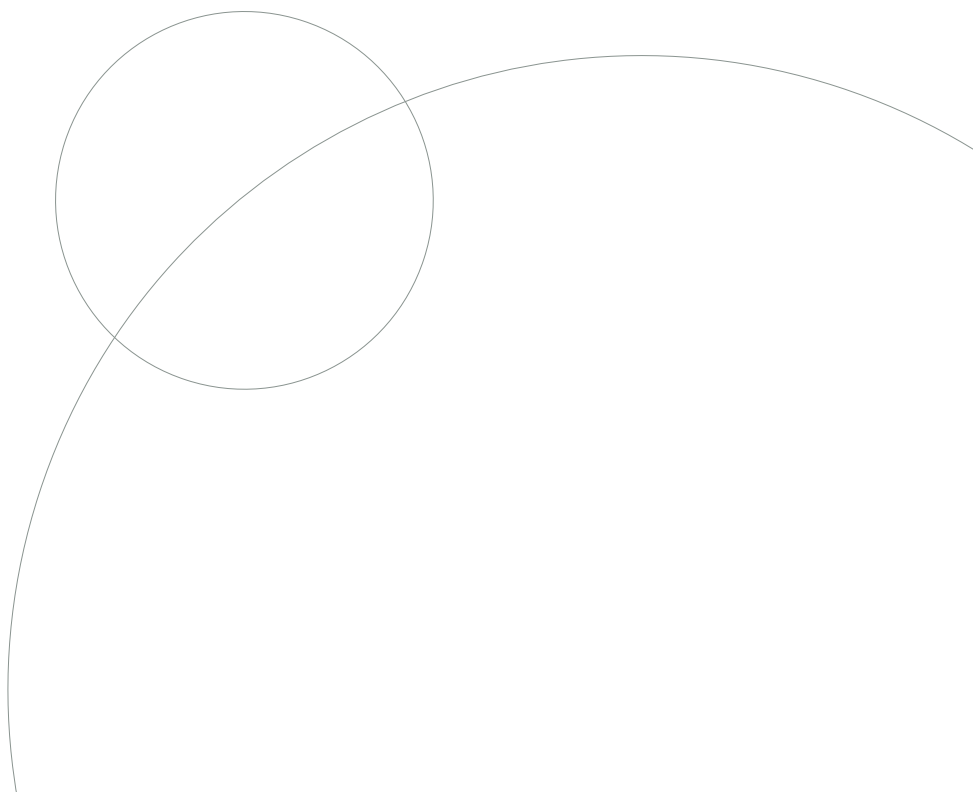
Further details are mentioned in the formulation guidelines of VLIR-UOS explaining the VLIR-UOS ToC process (cf. see figure below: VLIR-UOS 2017-2021 Theory of Change approach).



2 Monitoring for uptake

During implementation, VLIR-UOS projects are invited to regularly monitor their progress and revisit their ToC, if required, on the basis of lessons learned (Is the project still on the right track?). As such, the ToC (and the underlying uptake strategy) can be used as dynamic tools for learning and steering the project.

Data gathering on indicators for uptake and impact of research is important and should be included to properly monitor progress. Furthermore, VLIR-UOS projects report on an annual basis on their progress in an Annual Progress Report, which also includes reporting on creating the conditions for uptake (and associated indicators).



VLIR-UOS – part of the Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR) – is the platform through which Flemish universities and university colleges pool expertise and efforts and work together in the context of university cooperation for development. VLIR-UOS supports partnerships between universities and university colleges in Flanders and partner countries that seek answers to global and local challenges. This international network of experienced and committed academics, researchers, institutional coordinators and students works across the boundaries of institutions, disciplines, languages, countries and continents.

Funded by the Belgian Federal Government, VLIR-UOS is the main sponsor of partnership projects between academics from Flanders and partner countries, as well as scholarships for students and professionals from Flanders and partner countries. These partnership projects aim to improve the research and educational performance of local higher education institutions through capacity building, while at the same time developing innovative solutions (new knowledge, applications or services) to global, developmental problems.

Through these partnerships, institutes for higher education evolve into key actors that shape the economic and societal systems in their countries. By supporting relevant, high-quality educational programmes in Flanders and by providing scholarships for students from the South, VLIR-UOS invests in future changemakers, and contributes to the globalisation, diversity and quality of Flemish higher education.

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