

**Midterm evaluation of the
Institutional University
Cooperation with the
University of Limpopo (UL),
South Africa**

Table of contents

Acknowledgements	2
Executive Summary	3
1. Introduction	9
1.1. <i>Brief summary of:</i>	9
1.1.1. The IUC Programme and the IUC Partner Programme	9
1.1.2. The Terms of Reference of the Evaluation.....	10
1.1.3. The evaluation methodology to be applied.....	11
1.1.4. Criteria and indicators used.....	13
1.2. <i>Contextual information on the economic and/or political circumstances</i>	14
1.2.1. South Africa	14
1.2.2. The University of Limpopo.....	15
1.2.3. The Partnership	18
2. Evaluation findings	20
2.1. <i>Evaluation of the partner programme</i>	20
2.1.1. Introduction.....	20
2.1.2. Evaluation of the present stage of implementation of the programme and its constituent projects	23
2.1.3. Value for money.....	42
2.1.4. Financial Management.....	43
2.1.5. Main observations from the review of the Self-Assessment reports and On-site Interviews ..	43
.....	43
3. Conclusions and recommendations	47
3.1. <i>The Programme and its Projects</i>	47
3.2. <i>The management of the Programme</i>	48
3.3. <i>Coordination between all parties involved</i>	49
3.4. <i>Overall conclusions and recommendations to VLIR-UOS and towards Phase II</i>	50
ANNEXURES	51
<i>Annex 1: The VLIR Programme Model and IUC Cycle in Summary</i>	51
<i>Annex 2: Interview Schedule</i>	54
<i>Annex 3: Opinionnaire</i>	57
<i>Annex 4: List of persons interviewed</i>	59
<i>Annex 5: List of abbreviations</i>	60

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A number of factors contributed in a positive way to this evaluation. These include:

- the quality of the enabling environment created by the University of Limpopo (UL) and the Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad (VLIR) / Flemish Interuniversity Council (IUC) and the clear and comprehensive documentation provided by each;
- the quality of the briefing support given by the VLIR secretariat staff in Brussels and staff at the UL Programme Office on campus;
- the level of ownership of the programme exhibited by all stakeholders, and their willingness to share their commitment and overall enthusiasm for the programme;
- the quality of the organisation, co-ordination and logistics support provided to the evaluation mission by the two secretariats.

The evaluators endeavoured to listen to experts and 'ordinary people' alike, and from them gained not simply 'sharper facts' but also insights from the wisdom of their perceptions. Development planning may follow the dictates of current planning modalities yet, in its execution, life and outcomes, it is always less predictable and displays a mixture of responses to unrealistic planning, encountering more appropriate perceived needs and of course the strong influence of players, both national and visiting.

Producing this account has required the co-operation and willing active support of many people. The evaluators especially wish to thank the VLIR IUC and the UL senior management, the two Programme Coordinators, Professor R. Colebunders and Professor Kingsley Ayisi and the UL Flemish University Project Leaders. All were generous with their time and have played a key role in ensuring the overall success of the Programme to date. Special thanks are also due to Dr Christophe Goossens for his wise guidance and care for detail. We also wish to congratulate and thank all those interviewed on their work and the authoritative and mature way the students, in particular, talk about it. The promise for the future is considerable. The decision to set up the VLIR House on the Limpopo campus, superbly administered by Dima and Flora, was an inspired decision.

The evaluators have been impressed by the collegiality of the IUC-UL Programme. Our professional lives have been enriched by our discussions and exchanges whilst the quality thereof show clearly the seriousness with which the VLIR programme is viewed by, and the commitment of, all stakeholders, South and North, to it.

Professor Alan Penny and Professor Ken Harley

May/June, 2014

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the two consultants and do not represent those of the University of Limpopo and VLIR-UOS.

Executive Summary

Introduction

The work upon which this report is based was commissioned during March, 2014. Two consultants (one international and one national) were requested to review the Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad (VLIR) University Development Cooperation (UOS) Institutional University Cooperation (IUC) agreement with the University of Limpopo (UL), South Africa.

The UL Partner Programme comprises 8 specified projects which can be grouped into five main clusters:

- Cluster (1) a crosscutting cluster focusing on information management (Project 1).
- Cluster (2) ensuring competent communities, including energising competent communities, and improving wellness, multiple literacies and prevention, control and management of chronic diseases (Projects 2, 3 and 4),
- Cluster (3) water research and water security (Project 5),
- Cluster (4) food security (Project 6),
- Cluster (5) public health with research and interventions into infectious disease management (Projects 7 and 8).

The main objectives of the IUC-UL programme are capacity building (thus enabling the institution to accomplish its societal role of education), research and community engagement.

The evaluation aims at establishing the effectiveness and impact of the programme, and making an assessment of how well the partnership is performing.

A review of the context of Higher Education in South Africa suggests that a number of policy/practice gaps exist:

- Commentators on the higher education sector generally agree that developing policies enshrining liberty, equality, democracy and justice have proved relatively easy: instituting them and achieving systemic change has proved more difficult.
- Many of the students entering Higher Education from the schooling sector, especially from those schools formerly designated for the black, coloured and Indian ethnic groups, lack the necessary academic foundation skills for them to be successful. As a result, universities have found it necessary to focus to a greater or lesser extent on the quality of teaching and curriculum offered in contrast to developing research and research capacity.
- Efforts to increase the level of access to HE have largely been neutralised by high attrition. More than half of all first-year entrants never graduate at all; and only 35% of the total intake graduate within five years. Access, success and completion rates continue to be racially skewed, with white completion rates being on average 50% higher than African rates.
- Only 34% of academics have a PhD whilst the research performance of universities is highly uneven, with 10 of the 23 public universities producing 86% of all research and 89% of all doctoral graduates.

VLIR's intervention at the University of Limpopo is extremely timely and significant for three reasons:

- The number of staff with PhDs is small. The Programme addresses this need.
- The need to build a research culture and research capacity is great. Evidence from this evaluation shows that the Programme is cost effective and is building capacity.
- Student funding is problematic. Well over 50% of the students registered with the university are completely reliant on the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). VLIR financial support to students has been significant.

The Mid-term Review – An Overview of Major Findings

1. The Evaluation has shown that a solid research platform has been established and that, in broad terms, implementation has been effective. As Phase I has been as successful as might realistically have been hoped in terms of implementation and impact, it follows that the VLIR model of North/ South collaboration has been convincingly validated. These findings lead to two major overall judgements that frame the following specific recommendations..

First, the cumulative weight of evidence points decisively to justification for continuation of the programme. VLIR should proceed with the development of Phase II.

Second, whilst there is no need to tamper with fundamentals, the programme should capitalise on lessons learnt in Phase I and consolidate gains by refocusing projects and rationalising procedures specifically with Phase 2 aims in mind.

2. The VLIR IUC has a significant presence on campus as is evidenced by the physical presence of the VLIR house, appropriately signposted, the high regard of the programme by senior academics and the personal acknowledgement of the leadership of Professor Kingsley Ayisi. Nonetheless, it is believed that the visibility of the programme could be further enhanced, using the media and other means.
3. VLIR support represents the single highest externally funded programme on campus. It is already contributing to the research profile of the university whilst in development terms, the visitation confirmed its development relevance and importance.
4. The guidance and leadership that have been provided by northern partners has been significant, especially with regards conceiving and structuring the eight projects and in ensuring that the focus and shape of the projects has been strongly responsive to Southern needs and to that context.
5. The inclusion of Project One to provide specific and general capacity building in data collection, management, analysis and interpretation was a wise decision as it addresses a general lack of capacity in these areas. The additional development of GIS capacity will have long-term benefits whilst the strategic priorities identified for the next phase of the project strongly suggest that its sustainability is assured.
6. Evidence included in the KRA analysis was variable and limited. What is clear, however, is the catalytic impact of the funding, the influence of northern human capital and the way in which it has unleashed, energised and developed latent capacity. At this stage, research outputs are variable although a rising number of higher degree registrations should address this. Teaching demands continue to be great for most academics.

7. How the annual assessment findings are being used, and how targets are linked to outcomes, remains problematic largely because project logframes lack precision. If the logframe modality is to be used as a management tool, then the logframe structure and reporting format needs to be simplified to allow individuals and teams, using agreed measurable indicators, to assess directly and on a rolling basis the goal and purpose of the inputs and activities against the intended outcomes (results) in terms of the inputs (budgetary and other) over time. SMART indicators should be used and the intervention logic needs to be coherent, precise and simple, and not cluttered with narrative.
8. How management and communication operates within project teams, as well as how resources provided to projects have been allocated, remains problematic. In spite of the overlaps across project boundaries, projects are operating discretely.
9. Every project team reported difficulty in preparing the Self-Assessment reports and complained about the excessive time it took to complete them and to assure themselves that they were “filling in the slots correctly”. They confess that they simply did not know what was wanted and that this left them frustrated with the reporting formats.
10. VLIR operates an effective financial management system and allied accounting processes. Given that the University has its own financial management systems and accounting processes, the question arises as to the extent to which the two systems and processes are aligned. The interviews revealed some difficulties aligning the two systems but it was reported that these have been resolved¹.

In focusing on the individual projects

Not all of the eight individual projects unfolded in ways that were neatly aligned with original purposes and logframes. As the programme was entirely new, it is quite natural that original logframes were somewhat provisional and aspirational. A necessary first step, therefore, is to refine and/or redefine the scope and aims of each project. In Phase 2 it will be necessary to achieve the ‘Teaching’ and ‘Extension and Outreach’ KRAs.

The evaluators wish to point out that Projects 1, 4, 5 and 6 appear to be in need of only minimal refinement, at most. On the other hand:

- Project 2 needs to build on the focus and energy that began to emerge following its recruitment of two new members of staff.
- Project 3 would benefit from limiting its original scope in line with the more realistically constrained focus that has emerged. It could also possibly benefit from replacing its production of texts with an approach that utilises (and adapts, as appropriate) existing high quality materials that are freely available. Research could then focus on the more sustainable domain of monitoring the effectiveness of these materials and their adaptations in tandem with the pedagogies that are fit for purpose. Learning could then be taken to scale.
- Project 7, to all intents and purposes, has collapsed. Its sole remaining member of staff has (somewhat ironically) been one of the most prolific researchers in terms of publication out-

¹ The evaluators had one discussion with the PSU, the University Finance Director and the MEDUNSA Finance team. We also had access to the very brief Auditor’s Report. Although the MEDUNSA people spoke about the intricacies involved with the Trust, we were assured by all that what difficulties had been experienced had been ironed out. We comment in the report on the time delays caused because of the distances between the two campuses (pg. 51).

puts. She, together with the staff in Project 8, sees a merging of these two projects as a viable way forward. The Evaluators note also that the future of Projects 7 and 8 is framed within the larger institutional issue of the “demerger” of MEDUNSA from University of Limpopo (see point 3, pg 10, below).

Summary: Individual Project Performance

The following table provides an overall rating of Programme achievements to date in terms of development relevance, impact, efficiency and sustainability. The evaluators appreciate that the first four to five years of the Programme has focused on putting in place a secure foundation for project outreach over the next five years.

Evaluation Rating at current stage of programme. (1 High – 4 low)

<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Development Relevance</i>		<i>Impact</i>		<i>Efficiency</i>	<i>Sustainability</i>	
	Research Capacity	Development Goals	Within UL	Regionally/ Nationally	Input / Output	Institutional	Additional financial support
<i>1. Data Management and Analysis</i>	1	2	1	3	2	2	1
<i>2. Energising communities</i>	3	4	3	4	3	3	4
<i>3. Multiple Literacies</i>	3	2	3	2	3	3	4
<i>4. Prevention, control and management of chronic diseases</i>	2	2	2	2	2	1	4
<i>5 Water</i>	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
<i>6 Food Security</i>	1	2	2	2	2	2	2
<i>7 Public Health interventions</i>	3	4	3	3	4	4	4
<i>8 Infectious disease research</i>	2	2	3	3	3	2	3
<i>Programme Support Unit</i>	n/a	n/a	1	n/a	1	n/a	n/a

Description of Indicators

Rating	Development Relevance	Impact	Efficiency	Sustainability
<p>1 – HIGH - objectives largely achieved</p> <p>2 – Significant progress towards achieving objectives</p> <p>3 – Some progress towards achieving objectives</p> <p>4 – LOW – limited progress towards achieving objectives</p>	Extent to which project is realising research capacity building and development objectives	Impact of project on systems, structures and policies internally and externally.	Assessment of Output to Purpose on basis of Inputs.	<p>Prospect of achieving sustainable development.</p> <p>Internal - based on State funding for research output. External - based on attracting external funding.</p>

Concerning Managing the Programme

The Evaluators' experiences on both Turfloop and MEDUNSA campuses have foregrounded the absolutely key role of the Programme Coordinator. This highly specialised and demanding role can be performed effectively only by someone who is a recognised academic but who also has social skills and is adept at the hands-on work necessary to keep the programme running, and able to keep people happy. It would be unfortunate if the associated workload meant that a Programme Manager's own research languished as a result of Project demands, and that this person was reduced to simply servicing Projects in which other staff stand to gain. The evaluators suggest that it might be possible to simplify paperwork by ensuring that, for example, there is no overlap of data reported on different forms.

Budgetary allocations within Projects are at present left to the discretion of Project leaders. Strategies for distribution appear to range from meeting the needs of the most prolific researchers to equitable distribution amongst all staff as a means of encouraging 'buy in' to the Project. Project teams should be encouraged to refer to the management manual guidelines.

Even though there is talk of the signing of a MoU with MEDUNSA to enable the existing Projects 7 and 8 to continue, the MEDUNSA "demerger" presents risks. The fragility of relationships between the two institutions is exacerbated by the internal departmental difficulties that led to the collapse of Project 7 in MEDUNSA. The Evaluators' view is that Projects at MEDUNSA should not proceed into Phase II without the assurance that an enabling environment has been established. Establishing such an environment might require the services of an 'honest broker' from VLIR.

As listed in the Self-Assessments, the names of staff participating in each Project include some who are dormant, or who have withdrawn altogether. It is essential that names be updated in tandem with the rewriting of Logframes.

The joint North/South PhD programme is a significant development. However, thought has not yet been applied to the implications of institutional PhD rules that remain unchanged. One student, for example, has met all requirements for the award of the PhD bar the University of Antwerp's additional requirement for publications. Under the University of Limpopo rules, which do not have such requirements, the degree would have already been awarded. As a result the student has had to go through an anxiety-filled interregnum as she waits to hear from journal editors.

Apart from the fostering of new skills, the present interaction of academics and staff from across the North/ South divide does much to serve coordination in general. Such effects could be enhanced if the possibility of more enduring exchanges could be promoted. For staff, the possibility of staff sabbatical exchanges could be considered, and more 'Post docs' stationed in the South certainly would build on the considerable benefits noted of the few 'Post docs' currently at Turfloop.

Finally, coordination could be facilitated if the exit-strategy rules are made clear to all staff so that sustainable research trajectories and interventions can be developed during Phase II.

Recommendations

This Evaluation has shown that a solid research platform has been established and that, in broad terms, implementation has been effective. As Phase I has been as successful as might realistically have been hoped in terms of implementation and impact, it follows that the VLIR model of North/ South collaboration has been convincingly validated. These findings lead to two major overall judgements that frame the specific recommendations that follow.

First, the cumulative weight of evidence points decisively to justification for continuation of the Programme. Arrangements should be put in place for a smooth continuity into Phase II.

Second, whilst there is no need to tamper with fundamentals, the programme should capitalise on lessons learnt in Phase I and consolidate gains by refocusing projects and rationalising procedures specifically with Phase 2 aims in mind.

1. Introduction

The work upon which this report is based was commissioned during March, 2014. Two consultants (one international and one national) were requested to review the Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad (VLIR) University Development Cooperation (UOS) Institutional University Cooperation (IUC) agreement with the University of Limpopo (UL), South Africa.

The overall purpose of the IUC programme is to support institutional development of partner universities through inter-university cooperation between six Flemish Universities and universities in the South. The partnership with UL involves four Flemish Universities (Antwerp, Ghent, Hasselt and the Free University –Brussels). The partnership is intended to be demand led and, in the case of the UL programme, it consists of a coherent set of interventions aimed at developing institutional management, improved quality of teaching and learning and socially relevant research and research capacity building in the University of Limpopo.

The programme is managed through different management layers, with the Joint Steering Committee (JSCM) having overall responsibility for the overall design, planning and management coordination of the partner programmes and their constituent activity programmes, monitoring and evaluation, tracking progress and review. Two coordinators (North and South) are the effective programme leaders.

The local Project Leader is expected to provide academic project leadership and coordination whilst the Flemish Project Leader is also required to facilitate relevant networking and linkages.

1.1. Brief summary of:

1.1.1. The IUC Programme and the IUC Partner Programme

The Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR) was founded in 1976 by Decree as a public institution following an initiative by the Rectors of the six Flemish Universities in Belgium. The IUC vision relates to institutional strengthening in selected partner universities in the South to enable them to act as catalysts for change and in supporting local sustainable development.

The overall purpose of IUC programmes is to support institutional development of partner universities through inter-university cooperation between Flemish Universities and universities in the South. VLIR-UOS sets the policy framework, selects projects and funds and evaluates programmes and, in turn, is accountable to the government of Belgium as the financing public authority. Partner universities are accountable to the VLIR-UOS and their own University Councils and are responsible for programme proposal, development, implementation and review.

The core goals of the IUC Programme are that it should:

- Build the institutional capacity of the local university in the context of local societal needs through a long-term programme of at least ten years;
- Foster ownership through the process of shared project identification, implementation, outcomes and evaluation;
- Develop and exploit institutional synergies to develop post-graduate education in the South through improved quality of teaching and research, and
- Encourage South-South Higher Education linkages.

The UL Partner Programme comprises 8 specified projects that are grouped into five main clusters:

- Cluster (1) a crosscutting cluster focusing on information management.
- Cluster (2) ensuring competent communities, including energising communities, developing multiple literacies, improving wellness and the prevention, control and management of chronic diseases,
- Cluster (3) water research and water security,
- Cluster (4) food security,
- Cluster (5) public health, with research and interventions into infectious disease management.

The main objectives of the VLIR -UL IUC programme are capacity building (thus enabling the institution to accomplish its societal role of education), research and community engagement.

Preparatory to the field visit, the evaluators reviewed the extensive background documentation which had been provided to them. The field visit to the UL included interviews, observations and further documentary analysis, and allowed for a more complete assessment of impact through a process of triangulation (interviews, documentary analysis and observation).

1.1.2. The Terms of Reference of the Evaluation

The consultants were required to review the projects and make an assessment of how well the partnership is performing, what impact the programme is having, whether expectations are being realised, what lessons are being learnt and what programmatic and project revisions have been made to improve the programme's relevance, quality, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability.

As part of this and as a way of bench marking VLIR's engagement, the evaluation was expected to assess the present implementation status of the programme, its added value and the position of the IUC programme within the international cooperation activities of the University of Limpopo.

Specifically, the consultants were required to review and evaluate the following and, if necessary, make recommendations for improvement.

1. At the level of the partner programme and activity programmes:

Implementation

- ❖ The present implementation of the programme:
Evaluating
 - the overall state of implementation of the programme at both the overall programme and constituent project levels;
 - whether the activities, per project, have met the objectives that had been defined within the given framework and given means.
- ❖ The nature of the programme:
Evaluating
 - the quality, efficiency, efficacy, impact, development relevance and sustainability of the programme in the light of the overall goal of the IUC Programme (institutional capacity building of the local university, as situated in the context of the needs of the local society).
- ❖ The position of the IUC programme within the international cooperation activities of the partner university:

Evaluating

- the added—value of the IUC Programme for UL in comparison with other on-going cooperation programmes.

Programme Management

Reviewing:

- ❖ overall programme management (North and South), the coherence of the programme management and the synergies created;
- ❖ systems development (manuals, internal monitoring and reporting processes);
- ❖ programme/project development, management and implementation;
- ❖ financial management processes and procedures, including procurement and the dissemination of financial information, insofar as these impact on the effectiveness of the programme;
- ❖ public relations and visibility.

2. The Partnership

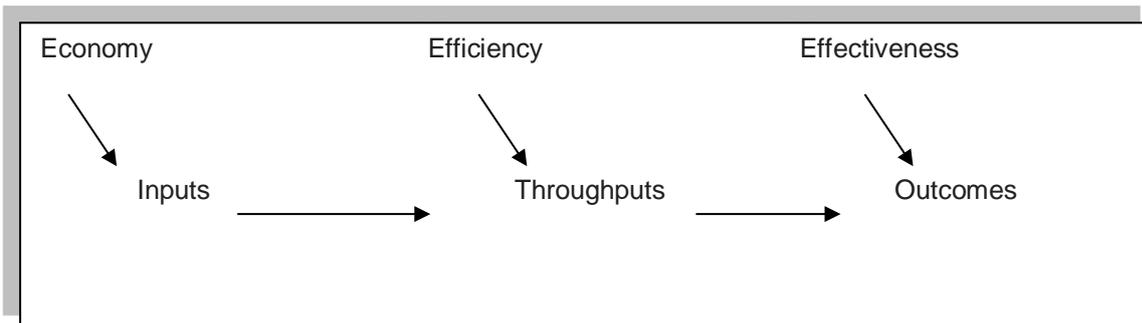
Evaluating:

the nature and understanding of the partnership and cooperation between all parties involved and formulating, where necessary, recommendations for improvement.

1.1.3. The evaluation methodology to be applied

Evaluation is usually seen as a necessary part of programme and project design, but less often as a rational approach to programme and project implementation with well-defined and agreed uses for the outcome of such evaluation. Beyond establishing the effectiveness of the programme and making an assessment of how well the partnership is performing, the evaluation is expected to assess the impact the programme is having, whether expectations are being realised, and what lessons are being learnt. The evaluation also has to identify what programmatic and project revisions have been made to improve the programme's effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. The evaluation also aimed at capturing the various expectations of the evaluation process itself and to use any findings in the recommendations proposed. In addition, the VLIR-UOS quality assurance process model involves (i) a system of internal quality assurance which is the responsibility of the universities and academics involved (N and S), (ii) a monitoring system whereby UL and Flemish co-ordinators report annually to the VLIR-UOS on the results obtained and the plans for the following year, and (iii) a system of external evaluation.

The classical evaluation framework derived from the VLIR Evaluation Commission (VLIR-EC) documentation emphasises the three E's of performance management and assessment (Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness) as they impact on the Inputs, Throughputs and Outcomes of the programme and its constituent projects (fig.1).



Any evaluation exercise attempts to assess the degree to which each of the above elements (Inputs, Throughputs and Outcomes) has created the necessary conditions to facilitate effective sustainable development. However, it has always to be borne in mind that evaluation is not a precise science as it is seldom possible to attach a quantifiable value to the direct and indirect added value of an intervention. One of the main difficulties faced by the evaluators when reviewing the output of the VLIR-UL Programme concerned the level of attribution that might be ascribed to the inputs. Another difficulty is trying to track changes that have occurred, as change is seldom linear in a developmental process. It is also difficult establishing attribution: how much of the change in an institution can be attributed to a particular programme or intervention.

However, it has been possible to provide a record of the work of the programme and its constituent projects and, through analysis, to make an overall professional judgement of effectiveness based on broad descriptive indicators. The evaluators have been able to identify key milestones in the process and to understand the perceptions of a range of key actors as to the added value of the programme.

The evaluators believe that the primary intention behind evaluation is to encourage lesson learning and to provide the basis for growth in a programme. Consequently they have sought to achieve this through encouraging an inclusive and consultative approach to the evaluation process and the evaluation report.

A combination of strategies has been used in this exercise. These included:

1. Briefing discussions at VLIR-UOS secretariat in Brussels.
2. Interviews with Northern and Southern partners.
3. A comprehensive review of all relevant documentation provided by the VLIR Secretariat and UL.
4. A critical review of the self-assessment reports, aiming primarily at verifying procedures followed and claims made.
5. Analysis of the standard Evaluation Commission (VLIR-EC) questionnaires to retrieve baseline information from the partners.
6. A review of supplementary documentation provided by the partners.
7. Interviews and discussions with stakeholders and beneficiaries.
8. On-site visits and visits to facilities developed under the VLIR-IUC programme.
9. Observation of activities being undertaken as part of the programme.
10. Presentation of findings to North-South stakeholders and receipt of verbal and written comments from them.

In addition, the authors encouraged stakeholders to review the draft final report and, where appropriate, to submit minority reports and comments on the evaluators' draft report beyond those which aimed at providing elucidation or correction.

Preparatory to the field visit, the evaluators reviewed the extensive background documentation which had been supplied to them. It provided a detailed overview of the IUC Programme; its conception, inception, implementation and progress. It also provided details of the constituent projects, the management process and copies of key correspondence. The self-evaluation process locates the evaluation firmly within the control of stakeholders. A structured self-assessment form was completed by each project team (F1), the programme teams (F2), and the two co-ordinators (F3). In addition, selected country and institutional data, including selected budgetary data, were reviewed.

The field visit to the UL included interviews, observations and further documentary analysis, and allowed for a more complete assessment of impact through a process of triangulation (interviews, documentary analysis and observation). A semi-structured interview schedule was used (Annex 3). The visit allowed the evaluators an opportunity to seek clarification and elaboration of the self-assessment returns from stakeholders in person. During the course of the field work 10 sets of interviews of between 30 minutes and one hour were conducted with groups of stakeholders and individuals representing all levels of the programme. Each project has a co-ordinator who manages the project and works closely with the Project Leader.

Over the course of this assignment the evaluators have endeavoured to listen to experts and 'ordinary people' alike and from them gained not simply 'sharper facts' but also insights from the wisdom of their perceptions. We have been mindful of the fact that a canal being 'man' planned and 'man' made follows a perceived rational and an 'engineeringly' planned route. A river does neither of these things. It meanders, is not totally predictable and changes in direction with surprises always potentially possible. Evaluation may be 'canal-like' in prospect but it is in hindsight often more river-like. The programme we evaluated was no less so.

1.1.4. Criteria and indicators used

The ToR provide detailed guidance on the Evaluation Criteria to be used and lists (Annex 2) seven key result areas with associate indicators.

The result areas are:

- KRA 1: Research
- KRA 2: Teaching
- KRA 3: Extension and Outreach
- KRA 4: Management
- KRA 5: Human Resource Development
- KRA 6: Infrastructure Management
- KRA 7: Mobilisation of additional resources and opportunities
- KRA 8: Other

In addition, a list of Qualitative Evaluation Criteria is provided. The profile comprises six dimensions with associated indicators. These include:

- Quality; overall outcomes and results
- Effectiveness; level of achievement of objectives
- Efficiency; the relationship between objectives and means
- Impact; actual and potential impact
- Development relevance; relevance of activities to development needs
- Sustainability; especially financial and institutional sustainability.

Finally, the ToR provide a 5 Point Evaluation Scale expressed in quantitative terms, from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) of performance on each of the six qualitative evaluation dimensions.

1.2. Contextual information on the economic and/or political circumstances

1.2.1. South Africa

South Africa covers approximately 1,219,900 sq. km at the southern end of the African continent with a population of approximately 50.5 million people of which 52% are female, 31% are under the age of 15 years and 7.7% are over the age of 60 years (SA Statistics, 2011). Adult literacy is estimated at 88.7% for the population aged 15 years and over. GDP per capita amounts to around US\$ 3200.00 whilst its stock exchange ranks among the 15 largest in the world. The country is endowed with an abundant supply of natural resources as well as having developed financial, legal, communications, energy and transport infrastructure.

South Africa's long history of apartheid and colonialism, coupled with a considerably skewed and uneven spread of resources, mainly along racial and ethnic lines, has created large disparities in income, housing and access to resources. A major challenge facing Higher Education concerns the need for transformation for it better to reflect national demographics whilst at the same time raising academic standards. The majority of higher education institutions still mirror apartheid demographics whilst none of South Africa's 25² public universities feature in the top 100 global rankings, where the biggest weight is given to research and the number of international scientific publications. Four universities feature in the top 500 (the universities of Cape Town, Witwatersrand, Stellenbosch and Pretoria)³.

A complex set of circumstances exists in the Higher Education sub-sector in South Africa. Firstly, over the last twenty years student numbers have more than doubled to around 920,000, largely in response to the push and pace of transformation. However, many of the students entering university from the schooling sector, especially from those schools formerly designated for the Black, Coloured and Indian ethnic groups, lack the necessary academic foundation skills for them to be successful. As a result, universities have focused to a greater or lesser extent on the quality of teaching and curriculum offered. In spite of this, wastage and inefficiency are considerable whilst the traditional tension between teaching and research in higher education has been skewed in favour of research by the funding formula.

A recent study published by the statutory Council on Higher Education (CHE)⁴ confirms through multiyear undergraduate cohort tracking that, although South Africa has since 1994 witnessed a significant growth in enrolment in both the schooling and higher education sectors, graduate output has not kept pace with the country's needs. High attrition and low graduation rates have largely neutralised significant gains in access. More than half of all first-year entrants never graduate at all and only 35% of the total intake graduate within five years. Access, success and completion rates continue to be racially skewed, with white completion rates being on average 50% higher than African rates. Further, only 34% of academics have a PhD whilst the research performance of universities is highly

² Two new universities have been created in the last year.

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/QS_World_University_Rankings

⁴ A proposal for undergraduate curriculum reform in South Africa: The case for a flexible curriculum structure http://www.che.ac.za/sites/default/files/publications/Full_Report.pdf

uneven, with 10 of the 23 public universities producing 86% of all research and 89% of all doctoral graduates (Macgregor, K, 2014)⁵.

Secondly, whilst the backlog in the number of black people with PhDs, or indeed, with post-graduate qualifications when apartheid ended, is slowly being addressed, the timeframe needed to do so is proving a far greater challenge than anticipated. Professor Max Price, Vice-Chancellor at the University of Cape Town, has pointed out that not only is there a shortage of black people with PhDs but also an even greater shortage of PhD holders who wish to become lecturers. His views are echoed by Professor Cheryl de la Rey, Vice Chancellor of the University of Pretoria, who believes that the challenge is not simply the number of black academics, but also the fact that universities are unable to compete on salaries with the private sector and government itself.⁶

Third, whilst spending on Higher Education is around about 12% (R37bn) of the national education budget, which accounts for 20% of GDP, over the last twenty years student numbers have more than doubled to around 920,000 whilst student – staffing ratios have worsened. The Education and Training minister, Blade Nzimande, expects the number of university students to reach around 1.6 million by 2030. This will compound the funding challenge. Funding for Higher Education as a proportion of GDP has declined from 0.76% in 2000 to 0.69% in 2009, with no target for increased funding and a rising school leaving pass-rate resulting in increasing numbers of students qualifying for university.

The sobering fact is that in South Africa a major policy/practice gap exists. Commentators on the higher education sector generally agree that developing policies enshrining liberty, equality, democracy and justice has proved relatively easy but instituting them and achieving systemic change has proved more difficult. The costs of equity and redress continue to increase, thereby making VLIR's focused intervention at the University of Limpopo extremely significant.

1.2.2. The University of Limpopo

The ironically titled 'Extension of University Education Act' of 1959 made provision for the establishment of racially exclusive universities for black South Africans. In terms of this Act, the University College of the North was established in 1959. As part of the reconfiguring of the higher education sector which followed the democratic elections of 1994, the then education minister Kader Asmal established the University of Limpopo on 1 January 2005 on the basis of a merger between what had become University of the North and the Medical University of Southern Africa (MEDUNSA). Having originally been created to advance the ideology of the Apartheid state, both institutions had been categorised as 'historically disadvantaged'. The University of Limpopo has four faculties: Health Sciences; Humanities; Management and Law; Science and Agriculture.

Geographic location is probably one reason for the failure of the merger. MEDUNSA is in Gauteng province, just over 300 kilometres from the 'mother' Turfloop campus, which itself is about 30 kilometres from the town of Polokwane in the northern part of the Limpopo Province. In its recommendation report to the Minister of Higher Education and Training (DHET), the CHE points to a lack of leadership in creating a new and inclusive institutional identity. In the view of the CHE, institutional constituencies

⁵ *Financial Mail*, January 24 – January 29 (2014) pg. 19

⁶ *Financial Mail*, January 24 – January 29 (2014) pgs. 18 - 23

were unable “to transcend their narrow interests in the fulfilment of the broader national policy goals”⁷, compromising MEDUNSA’s capacity to produce much needed black health professionals.

Following the DHET’s decision to ‘unbundle’ the merger with MEDUNSA, a senior official explained that “separation will be finalised during 2014 ...”⁸ Notwithstanding, the official University of Limpopo website⁹ still lists the following Schools and sites under its Faculty of Health Sciences:

- Oral Health Sciences
- Health Care Sciences (MEDUNSA Campus)
- Health Sciences (Turfloop)
- Medicine
- Pathology and Pre-Clinical Sciences.

Research productivity is very uneven across these faculties. In 2012, Agriculture and related sciences, together with the Health professions and related clinical sciences, contributed 60.4% of the University’s 291.23 ‘Research Outputs’.¹⁰ Although total publication output was a considerable increase over the 147.55 units in 2011, research productivity remains modest¹¹.

Other than the ‘University Ranking by Academic Performance’ (URAP) index¹², the university does not feature in international ranking indices. In URAP, it is ranked 13 of the 13 South African universities listed, and 1700 in world rankings. To put this into perspective, it should be noted that ten South African universities are not listed at all in the URAP rankings.

In 2009 the university had a total headcount enrolment of 17032, of which 97% were black African students. In 2010, undergraduate bachelor degree enrolments constituted 80.6% of the total enrolment. Registration in masters’ level and doctoral studies contributed 9.5% and 0.8% respectively.¹³

A worrisome issue for the University of Limpopo is that of student funding. According to a report dated 29 January 2014, well over 50% of the students registered with the university are completely reliant on the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS).¹⁴ Further, while the University of Limpopo

⁷http://www.che.ac.za/sites/default/files/publications/adv_advice_on_medunsa_and_univ_of_limpopo_20110824_v.1_0.pdf , p. 1

⁸<http://www.bdlive.co.za/national/education/2013/06/19/unbundling-of-university-of-limpopo-nearly-finalised>

⁹ <http://www.ul.ac.za/index.php?Entity=Faculty%20of%20Health%20Sciences> (accessed 23/3/2014)

¹⁰ <http://www.ul.ac.za/research/application/downloads/UL%20Research%20Outputs%20Report%20-%202012.pdf>

¹¹ (see also footnote 18 on pg 44) It is not easy to get an authoritative SAPSE list of journals. Two files were used to check submissions by project teams.

These are

1. ‘Complete list of accredited journals (IBSS, ISI and Local list) as received from DHET in January 2014’ (http://www0.sun.ac.za/research/assets/files/Accredited_Journals/DHET%20Accredited%20lists%20for%20publications%20to%20be%20made%20in%202014.xlsx) and

2. ‘List_of_approved_South_African_journals_as_maintained_by_the_DoE_(.pdf)2.pdf’ given as the ‘Complete list ...’ Number journals , close to 3000)

¹²http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rankings_of_universities_in_South_Africa#University_Ranking_by_Academic_Performance_.28URAP.29

¹³http://www.che.ac.za/sites/default/files/institutional_audits/institutional_audits_2010_lp_executive_summary.pdf

¹⁴ <http://www.sabc.co.za/news/a/ff85fc8042bc9caaba9bfa56d5ffbd92/NSFAS-cuts-University-of-Limpopo-funding->

had been expecting to receive more than R200 million, only R89 million has been allocated. The situation has been compounded by alleged irregularities in respect of NSFAS allocations. This has led to protests at UL and at various other tertiary institutions in the current academic year.

The CHE's publically available Executive Summary¹⁵ of its 2011 Institutional Audit of the University of Limpopo offers three "Commendations" and 33 "Recommendations". The University was commended for: responsiveness to national imperatives in the field of health care; the outstanding research work and international collaborations of its Centre for Material Modelling; and for community engagements on the part of "committed staff members". For the most part, the 33 Recommendations address issues of institutional leadership and governance, particularly in connection with the need to develop:

- an inclusive institutional vision and mission to promote institutional identity and work ethic;
- a full management information system to inform institutional and academic planning and decision-making;
- systems of quality assurance for its academic offerings;
- monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and a systematic approach to teaching and learning;
- coherent research capacity development policies and procedures;
- a residence environment conducive to a quality learning experience for all students.

The Executive Summary of the CHE Report concludes:

With its 18,000 enrolments, its location across two South African provinces, its rural and peri-urban hinterlands, its platforms for health sciences education, and its declared commitment to giving access to higher education to the rural poor in a variety of disciplines and professions, the University of Limpopo could play a unique and vital role in the South African higher education system. In the Panel's view there is still a small window of opportunity to make this University into a recognisable university deserving its proud struggle past. Further leadership failure will make the University unviable and will dash the hopes of current and future students and the dreams and efforts of those who gave their lives in the struggle for democracy (p. 35).

Progress in addressing the CHE's recommendations does not appear to have been easy. The 'Improvement Plan' follow-up process is described as follows:

*University of Limpopo – improvement plan not approved; visited on 18 July 2012; resubmitted improvement plan approved; visited on 29 October 2012; support visit made on 25 February 2013; required interim progress report expected in March 2013 but extension requested and interim report received on 3 April 2013 (p. 13).*¹⁶

Given the difficulties posed by the merger with MEDUNSA, the University of Limpopo will arguably benefit from the 'unbundling' of the merger in a way that will enable it to tackle institutional challenges in a more purposeful way.

¹⁵ HEQC Audit Report Number 31. July 2011. *University of Limpopo: Report of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) to the University of Limpopo. Executive Summary.*
http://www.che.ac.za/sites/default/files/institutional_audits/institutional_audits_2010_lp_executive_summary.pdf

¹⁶ Council on Higher Education. 2013. CHE Annual Report 2012-2013 http://www.che.ac.za/media_and_publications/annual-reports/annual-report-council-higher-education-20122013

1.2.3. The Partnership

The Partnership

The following table outlines the partnerships involved:

VLIR-UL IUC		Programme Coordinators	Prof Kingsley Ayisi	Prof R.Colebunders, University of Antwerp	
UL IUC Project/ Clusters		Key Focus	UL Project Leader	Flemish University	Flemish Project Leader
1.	Data Management and Analysis (Cross-cutting cluster)	Project 1 Data management and analysis – ICT, GIS remote sensing. Providing cross-cutting support across the partnership. Capacity building.	Professor Lesaoana Maseka	Hasselt	Prof K. Vanhoof/
2.	Ensuring competent communities in the context of global change.	3 Projects with research capacity building cross-cutting: Project 2: Energising communities Project 3: Multiple literacies – capacity building in language literacy, science literacy and the use of multimoded texts. Project 4: Prevention, control and management of chronic diseases in rural communities. Working out of the Dikgale Demographic Surveillance site.	Dr C. Burman Prof R. McCabe Prof M.Alberts	Antwerp Ghent Antwerp	Prof H. Meulemans Prof M. Valcke Prof J-P Van geertruyden
3.	Water	Project 5 Bio-monitoring of water quality, sediment, biota, fish health and fish parasites. Research capacity building based on Olifants River area.	Prof A. Jooste	Antwerp	Prof L. Bervoets
4.	Food security	Project 6 Research and research capacity building in area of chicken and crop production. Research and capacity building in proteinics and molecular genetics. Linked to the School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences/	Prof J Ng'ambi	Free University Brussels	Prof E. Van Driessche

5.	Public Health	<p>2 Projects with research and capacity development cross-cutting:</p> <p>Project 7 Public health intervention research to develop relevant and feasible solutions to public health problems in Southern Africa.</p> <p>Project 8 Infectious disease research and capacity development focusing on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - decreasing morbidity and mortality. - Identifying and treating diarrhoeal pathogens. 	<p>To be appointed</p> <p>Prof M. Nchabeleng</p>	<p>Antwerp</p>	<p>Prof M. Van Sprundel</p> <p>Prof J.P.Bogers</p>
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2. Evaluation findings

2.1. Evaluation of the partner programme

2.1.1. Introduction

The evaluation team had access to all annual reports and other documents up to the mid-point evaluation and, just prior to the mission, the summative report prepared for the Mid-Term review. Concerning the former, the evaluators commend VLIR on the accessibility of records and the quality of its paper trail.

The review of this documentation (annual reports, self-assessment reports and other documents, including details of spending up to the Mid-Term review) and the visitation raised the following issues.

What constitutes the institutional partnership and to what extent is it driven by Northern partners? This question is important as it provides an indication of the level or degree of ownership and hence sustainability of the partnership. Consequently, the evaluation mission was interested in establishing the extent to which the development and academic discourse is predominantly a northern one, or a balanced one taking seriously the southern context, and what strategies are employed to ensure that balance.

It is immediately evident upon arriving at the University of Limpopo that the VLIR IUC has a significant presence on campus. From the welcome received by the campus security personnel, to the physical presence of the VLIR house, appropriately signposted, to the high regard of the programme by senior academics and the personal acknowledgement of Professor Kingsley Ayisi as we walked the campus, it was unnecessary to confirm further the significance of this partnership. In financial terms alone, it is the single highest externally funded programme on campus. It is already contributing to the research profile of the university. In development terms, the visitation confirmed its relevance and importance.

It is also evident that guidance and leadership have been provided by northern partners, especially with regards navigating VLIR's administrative requirements necessary to secure an IUC partnership and in conceiving and structuring the eight projects. It is further evident that the focus and shape of the projects has been strongly responsive to Southern needs and to that context whilst also recognising the capacity differences.

The evaluators believe it was a very wise decision to develop the cross-cutting Project One to provide, as it does, specific and general capacity building in data collection, management, analysis and interpretation, especially given the general weaknesses in this area in much academic literature¹⁷. The additional development of GIS capacity will have long-term benefits and, whilst these are not detailed in the self-assessment reports, strategic priorities identified for the next phase of the project strongly suggest that its sustainability is assured.

Although most reports propose strategic options to ensure the sustainability of the various projects and the benefits of project interventions for wider stakeholders and communities are self-evident, little information on the strategies to be adopted to disseminate research findings is provided. The visibility

¹⁷ Both consultants are members of editorial committees for international and national journals. A common weakness of papers in the humanities and social sciences relates to the research methods used. The inclusion of this project raises the importance of research methods courses. It is also increasingly common in Northern Universities to insist that PhD and Masters level candidates complete preparatory courses in research methods prior to embarking on research projects.

of the programme could be further enhanced, using the media and other means, although the evaluators concede that the priority to date is establishing a solid research platform.

Evidence included in the KRA analysis was variable and limited, although it was possible to 'harden' this up whilst on site and during the interviews with project leaders and stakeholders. What is clear, however, is that the catalytic impact of the funding, the influence of northern human capital and the way in which it has unleashed, energised and developed latent capacity are incontrovertible, especially in the way research and other activities are being stimulated through the transfer of 'soft' and 'hard' research skills involved. At this stage, research outputs are variable whilst evidence is still emerging on the impact of this research or of the specific capacity building achieved, except through the steeply rising number of higher degree registrations. Little mention is made of the impact of the projects on teaching and learning across course programmes or on institutional governance. The issue of how the annual assessment findings are being used, and how targets are linked to outcomes, remains problematic largely because project logframes and how they were developed, used and revised lacks precision.

In a number of areas delays in finalising research protocols and obtaining research approval appear to have been an important reason for lack of progress and slippages against the proposed timeframes. In a few areas these delays also led to the abandonment of some research projects and, indeed, to the loss of research funding. Whether this is a consequence of wider institutional dysfunction is not known, but it should be examined by the University authorities. Establishing why there is slow progress in some project areas (especially projects 2 and 7) yet satisfactory progress in others has not been easy to assess and a host of factors have been suggested by project leaders during their discussions with the evaluation mission. What is becoming evident is that for some project members the issue of work load, the failure to make research a priority and the failure on the part of northern partners to make the VLIR project activities a priority are amongst the possible reasons for slow progress. Teaching demands are great for some of the persons involved. The question arises, therefore, as to what the more successful projects are doing to ensure progress and whether it is not possible to encourage better lesson learning across the programme as a whole.

Related to this is how management and communication operate within project teams, some of which are much larger than others, as well as how resources provided to projects have been allocated. It is evident that issues have arisen with regards the variable levels of funding within project activity areas to procurement and to requisitions. It would seem that the use of 'shared' infrastructure and of project and other vehicles has also been an issue, although these are being successfully resolved. Different perceptions exist as to the roles and functions of the Southern and Northern Programme and Project Managers and the extent to which the Northerners especially should play a more hands-on role, or indeed, have the time to.

At present and in spite of the overlaps across project boundaries, projects are operating discreetly. This observation is not meant as a criticism by the evaluation mission, for the two evaluators are very conscious of the difficulties of working in collaborative groups and, more finely, how institutional reward and recognition systems define how researchers work. Even where researchers work in teams, the work is often judged individually.

In reviewing the self-assessment reports and from discussions with project leaders and teams, it is evident that what has been included in the logframe and the Key Results Area submissions reveals a lack of clarity as to the purpose and functions being served by each report or, in some cases, how to structure and write a logframe, what to include in a logframe and the centrality of a logframe to Project

Cycle Management (PCM), the central management tool of the programme. The KRA reporting format is easier to understand and to respond to, but it is evident that for many of those interviewed, the logic of 'logframing' is not. The evaluation mission wish to assert:

If the logframe modality is to be used as a management tool, as we assume it is intended to be, then the logframe structure and reporting format need to be sufficiently simple to allow individuals and teams, using agreed indicators, to assess directly and on a rolling basis the goal and purpose of the inputs and activities against the intended outcomes (results) in terms of the inputs (budgetary and other) over time. SMART indicators should be used with formative indicators (milestones), especially quantitative ones, set within a time-frame, usually annual, so that progress measured over the specified time period is possible. Summative indicators should be separately identified and used to measure performance at the end of a programme or project. The intervention logic, therefore, needs to be coherent, precise and simple, and not cluttered with narrative.

The evaluators do not believe it is appropriate to engage here in a debate on the merits and demerits of using logframe technology and whether the use of logframes is appropriate or not in academic research, as two project leaders in the north have asserted. However, we do wish to endorse VLIR's view that it is necessary for research teams to be able to state clearly in measurable terms what their research goal and purpose is and what the intended outcomes are. Without this it will be impossible to judge the value, impact, relevance, appropriateness and cost effectiveness of the inputs. The evaluators have serious questions about the usefulness of the current form of the logframe, something with which all Project teams concur. We have noted that all Project teams expressed considerable ire at having had to spend an excessive amount of time completing the Self-Assessment exercise. Nonetheless, the evaluators found the reports of value, in spite of the repetition and evidence that what was required of reportees was not fully understood or appreciated.

The stated overall academic objective of the VLIR-UL IUC relates to research capacity building and the creation of an applied research culture in an institutional and local community context. The development objective is stated as building competent communities. In the context of this evaluation and in terms of project outputs and outcomes, what this means is the need to establish whether the self-assessment reports contain sufficient evidence to justify the inputs and interventions made: in other words, whether the inputs are appropriate, realistic, cost effective and sustainable. Whilst it is acknowledged that this is a mid-term review and that it is only now that answers to these questions are becoming evident, is unclear from the majority of the self-assessment reports how present and proposed interventions, together with the capacity building and budgetary inputs, link to the intended outcomes. A major feature of the on-site interviews is that these links are becoming clearer over time and the synergies more evident. The evaluators would go so far as to suggest that over the course of the Projects to date there has been an organic progression towards coherence and synergy in Project focus as well as in the composition of research teams.

This is what made the reporting for the Project leaders difficult and, for the evaluators, to extract the coherence and the consistency in what was read. Teams report finding themselves reporting the same thing in different parts of the Self-Assessment report template, confirmed by the fact that there is

evidence of cutting and pasting. Every project team has reported considerable difficulty in preparing the Self-Assessment reports and complained about the excessive time it took to complete them and, indeed, to assure themselves that they were “filling in the slots correctly”. They confess that they simply did not know what was wanted and that this left them frustrated with the reporting formats. The result is that there is an absence of a coherently conceptualised goal and purpose and a structured set of inputs and activities. Generally across all projects the intervention logic is unclear and the intended outcomes woolly.

The evaluators conclude that there appears to be insufficient understanding of Project Cycle Management (PCM) as a dynamic management tool and the use of the logframe as part of this. It is suggested that it cannot be assumed that the provision of reporting templates, no matter how good they may be intrinsically, will through their use provide necessary reporting and analytical skills and competencies. Further, in spite of having good academic credentials, academic project managers cannot be assumed to be fully conversant with PCM and Logical Framework planning and reporting systems. Nor, after their recent experience of completing the self-assessment exercise, do they believe they are worthwhile. This report will therefore recommend a revised structure and format for the logframe, aligned to the KRA template, leading to a straightforward analytical and critical narrative which uses the information provided by the logframe and KRA template to assess impact and value for money.

VLIR operates an effective financial management system and allied accounting processes. Given that the University has its own financial management systems and accounting processes, the question arises as to the extent to which the two systems and processes are aligned. Little is said about this in the reports except that in the auditor’s report it is stated that the university does not have a separate bank account for the VLIR-IUC account which suggests that no difficulties exist with this arrangement. The interviews revealed that there had been some difficulties aligning the two systems but that these have been resolved.

The role of the VLIR University office and the functioning of the PSU on the UL campus have received little attention in the reports. Nonetheless, the on-site visit revealed that VLIR House functions very well and that the personnel have created a strong presence on campus. The programme has generated some very good stories and it was suggested that these, together with the Programme generally, might be used to generate greater visibility. It is evident, too, that VLIR house is the first port of call for addressing any queries or difficulties that should arise in the Projects. This raises the issue of the time commitment necessary by the local Programme Coordinator and the VLIR House staff. They appear to be very busy people.

2.1.2. Evaluation of the present stage of implementation of the programme and its constituent projects

Self-Assessment Reports - Individual Project Performances and Interview findings

Project 1: Data Management, Analysis and GIS

General Observations

The following general observations are made:

1. This project builds on VLIR’s considerable international experience on the need to underpin research activities with good quality data and the allied skills of data collection, management and interpretation. As such, this project addresses current deficits in this regard and focuses

on identified needs in the University of Limpopo context and aims at realising high impact and transferable outcomes.

2. Strengthening ICT services and the development of GIS capacity is clearly impacting positively on the research capacity of the University, as is evidenced by the number of PhD and Masters level students involved in the project. If the PhD candidates can be retained in the employ of the university upon graduation then a strong research foundation will result which should provide support to the master's degree programme.
3. The evaluators noted concerns by Northern Partners over the need to support UL PhD students to step up to the academic and professional standards expected of them, although the evaluators believe it is important to take starting points and context into account.
4. Apart from rolling out essential training, the potential for this training to impact positively on the wider university research curriculum is considerable as is evidenced in the extent to which ICT skills and competencies are being required in undergraduate programmes.
5. In reviewing the self-assessment report the evaluators encountered difficulties with understanding how the logframe has been used as a management tool or to provide the basis for measuring outcomes and impact.
6. Improvements directly attributed to the project in respect of upgrading connectivity, putting in place a network redundancy system, providing specialist training and improving system data collection, processing, storage and retrieval have all improved user ICT experiences across the university. In addition five local schools have been added to the network.
7. The recruitment of an ICT manager and data manager has ensured significant benefits to the programme and institution. Their respective appreciation of the needs of users is impressive.

KRA Performance - highlights

In the areas of research, training and human resource development significant progress has been reported, reflecting commitment by the national and Flemish teams.

KRA 1: Research:

The recruitment of 6 PhD students who are progressing well has had a major impact on the project's publication and conference related outputs. Three training manuals have been produced and others are being developed in response to the ICT training needs of the institution. Collaboration (nationally and internationally) and particularly with the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) in Pretoria has raised the profile of the project as well as exposing researchers to developments elsewhere. This has also led to additional funding being obtained from the Electricity Supply Commission (ESCOM) and the National Research Foundation.

KRA 2: Teaching:

The amount of teaching and training undertaken over the review period appears to have been entirely appropriate and focused upon immediate and emerging needs of the university, the Programme and the Project. Significant training support for the GIS implementation has occurred.

KRA 6: Infrastructure management:

It is reported that one server has been dedicated to the VLIR programme and that essential equipment and software to support the GIS and remote sensing research activities of the School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences has been provided.

Limited information beyond that already mentioned has been provided under KRA 4: *Management*, KRA 5: *Human Resource Development*, and KRA 7: *Mobilisation of additional resources and opportunities*.

Under KRA 3: *Extension and Outreach*, hosting the SA Statistical Association Conference (2013) was a groundbreaking event for the university, whilst engaging with the Global Conference on Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Security and Climate Change (2013), together with the project's alignment with the newly established Risk and Vulnerability Assessment Centre (RAVAC) funded by the South African Department of Science and Technology has been significant. This has raised the profile of the Project, as has the association with the Limpopo Living Landscape project supported by the German Ministry of Education and Research.

Soft indicators and the qualitative appreciation

Much that is presented in these sections of the self-assessment and during the interviews is based on reflections by the research students. That little was offered on lessons learnt is testimony to the fact that the Project has been very well planned and executed. Much appreciation was expressed by the research students themselves and by staff involved. As one student said; "without VLIR none of this would be here and I would not be here". Some of these students believe they are the product of poverty, but none are victims thereof. For all of the students interviewed, the alternative to receiving VLIR support is to find themselves sitting at home in an impoverished rural area hoping a job will be found. The acquisition of GIS skills has been totally transformative for those engaged in research using this technology. The number of PhD candidates exploiting the opportunities presented is impressive.

Self-scoring Cooperation Dynamics and Effects of the project on local partner

The explanations provided in justification for the scores given in the self-scoring exercise are a reworking of earlier statements made, with one exception; namely that concerning the quality of communication which is given as a reason for the resignation of "some team members". No elaboration is provided.

Responses to the statements on the institutional, academic and individual impact of the IUC project range between 'strongly agree' and 'neither agree or disagree.' The best that can be said of the responses is that they reflect a positive assessment of the project overall because it has raised the profile of the University, increased personal academic opportunities and raised staff capacity.

Project 2: Energising competent communities in the context of wellness and global change

General Observations

The following general observations are made:

1. The Project team is commended for having stated upfront that “Project 2 sets out with the [original] intention of demonstrating that communities in rural areas have assets that can be built upon”. As such, it takes seriously VLIR’s motto *Sharing Minds, Changing Lives* and aims to base activities in community agency and ownership. It is a complex project which in the view of the evaluators requires that the theoretical principles being espoused be articulated clearly and in terms linked to identifiable activities and intended outcomes.
2. It is evident that translating this into focused action has been a challenge; something later confirmed during the interviews. Harnessing social capital in an asset-based thrust has quite a sizeable literature, including some critiques. It is an approach that typically relies on mapping the assets of the community; building relationships; agreeing on a vision; mobilising action plans; etc. The Self-Assessment reports this process as having begun. It mentions a “problem tree” analysis before the project began, but the weakness of the Self-Assessment report is that it does not explain what happened thereafter in terms of negotiating with the community, building relationships, etc. Alongside this asset-based approach, the Project planned a primary focus on HIV/Aids. Here, the Project makes the shift from the simple ABC approach to one of Bio-social competence (“the virus within the socio-economic environment”). It does not make clear how this relates to the asset-based methodology or what were the community assets that led to this shift. From the discussion held with the Project team, however, it appeared rather as if the shift occurred through the application of “complexity theory” and other theoretical approaches. Explanations such as the following reinforce the view that the project is now being driven more by academic theories than by community assets, e.g.

“The unexpected factor in this is that way in which we were as trapped within the ABC approach to HIV/AIDS-related challenges. It was the influence of frame theory and social learning literature that triggered our search for innovative / new ways of looking at the challenge” (Self-Assessment, p. 16).

3. Notwithstanding the above, the two professors who joined the Project in year two have provided a clearer focus underpinned by the asset-based approach through the research topics being pursued, resulting in increasing collaboration between the departments of Social Work and Psychology.
4. The stated overall academic objective largely relates to research capacity building and the creation of an applied research culture based upon activities within a local community context. The development objective is stated as building competent communities. What this means in terms of outputs and outcomes, and whether the interventions are appropriate, realistic, cost effective and sustainable, is unclear in the self-assessment report. However, in the interviews with students it became evident that relevant, community related studies are being undertaken, for example, into the coping strategies of mothers of children with chronic diseases, into faith healers and chronic diseases and into women with hypertension. In the words of one professor, “these topics have been brewed together” through a process of group debate.

5. It is suggested that what could be further articulated is how the proposed interventions, together with the capacity building and budgetary inputs, link to the intended outcomes. The project needs to decide upon and state precisely what will be used to measure the anticipated changes, how change will be measured and to what factors it will be attributable and how sustainable change will be achieved. Causation cannot simply be assumed. Perhaps this is why in discussions it was stated that the logframe required revision to enable the intervention logic (the theory of change) to be articulated.

KRA performance - highlights

KRA 1: Research:

This is a relatively large team comprising 6 named members. It is reasonable to expect, with the increasing number of PhD and Masters students being registered, that their output will soon be significant. It is also noted that since the beginning of 2014, Complexity Theory has been taught to first year Master's degree students and, it is hoped, that there will be some interest amongst them in applying their learning in this area in their dissertation fieldwork.

Nine research protocols have been processed in the period under review.

The evaluators wish to encourage the Project Team to identify and operationalise strategies for stimulating the development of a promising research culture still further.

KRA 2: Teaching:

Limited direct impact on teaching is reported, apart from a half module being taught in the Masters Development Theory programme.

KRA 3: Extension and Outreach:

Strong action research/community engagement and links to the Waterberg NGO are reported, as are the development of an 'After Action Training Manual' and training in the Nvivo software package. However, without details, it is not possible for the evaluators to comment constructively on the performance in this area.

KRA 4: Management, KRA 5: Human Resource Development, KRA 6: Infrastructure management, and KRA 7: Mobilisation of additional resources and opportunities:

The report lists a number of areas of capacity building and indicates where opportunities are being taken up, especially through spin-off activities. Although activities are listed, the impact and value thereof has to be inferred. The team is encouraged to show how these activities are linked and are creating synergies and improving outcomes.

Soft indicators, unexpected results and qualitative appreciation.

The challenges associated with changing mindset and behaviour change cannot be under-estimated so it would have been helpful had strategies that are being adopted been listed, as well as how changing mindset and behaviour change are being manifested in daily life. It is evident that the engagement with external partners, both internationally and nationally, is raising the profile of the project and the institution. The evaluators also note with pleasure the fact that the team has the confidence to acknowledge that an over-ambitious start has led to some disappointments. As is acknowledged, "unlearning" is a vital element of learning. The Project is serving as a conceptual hub around which various activities are coalescing, but it should continue to remain a priority to disentangle the complexi-

ties involved and to identify more clearly what is being attempted in the Project by listing activities, prioritising them and seeking strategies to address them.

Observation:

1. The evaluators note that progress is being made, especially with regards stimulating research activity. One of the challenges faced, however, is establishing the extent to which the KRAs and the qualitative responses presented in the self-assessment can be attributed to the VLIR-IUC alone, and accruing from the links with Northern partners. It would also seem that it has taken time for the project to 'bed down' and that only more recently a more targeted research focus is being achieved. It is very evident that the partnership has catalysed research activity and, that in terms of capacity building, phase one has been significant in building confidence in team members through the provision of seed funding on the one hand and direct technical support from northern partners on the other.
2. The evaluators have experienced some difficulty in coming to a fair comment upon the scoring given by the project team in sections 7 and 8, especially because of the large number of 4s attributed to the project and with only one '2' and five '3's making up the rest of the scores. It is not clear quite what interpretation can be placed on them. Nonetheless, the tone of the responses and the quality of the debate during the interviews point clearly to the catalytic effect of the VLIR funding. A positive impression has been gained.
3. Much of the success of any project centres around the individuals engaged with it. It would be foolish not to acknowledge that there have been difficulties in this regard so it is hoped that with the appointment of the new project leader, the Project will be reinvigorated.

Critical success factors or hindering elements:

Most significant to the evaluators is the statement by the Project 2 team which states:

"We work 'together' but the intellectual collaboration remains a silo collaboration". How this might be addressed is a major challenge because there are powerful institutional and professional factors working against collaboration.

The evaluators commend the Project team for their candour and self-criticism but also wish to congratulate them on the significant progress they have made.

Proposal

The evaluators wish to suggest that the Project team might revisit the overall conception of the Project 2 and, on the basis of evidence contained within the Dikgale data set compiled by Professor Alberts and using the data that has informed the preparation of the Atlas of Vulnerability by Professor Ayisi, reconceptualise the project around a more focused set of research areas. To this end it should be possible to merge Projects 2, 3 and 4, utilizing Professor Albert's data for points of departure. This would encourage a mushrooming of studies on lifestyles, socio-economic variables and basic skill needs, including the multiple literacies identified in Project 3 and on developing the chronic disease model proposed in Project 4.

Project 3: Multiple literacies

General Observations

The following general observations are made:

1. Project 3 aims at developing research skills in all University of Limpopo students and the development of a range of different literacies (language, mathematical, scientific, health and nutrition) in young children. Why these have been chosen while other literacies such as cultural literacy and economic literacy are not included is not stated. The evaluators are concerned that the original project formulation was extremely broad. Vertically, it seemed to span primary school, secondary school and university students. Horizontally, it seemed to span literacies across different languages and science. As the project has evolved the focus has been concentrated upon early reading skill acquisition and English language competence in the primary school.
2. Whilst the evaluators have experience of the challenges facing rural communities in South Africa and the range of interventions being undertaken to ameliorate poverty and empower communities, probably more than in any of the other projects, this one highlights the need not to regard the logframe as static. Much was not known at the time the project was being formulated. For example, the consequences of too few primary teachers being trained nationally and none regionally could not have been anticipated. The project originally set out to produce material to assist primary teachers, yet quickly found it necessary to begin training poorly trained secondary teachers to teach literacy.
3. The detailed narrative provided in the current status column and comments section of the logframe provides a useful outline of what has been undertaken and achieved. The evaluators commend the team for the honesty of some of the comments made concerning the “overestimation of the objective”.
4. The project has provided a relevant and appropriate research platform and appears to have the strongest development thrust of all the projects.

KRA performance - highlights

KRA 1: Research:

A number of named persons in this project are not active and the list should be revised. The two staff members involved are language and literacy specialists. Research output in terms of publications is growing and improved output can be anticipated when outputs from the very encouraging number of Masters and PhD students come on stream.

What is evident is that there has been progress in raising the importance of research, with team personnel opening their work to academic scrutiny and review. It would be useful to know what strategies are being used to encourage research and what lesson learning is arising from them. The evaluators wish to encourage the team in their efforts.

KRA 2: Teaching:

The evaluators have noted that six workbooks have been produced by University of Ghent interns and a collection of context relevant readers have been produced locally. Little is said about how research and teaching are linked and are impacting on the quality of teaching.

KRA 3: Extension and Outreach:

It is noted in the logframe narrative that the main extension/outreach modality for developing and trialing materials is the workshop, yet no assessment has been made of the cost and professional effectiveness of using workshops. This is mentioned because the international experience of using workshops is not positive. It would be helpful if greater precision could be used when referring to the number of participants and schools involved and in describing the work undertaken. Without details, it is not possible for the evaluators to comment constructively on performance in this area.

KRA 4: Management, KRA 5: Human Resource Development, KRA 6: Infrastructure management, and KRA 7: Mobilisation of additional resources and opportunities:

The report lists a number of areas of capacity building and indicates where opportunities are being taken up. Although activities are listed, the impact and value thereof has to be inferred. The team is encouraged to show how these activities are linked and are creating synergies and improving outcomes.

Soft indicators, unexpected results and qualitative appreciation

The evaluators had difficulty separating out what one might normally expect in an honours and masters' programme and what additionality the VLIR programme is providing. It is pleasing to note the role of the interns which generally has been positive, significant and beneficial to both the schools and the communities in which they are operating, as well as to themselves. It would appear from comments made that the selection of interns should be reviewed to ensure that the unsatisfactory reports on two recent interns are avoided.

Undertaking action research can be difficult, especially managing the tension between the research role and the development role. It would be useful knowing how the development work is being evaluated and what strategies are being developed to sustain it. In terms of their research, it would be useful knowing how the interns and local researchers are 'distancing' their research role from their development role, given that much of this is about teaching, guiding teachers and conducting workshops.

Self-scoring cooperation dynamics and effects of the project on the local partner

Scores range from 2 (fair) to 4 (very good) on the cooperation dynamics, with the latter referring to raising the profile of research and academic interest and commitment. External contacts are clearly being developed although it would appear they are not easy to sustain.

The ranking on the effects on the local partner reflects quite a lot of ambivalence with the statements listed, with the majority of scores being a 3 (neither agree nor disagree) and with only three statements being given a 4 (agree) and four statements being given a negative score. Interpreting such scores is difficult except to conclude that the programme has raised the standing of the local research unit (item 1.3), positively excited the interest of the university's senior management (item 3.2) and raised the profile of research (item 3.3).

Overall comment

This project has successfully raised the visibility of the VLIR-UL IUC as information contained in the self-assessment report indicates, and as the *stories, testimonials and anecdotes* reveal. A great deal of work has been put into the work in schools whilst the utilisation/engagement of the Belgian interns appears to have been generally successful. There is surely an interesting paper to be written on managing, supporting and satisfying the expectations of interns!

From a research perspective there is a need for greater focus and coherence which could be the objective of Phase 2, especially by using relevant data from the Dikgale Demographic Surveillance site. It is suggested that more attention needs to be given to developing strategies to ensure the sustainability of the work undertaken.

Project 4: Prevention, control and management of chronic diseases in a rural community

General Observations

The following general observations are made:

1. This project aims at developing an intervention programme for the prevention, control and management of chronic diseases in a rural area. It will strengthen primary health care through the development of a chronic disease model in contrast to an acute disease model of health care.
2. Unlike earlier projects, the logframe contains targets to be met within a specified timeframe and allied activities. The intervention logic is clear and the work is located in Dikgale, thereby facilitating synergies with Project 2 with interventions based on validated data. There are concerns relating to monitoring impact which we acknowledged during the interviews. It is planned to address these in phase 2.
3. The specific academic objective is capacity building, increasing the number of PhD and Masters degree candidates and raising publication levels. The evidence to date points to annual targets being reached.
4. The development objective aims at reducing the specific mortality rate from chronic communicable and communicable diseases by 20%, increase the number of people adhering to treatment to over 90% and improve detection rates. Progress on these need to be clarified.
5. Activities include enlarging the Dikgale Demographic Surveillance Site (DDSS) and introducing verbal autopsies.
6. This is a large team of 18 members. At some point it would have been helpful to have shown how each relates to the work of the Project as well as who was responsible for the 6 published papers.

KRA performance - highlights

KRA 1 and 2: *Research and Teaching*:

- Six articles in peer reviewed articles and six conference abstracts are recorded.
- An unspecified number of training courses are referred to. The latter focused upon training field workers in the administration of the WHO STEP questionnaire and other forms. Training also occurred in the use of GPS (GIS?) technology and taking anthropometry measures and blood pressure.

KRA 3: Extension and Outreach

Activities related to the expansion of the Dikgale DSS are listed, although outcomes and results are not stated, nor in discussions were these fully identified for Phase 2 activities.

KRA 4: Management and KRA 6: Infrastructure Management

A new data base for the DDSS has been developed and the InterVA programme was installed for determining the cause of death. Nine computers for students have been procured.

KRA 5: Human resources development

One PhD and 3 MSc students have graduated, eighteen 4th year medical students have completed mini-dissertations using VLIR programme samples and six PhD students are at various stages of their studies.

An impressive feature to emerge during the interviews on site is the number of female candidates involved.

Soft indicators, unexpected results and qualitative appreciation

Reviewing what is reported, of note is the growth of the number of staff involved in research on non-communicable diseases and collaboration with the Department of Statistics on the analysis of longitudinal data. Of concern is that there are delays in obtaining ethics approval for projects.

It is reported (pg 10) and confirmed during interviews, that with hindsight a different strategy and intervention programme would have been used to mobilise the community. This raises the question of whether an adequate project monitoring system is in place and how frequently internal reviews occur, for it seems that to have arrived at this conclusion at this stage of the project is worrisome.

Self-scoring cooperation dynamics and effects of the project on the local partner

Scores range from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent) with the majority of scores being a 4 (very good) on the cooperation dynamics, with the single excellent score being attributed to the quality of communication.

Concerning the effects of the project on the local partner, scores ranged from 2 to 5 with the strongest agreement being attributed item 2-3, that the IUC has raised the ability of staff of the local partner research unit to publish research work being undertaken. This was a key feature of comments by UL staff during the on-site interviews.

Of note too is that critical success factors identified are improved staff capacity, although evidently not in sufficient numbers, and collaboration with their Belgian counterparts. Also noted is the view, strongly made during interviews, that where transdisciplinary silos can be bridged greater impact and coherence are possible. This issue will be taken up by the evaluators later in this report when project mergers are discussed.

Overall observation

Analysing the contents of this report was made easier by having greater precision and coherence in the writing. The evaluators understand that the Project Leader is well-versed in Project Cycle Management and in producing coherent, SMART indicators.

Project 5: *Water*

General Observations

The following general observations are made:

1. The goal of the project is the conservation of the South African water supply by studying the processes and underlying patterns in the distribution and abundance of biodiversity in the Olifants river system. Specifically, the impact of water variability, water pollution and contaminat-

ed fish on human health and the aquatic ecosystem will be researched. The main outcomes will be a greater understanding of the processes involved, the establishment of sustainable water research and training programmes and the building of capacity at the University of Limpopo, and the development of water awareness programmes in the region's schools.

2. The project is well structured and focused with clear academic and development objectives cited. The mapping, collection and identification of most of the pollutants and their risk to human health, together with the identification of the risk of changes in rainfall and water variability on the ecosystem of the Olifants River basin, have been assessed.
3. A successful network of national and international external collaborators has been established and through it and the research being undertaken, it is evident that the research capacity and profile of the University of Limpopo in water studies have been raised. An impressive number of masters' level students and two PhD students have been recruited, the majority of whom are women.
4. It is suggested that mention might be made of the impact of the Project and its activities on the undergraduate curriculum and teaching programme, something which was not clarified in any detail during the interviews.
5. Of concern is that it is reported that only two of a very large Northern team (10 named persons) have visited the project; and that, infrequently. The local team comprises 9 named persons. It would be helpful to show how each relates to the work of the Project as well as who were responsible for the 7 SAPSE papers, 5 abstracts and the Water Research Commission Report.
6. In talking with the team and the students during the on-site visit, one gained the view that this is a well organised and well managed project, with students especially clear about the benefits being gained from structured supervision.

KRA performance - highlights

KRA 1: Research

7 SAPSE publications have been produced, whilst 36 conference presentations are reported (12 International and 24 National).

A major WRC report was commissioned and published in 2013.

The study of the water quality of the Olifants River has produced some alarming findings on toxic metal contamination. Findings, if confirmed, will have a major impact on national water policy as well as implications for the health of local communities and animals.

KRA 2: Teaching

The increased number of postgraduate students (11 Masters and 2 PhDs) has raised the profile of the department, whilst the establishment of water awareness programmes will have wide ranging implications.

Two post-docs are being funded by the National Research Roundation and the university.

KRA 3: Extension and outreach

Results in this area are impressive, especially with regards national and international collaboration, adult/community water and health awareness education and engaging and training communities in bio monitoring the water quality of the lower Olifants River.

KRA 4 – Management, KRA 5 – Human Resource Development

The registration and progression of Masters and PhD candidates has been noted above.

KRA 6 – Infrastructure Management

The provision of two laptops, two PCs and one printer, together with various items of equipment for laboratory and field work, are noted.

KRA 7 – Mobilisation of additional resources

Two spin-off NSS post-doctoral projects with accompanying external grants are noted as well as the VLIR grant for a linked project involving KU Leuven, UL, The University of the Western Cape (UWC) and the University of Tanzania.

Soft Indicators and unexpected results

The significance of having identified the state of metal concentrations in the Olifants River System cannot be understated, especially the implications for human and animal health. The findings are regarded by national and international ecologist as highly significant and that it has significantly raised the profile of the project, and by inference, VLIR.

Self-scoring cooperation dynamics

A score of 4 (very good) is given to all but one item (quality of communication) where a 3 (good) is allocated.

Effects on the local partner ratings

Six of the scores provide a rating of 5 (strongly agree), eleven a rating of 4 (agree) and two a rating of 3 (neither agree nor disagree). Taken as a whole, the ratings reflect a highly positive assessment of the impact of the IUC Programme on UL.

Critical success or hindering factors

By identifying the long-term nature of the Programme, the evaluators also congratulate VLIR for maintaining this policy as a cornerstone of their activities. It creates confidence on the part of all collaborating institutions and researchers and allows them to focus on their projects and not be worrying about the funding of them.

Overall observation

This is a clearly focused and successful project as the *Stories and Anecdotes* and interviews also confirm. The IUC is bringing together a group of committed academics/researchers with development values they have been able to realise through the opportunities the IUC has offered them. The evaluators congratulate the team on the progress they have made.

Project 6: Food Security

General Observations

The following general observations are made:

1. This project addresses two key areas; training agronomists, molecular plant biologists and animal scientists, and undertaking research that adds to knowledge about the production of a common root stock and improving indigenous chicken breeds in a context where food security is an ever present challenge. The project team has identified three core challenges; the fact that the majority of faculty staff do not have PhDs, the need to update the curriculum regularly and the associated problem of keeping up to date with developments internationally in the fields of micro-biology and biotechnology, and the need for more advanced infrastructure and equipment. From discussions with the Project team it is evident that the inputs and targets are aligned and grouped accordingly, and that VLIR's support in respect of the provision of essential equipment has been significant.
2. The Project and the students registered to undertake individual research activities are benefiting from working around clearly articulated common thematic areas, with each research topic feeding into the IUC Programme, as well as from the involvement of experienced local and international scientists and researchers. The enabling environment which has been developed by VLIR, through its provision of much needed equipment and capacity building for the local team, has ensured that student progress has been very good. The confidence shown by the higher degree students interviewed as they spoke about their respective research programmes was highly impressive.
3. As with other Projects, the quality of reporting could be better. Whilst the narrative provided by the logframe provides a useful outline of the activities undertaken, it could display greater focus and precision. With 13 "intermediate" results listed, clear allied baseline data or targets are needed to enable evaluators to assess progress, to establish what can be attributed to the IUC and to assess the impact of the reported research publication record. Evidence presented is generalised, baseline statements are simply turned into positive statements under 'current status', often with the use of antonyms (e.g. "few" becomes "more"). The use of descriptors such as 'good', 'substantially', 'more', 'less' etc need to be quantified in some way.
4. The written reports would also be improved were the intervention logic (what is to be done) to be presented chronologically, with activity linked to the budgetary inputs and the intended outcomes. The project team needs to decide upon and state precisely what indicators will be used to measure the anticipated changes, how change will be measured and to what factors change will be attributable. It could also indicate how intended changes will be sustained.
5. It is appreciated that it is often difficult to attribute outcomes directly to particular inputs, but it is suggested that the Project Team attempt to clarify what the IUC has enabled in quantifiable terms.

KRA performance – highlights

KRA 1 – Research

The report lists seventy articles in peer-reviewed journals, ten in national peer reviewed journals, fifty conference presentations and fifty-five conference abstract contributions. This is impressive by any standards but the reviewers noted that few of the articles cited appear to have been published in

SAPSE approved journals.¹⁸ This was discussed with the team and various explanations were given. Whilst it can certainly not be assumed that publication in a SAPSE-accredited journal necessarily implies a mark of quality (and by corollary that publication in a non-SAPSE accreditation implies low quality research) the fact remains that publication in a SAPSE accredited journal attracts government subsidy; publication in a non-SAPSE accredited journal does not. The SAPSE status of the journal in which articles are published thus has major financial implications for both the university and the researcher. This in turns implies that strategic thought should be given to the question of which journals are targeted for project publications.¹⁸

KRA 2 – Teaching

A new module on Nature Farming was developed whilst the curricula in Animal Production, Crop Production and Biotechnology were reviewed and revised. The evaluators wish to point out that, contrary to what is stated, this does not necessarily mean that they were “substantially improved” without some statement related to how the changes made constitute an improvement.

Nonetheless, the reviewers were impressed with the level of the Project Team’s engagement with teaching.

Under KRA 3 – Extension and outreach

It is reported that 17 workshops occurred or training modules were produced. Whilst this represents an impressive output, at some point the impact and value for money of these should be assessed.

KRA 4 – Management

It is noted that 4 research protocols were developed at PhD level. The level of PhD supervision by the four professors in the Faculty is commendable and the reviewers were impressed by the level of engagement with their students.

KRA 5 – Human Resource Development

It is noted that one PhD student had received training in Belgium and that one PhD and two Masters from Belgium did their field work in South Africa. At some point in the report the value of this arrangement should be assessed and the lessons learnt identified. In discussing this with the Project team an interesting set of stories emerged.

KRA 6 – Infrastructure Management

Areas where IUC funding has added value is noted, especially the renovation of the poultry unit.

KRS 7 – Mobilisation of additional resources/opportunities

Six spin-off projects and four instances of collaboration with other institutions are noted.

¹⁸ Precise figures cannot be given because, as indicated earlier in footnote 11, it is not easy to obtain a single, authoritative SAPSE list. In correspondence with the team two further journal publications were added to the project’s KRA publication, but neither are to be found in the SAPSE list. However, the journal *Tropical Animal Health and Production* is listed in the Science Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), The journal, *South African Journal of Animal Science* is listed under the homepage <http://sasas.co.za/journals> but on the website they don’t mention SAPSE accreditation

Soft indicators and unexpected results

It is pleasing to note that research is reported to have become a priority within the Faculty of Science and Agriculture as a result of the IUC, and that two staff members have been given more research time. In discussing the changes brought about by this, the reviewers noted the increased pressure that faculty staff are under to deliver on their research commitments and the need for the Faculty to raise the level of the individual researcher NRF ratings. It is also pleasing to note that the work with indigenous chickens is showing positive results.

Qualitative appreciation and Self-scoring cooperation dynamics

It is evident from what has been stated that the IUC has brought significant improvements to the infrastructure and raised the academic profile of the Faculty of Science and Agriculture.

The scoring is overwhelmingly positive including a 5 (excellent) for communication, which is in contrast to what is reported in two other Projects.

Effects of the project on the local partner

It is very difficult to take the responses to the scoring on the tables in section 8 seriously when all items were scored with a 5, strongly agree, and the Project Team acknowledge the need to be more precise.

A similar difficulty exists with the assertion that the project represents Value for Money in the absence of evidence and hard precise data. The reviewers felt that the claim that the main problem faced by the Project concerns insufficient funds for operation costs and scholarship could be more specific as in their experience few academics when asked this kind of question would say anything different.

With three graduates securing university posts, something they attribute directly to VLIR support and to the IUC, the reviewers were able to conclude that it has had a wider institutional impact through the development of a research culture in the university and improvements in the Faculty's work ethic.

Overall Observation

Although the self-appraisal could have been more critical and reflective with the addition of hard evidence for some of the assertions made, the overall impression gained by the reviewers is that the IUC has made a difference to people's attitudes, priorities and working practices. Research is the impressive achievement of this Project, whilst the manner in which higher degree students spoke about their work confirms that the IUC is making a significant difference.

Project 7: Public Health Interventions

General Observations

The following general observations are made:

1. The aim of this project was to minimise health problems and high risk behaviours amongst health care workers (HCWs) by empowering them with skills and knowledge and thereby enable them to take responsibility for their own health. The project started off well in 2011 with a full complement of staff but during the course of 2013-2014 four key staff resigned, placing the future of the project at risk.
2. Discussions with local Project Team members revealed a very sorry story of dissension over the allocation of VLIR resources within the host Department, distrust and a lack of cooperation within Project 7 and, indeed, evidence of funding having been largely corralled by two senior

staff members/researchers to the perceived exclusion of others. Some very strong views were expressed by some interviewees.

3. The reviewers are of the view that the enabling environment has collapsed and that in the view of some interviewees, the Department of Public Health is “completely dysfunctional”. Whilst it is not the role of the reviewers to ask about why this situation arose, it remains a puzzle to the reviewers that no action appears to have been taken by the University Senior Management to secure the enabling environment of Project 7 when senior staff began resigning from MEDUNSA or when the perception developed that it was failing to deal with alleged disagreements between national and international project leaders over the composition of research teams and the perceived inequitable allocation of resources for research and development activities.
4. In terms of the future of Project 7 and, indeed, Project 8, any discussion will be coloured by the forthcoming demerger between MEDUNSA and the University of Limpopo. The proposal to agree a Memorandum of Understanding on the VLIR IUC between the two institutions, with each managing separate budgets and reporting systems, will require careful consideration; such is the degree of distrust evident. The physical distance between the two institutions has made management by the Turfloop-based VLIR office difficult, whilst requiring this to occur between two independent institutions, given the alleged history of distrust, may suggest that in the context of the forthcoming demerger, VLIR may wish to review seriously winding down both Projects 7 and 8.
5. Whatever is decided, a priority has to be securing the supervision and professional support of the PhD and Masters’ degree candidates, all of whom made impressive presentations on their work to the reviewers.
6. It is evident that many positive outcomes can be attributed to the VLIR-IUC for both individual students and institutionally. What was described as a platform for research was created, a research culture was developed and above all, opportunities for research created for a group of bright students who, without VLIR support, would not be where they are.
7. Research outputs from this project have been impressive and are recorded under the KRA performance highlights. Whether empowering Health Care Workers (HCWs) with skills and knowledge actually enabled them to take responsibility for their own health is unknown. However, it is immediately evident from a review of the KRA indicators that some impressive research successes have been achieved by this project.

KRA performance – highlights

KRA 1: Research

A total of 42 articles were published in national and international peer reviewed journals. No details are provided as to whether these are SAPSE rated nor whether they are single or multi-authored.

It was reported that this outcome significantly improved the research output of the institution and raised its research profile.

KRA 2: Teaching

An unspecified number of information booklets were developed and distributed to HCWs during a Wellness Campaign.

KRA 3: *Extension and outreach*

Two community outreach programmes are mentioned, although no details are provided.

The collapse of the enabling environment of the Project resulted in little of significance being reported under KRA 4: *Management*, KRA 5: *Human resource Development*, KRA 6: *Infrastructure Management*, and KRA 7: *Mobilisation of additional resources*

Overall observation

The collapse of the project is to be regretted and signals serious systemic problems within MEDUNSA and UL. All projects should be required to develop contingency plans and an exit strategy and to implement them when necessary. It is suggested that regular monitoring would have picked up some of the issues that led to this collapse. The evaluators are left to ask what senior management were doing when the resignations began and what has happened to movable items of equipment purchased under this project as those interviewed do not appear to know.

Project 8: Infectious disease research and capacity development

General Observations

The following general observations are made:

1. This project aims at developing research capacity in infectious diseases (IDs) among clinicians and laboratory-based researchers at the University of Limpopo and MEDUNSA Campus. The goal is to reduce morbidity and mortality due to IDs in South Africa.
2. Upon enquiring into why such a large local team is named, it transpired that only three were actively involved. It would seem appropriate not to name those not actively involved.
3. The project self-assessment documentation benefits from having a more structured, coherent and targeted logframe which enabled the evaluators to read across the table. However, it is suggested that had milestones been delineated, progress would have been more easily tracked. At present it is unclear as to how funding was allocated, what systems exist for monitoring progress and how expenditure is justified, except that it appears from the budget breakdown that a number of researchers were each allocated a small research grant of variable amounts.
4. The evaluators were informed by senior campus administrators that a number of political issues between the two campuses were inadequately addressed over the period of the IUC and that these have been exacerbated since the decision to separate the two campuses and form separate institutions. As with Project 7, staff stability is also a problem and eight staff members have left the institution since Project 8 began.
5. The KRA 1 return posts a rather modest four A1 articles and 11 abstracts, whereas on pg 5 of the Self- Assessment the figure of thirty two A1 articles is posted. The latter total represents an impressive rise. Whilst it was suggested to the evaluators that the increase over the four years of the project cannot be entirely attributed to the VLIR-IUC, statements by researchers involved emphasise the significant impact the IUC has had on creating a successful research environment. It is further noted that the current focus is on selecting and training PhDs in key areas to stay on as post-docs which, if successful, should provide some stability over Phase 2 of the project.

6. The research students interviewed were very impressive and spoke about their projects with knowledge, insight and passion. The visit to Belgium for the scholars was clearly a highlight and has enabled significant opportunities for collaboration. They also spoke positively about how regular communication with northern colleagues helps them to “keep on going when the going gets tough” and the extent to which the added value of these links is the expertise provided by northern academic counterparts. The VLIR programme has clearly created the opportunities for a research dialogue, confidence to engage at a policy level with the South African government, and leverage to secure additional resources, especially through the provision of skills to write research proposals.
7. As stated above, the separation of the two institutions will clearly create new challenges, especially over the division of the Programme Budget which is due to be reduced as a matter of course. The merging of Projects 7 and 8 could also reduce the unit value of the budget unless an agreement is reached to leave the current percentage share of the Programme budget as it is.

KRA performance - highlights

KRA 1: Research

Four papers (see point (v) above), seventeen national and eight international presentations are listed, although no details are provided in the narrative.

Given the size of the team, these results are rather meagre.

KRA 2: Teaching

It is reported that manuals outlining Standard Operating Procedures have been developed, but it would be useful if the narrative to this Self-Assessment report included some indication on how these SOPs have been received and are being used.

KRA 3: Extension and outreach

Annual STI, TB and infection control workshops held. Here too, it would be useful if the narrative to this Self-Assessment report included a summary of an evaluation of these.

KRA 5: Human resource development

Five PhDs, eleven MMEDs, twelve MScs and sixteen BSc Hons candidates are reported to be in training. This impressive number holds the promise of a viable number of Post Docs who can share the research load of team leaders. The narrative to the Self-Assessment report would benefit from a development plan in this regard.

KRA 6: Infrastructure Management

The provision of two laboratories for TB and AMR is noted, whilst the value of these was discussed with students and staff. It is evident that they have been significant in raising the quality of the work being undertaken.

KRA 7: Mobilisation of additional resources

The visit of two PhD students to Belgium and the return visit of four Belgian PhD students is noted and reports by the UL students suggest strongly that progress would not have been as great without such

visits. The evaluators would be interested in knowing what specific benefits were accrued by the northern students.

Soft indicators and unexpected results

The work under IR 2 is noted with interest, especially the catalytic impact of it and the likely impact of the training and transferrable skills developed. Clearly there is potential for new and applied research arising out of the training provided in the north.

Qualitative appreciation

A major issue exists in MEDUNSA concerning staff retention and the retention of training within the project. Comments on relationship issues also point to the need for improved 'match –making' and stronger local leadership and project management.

Dealing with the wider context and the shortage of posts or the lack of career prospects within the institution is problematic. Whilst related issues might be addressed at a higher level within UL, the issue of sustainability involves both VLIR and UL, especially as it relates to decisions over whether or not to launch projects where the risks are great and where there is a high risk of the lack of sustainability.

Effects of the project on the local partner

Scores related to items on what the project has achieved are consistently positive, whilst those related to the academic impact of the IUC project, whilst also positive, range from a 3 (neither agree nor disagree) to a 5 (strongly agree). Concerning the individual impact of the IUC project, a similar range occurs with one item (3.7) related to promoting the academic recognition of the local partner, received a negative response. It is evident that there is need for greater sensitivity in this regard.

Critical success factors or hindering factors

Given the success of the project in recruiting clinicians, it is to be regretted that respondents were generally unable to articulate the reasons for the successes noted and what is being done to make respondents comfortable to work within project groups. There must be a number of positive factors that might be shared with other less successful projects.

From what was said about funding high potential candidates to encourage them to continue from the masters to the PhD level and retaining them, there is obviously a need to review the level of funding available to them as well as establishing other sources of funding for which they might apply. It cannot be assumed that candidates come from similar circumstances and have a similar level of family and institutional support behind them.

The issue of ethics approval and turnaround is one mentioned by all projects, and is clearly something about which the senior management of UL is well aware. It is to be hoped that by the time of the IUC completion report review occurs in four years time that this will not still be an issue.

General Observation

It is very evident that there have been some significant gains in this project, but equally it has faced some near killer situations in the problem of staff retention.

It is also evident that when the right environment for research is created, good research usually follows, as is evidenced in this project.

Finally, it is also evident that northern and southern project leaders need to strategise together more frequently and that project activities need to be more closely directed. One visit a year from the northern project leader is insufficient.

2.1.3. Value for money

Value for Money (VfM) is a difficult concept and in much development literature VfM is reduced to simple cost saving thinking instead of addressing it in terms of improved practice and outcomes. Consequently when VLIR asked Project teams to comment on the Value for Money of their projects and whether, in the context of their results, there could have been better ways to optimise them, it was reasonable to assume that VfM as a concept is understood, and that data is available for respondents to respond accurately. It would appear that this was not the case and it should not come as much of a surprise that teams generally found this difficult to answer. Establishing unit costs and rates of return is usually based on SMART indicators in the logframe. Although quantifiable data is called for in the KRA analysis, one difficulty with the KRA results is the issue of attribution.

The Terms of Reference also require the Evaluation Mission to assess value for money (VfM) of the Programme. From an analysis of the interview data and the qualitative parts of the Self-Assessment reports, there is clear evidence that the level of VLIR's engagement with the University of Limpopo is proving effective in driving improvements in quality, from which it can be assumed that this will help to ensure value for money of the programme. The evaluators found that it is possible to argue similarly when assessing both the development relevance and the poverty reduction impact of Projects. On the other hand, whilst the review of documentation provides some insights into both, the value of the on-site mission allowed the evaluators an opportunity to get inside the dynamics of the Projects and to appreciate the development relevance and the poverty reduction impact of projects to date.

The effectiveness of the IUC is especially demonstrated in:

- the high regard by which the VLIR Programme is held by the university's senior management,
- evidence of the policy, strategic, academic and technical advice given by Northern partners,
- the catalytic impact of the Programme,
- the development of a research culture in both individual and institutional terms,
- the ownership and commitment displayed by local Project teams,
- the number of publications and spin-off activities emerging from the Programme to date.

The evaluators suggest that it is possible to arrive at a more objective VfM figure if one attempts to arrive at an estimated unit cost for the Programme. Two proxy indicators are used; the number of students who have received support from the Programme, accepting that this varies from student to student, and the number of internationally and nationally peer reviewed articles that have been published. Whilst the latter is not an entirely satisfactory indicator when judged across the Programme as a whole, mainly because two Projects (Projects 6 and 7) were especially prolific and skew the overall total number of a total of 137 articles reported, publications have significance for the Institution as they are an increasing source of funding to the University through the SAPSE system.

Information provided by the University of Limpopo Students' Records Office (Table 1) reveals that over the first phase of the IUC a total of 191 students have received support in one form or another from VLIR. What is particularly interesting in these figures is the higher percentage of females over males (60% females: 40% males). In terms of meeting Millenium Development Goal (MDG) gender targets, this is very encouraging.

Table 1

VLIR-Supported Postgraduate Students Record

Project	Total	Male	Female
P1	11	4	7
P2	14	5	9
P3	9	5	4
P4	9	6	3
P5	14	6	8
P6	42	23	19
P7	70	21	49
P8	22	5	17
TOTAL	191	75	116

Relating these figures to expenditure, the following information is available: the total budget allocation for years 1 to 5 amounts to €3,490,000.00. Based on the current market exchange rate of around € 1= ZAR 14.5, this amounts to a total of around R51.5 million or an input of around R10 million per year.

Using two proxy indicators of value, the overall number of students who have benefited directly from VLIR support, either directly through support on a personal basis or through research opportunities created in the various research activities (n=191), and the number of SAPSE accredited publications produced across the Programme over the same period, (139) one gets a baseline of 330 units. By dividing the total input of €3,490,000.00 by the baseline, one gets a Programme unit cost of approximately €10,575.76, provided that all students are successful. If one assumes that the average time taken by individual students to complete their Masters/PhD studies to be 3 years, a unit cost of just over €3,525.00 is arrived at.

The added value of the IUC programme to the university in comparison with other donor funded cooperation programmes is significant because VLIR-UOS IUC-UL is the university's largest single external contributor to the university's coffers, estimated to be about 40% of the total of external funding.

2.1.4. Financial Management

All partners agree that having confidence that funds will be used for their intended purposes is essential. The external audit undertaken in March 2014 raises no specific concerns based on a 59% sampling of records, but it is known from interviews with project leaders that procurement and the release of funds is tardy and needs to be addressed.

2.1.5. Main observations from the review of the Self-Assessment reports and On-site Interviews

In making these observations it has to be borne in mind that this report is reviewing eight Projects over a number of cognate areas involving researchers with varying degrees of experience. The manner in which the projects were clustered also brought together academics from differing research traditions and attempted to force collaborative working. In hindsight, the fact that so few major disagreements occurred is a testimony to the professionalism of those involved and especially to the appeal and promise of the Programme. The availability of long-term funding also, no doubt, was an attraction.

The Projects did not unfold in uniform ways. When they were conceptualised some of the goals were wide-ranging and possibly also aspirational. Once staff came together and staff interests became more explicit, especially when mediated in conjunction with student interests, and on the ground practicalities, earlier ideals were reshaped. Implementation imposed the need for greater realism.

The context of the IUC programme was significant. A number of factors came together at about the same time.

- First, the need for research was becoming an ever important issue in Higher Education in South Africa. The Council on Higher Education, the National Research Foundation, and funding bodies were all pushing for greater quality of research and output. The need for output was built into individual contracts, job descriptions and performance criteria in many universities.
- Second, the need for research and increased funding for research was identified as a priority by the University of Limpopo.
- Third, research capacity became an issue and senior appointments were made to lead the development of research.
- Fourth, the IUC programme, with its research and development agendas, was negotiated and agreed. The Programme created a focused environment to realise both agendas.

The University of Limpopo was not excluded from these pressures and, as the Research Output Graph (2006-2012) related to subsidy formula unit earnings reveals (UL, 2013) starting from a low base an impressive rise is shown from 2011 onwards. Whilst this cannot necessarily be attributed directly to the impact of the IUC Programme, we can safely say that it made a direct contribution, as well as playing an important part in the development of a research culture in the institution. This is the strongly held view of academics within the Programme.

The evaluation mission concludes that:

The research aims of Phase One are such that a solid research platform has been established and the research profile of the university, raised. In this sense, the Programme is poised to address Teaching, Extension and Outreach and the other Key Result Areas.

Aspects of the Programme that have made this possible include:

Students

- Students who have studied under difficult circumstances have a strong desire to become skilled researchers and to produce outputs that will benefit the broader community. They were not pursuing purely selfish aims.
- Students were enormously impressive in the way they described their projects and discussed the challenges they were facing to become competent researchers. They have stated unequivocally that this is due to their induction into, and their exposure to leaders in research, both locally and abroad, and to the sense that they are joining an elite national and international club.
- The VLIR model is having a knock-on effect on the style and model of supervision, whilst collaborative research, and all that that entails, is drawing in academics too.
- Significant too is the number of female students involved in the hard sciences; areas which have traditionally been excluded to them.

Lekoma

"I have five sisters and my mother is a single parent. Where you come from doesn't define where you are going. VLIR has made a huge difference in my life". Master's candidate, Year 2. Field of study, Children's oncology.

Shoki

"I am a child of poverty, but not victim of it. VLIR financial support has emancipated me". Ph.D candidate, Year 2. Field of Study, Mathematical Statistics. Modelling service delivery chains.

Staff

The following features are not uniform across all Project areas, but the general consensus is that:

- The IUC Programme has provided an opportunity to work with others across a number of disciplinary areas, although silos remain.
- There have been gains through the provision of funding to appoint researchers and through contact with Northern partners.
- Some refer to developing their confidence through attendance and presentation of work at conferences, and having it recognised.
- Collegiality has been enhanced through collaborative working which in turn has contributed to a sharper research focus within departments. They feel they are part of a collaborative enterprise whilst they also acknowledge personal rewards and improved status.

Institutional – the enabling environment

The following observations are based on discussions across the institutional spectrum which included the Vice-Chancellor, senior academics and administrative personnel.

- Creating an enabling research environment has been a most significant result of the signing of the VLIR-IUC agreement. It alerted senior management to the need for appropriate investment in infrastructure as well as the appointment of suitably qualified research staff. As staff and students have attested, VLIR's contribution regarding equipment has been most significant.
- The Vice-Chancellor (VC) regards the VLIR programme as the university's flagship programme and pointed out that the monetary investment is the largest single external funding the university currently has. He estimated that 20%-25% of the University's third stream income comes from VLIR. It has also attracted other smaller investments.
- The VC also believes that, in contrast to other support, VLIR's is long-term and came at the right time. It has put the University on the map research-wise.
- The Programme is a key item on the agenda of the Research Committee.
- Benefits accruing from the International links are regarded as highly beneficial.
- Improved research is regarded as improving the quality of the curriculum and teaching and learning.
- It is understood that inordinate delays in securing research proposal approval are being addressed.

Institutional – other issues

Dominating discussions is the de-merger of MEDUNSA. It is evident that:

- There is considerable anxiety on the part of MEDUNSA VLIR Programme staff surrounding the share-out of resources and equipment. It is evident that the VLIR Programme (Projects 7 and 8) has been drawn into the wider institutional political difficulties surrounding the demerger.
- On the MEDUNSA campus, the Programme's enabling environment has been compromised and threatens to derail the VLIR enterprise. Past history and recriminations are fuelling the unsettled situation. Project 7 has collapsed.
- Despite these difficulties, student research at MEDUNSA has continued, and staff research output has improved, ironically through mainly one former staff member in Project 7.
- VLIR will need to assess the situation on MEDUNSA before engaging further.

Programme Management Issues

- The leadership provided by the South Programme Coordinator has been widely applauded for its inclusiveness, effectiveness and attention to detail. The support provided by the Programme Support Office is also widely appreciated.
- Appreciation has also been expressed for the timely and sensitive manner in which VLIR head office in Brussels responds to and supports the Programme.
- There is widespread unhappiness with the report forms and the duplication between the information requested in the self-assessment and the annual report. Currently the logframe is not fit for purpose and fails to provide a tool for tracking and indeed measuring performance, assessing value for money and the effectiveness of the Programme. At the same time, some of the misery is self-afflicted as some Project goals have changed and people are reporting in the Self-Assessments against project purpose and indicators that have been modified.
- There is a need to undertake a Risk Analysis in the IUC development phase. This is not to say that IUC's should not be launched in problematic situations but to identify risks and threats to sustainability and to devise appropriate risk mitigation measures. The consequences of the apparently sudden departure of staff in Projects 7 and 8 might have been mitigated and Project 7 saved and Project 8 protected from the consequences of unexpected staff changes.
- A decision needs to be taken on the structure of the report forms and what information VLIR needs. Currently the logframe is not fit for purpose and fails to provide a tool for tracking and indeed measuring performance.
- There is a need to develop a more effective system of monitoring and reporting so that issues raised in quarterly and annual reports are followed up and addressed before they reach near crisis point.
- Across the Programme there have been significant improvements in research output, but copies of citations need to accompany annual and mid-term reports together with advice on what counts as a legitimate article or book or product.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

This Evaluation has shown that a solid research platform has been established and that, in broad terms, implementation has been effective. As Phase I has been as successful as might realistically have been hoped in terms of implementation and impact, it follows that the VLIR model of North/ South collaboration has been convincingly validated. These findings lead to two major overall judgements that frame specific recommendations that follow.

First, the cumulative weight of evidence points decisively to justification for continuation of the programme. Arrangements should be put in place for a smooth continuity into Phase II.

Second, whilst there is no need to tamper with fundamentals, the programme should capitalise on lessons learnt in Phase I and consolidate gains by refocusing projects and rationalising procedures specifically with Phase 2 aims in mind.

3.1. The Programme and its Projects

Without in any way gainsaying the above overall judgement regarding the success of the Programme, it should be remembered that not all of the eight individual projects unfolded in ways that were neatly aligned with original purposes and logframes. As the programme was entirely new, it is quite natural that original logframes were somewhat provisional and aspirational. The real thrust of each came to be realised only when the interests of academic staff and students coalesced with each other as well as with on-the-ground practicalities and constraints.

A necessary first step, then, is to refine and/or redefine the scope and aims of each project. This important step will need to be Janus-headed, looking at both the past and the future in terms of the need to redirect projects towards *intervention*. The case for such a move was stressed in all interviews; and in Phase 2 it is also necessary to achieve the 'Teaching' and 'Extension and Outreach' KRAs.

With respect to the possible reshaping of each project, details under the section 'Self-Assessment Reports - Individual Project Performances' (section 2) will not be repeated here. The nature of refining/ redefining is also of course a matter for the professional judgement of each of the respective teams. Nonetheless, the Evaluators wish to point out that Projects 1, 4, 5 and 6 appear to be in need of only minimal refinement, at most.

On the other hand:

- Project 2 needs to build on the focus and energy that began to emerge following its recruitment of two new members of staff.
- Project 3 would certainly benefit from limiting its original scope in line with the more realistically constrained focus that has emerged. It could also possibly benefit from replacing its production of texts with an approach that utilises (and adapts, as appropriate) existing high quality

materials that are freely available.¹⁹ Research could then focus on the more sustainable domain of monitoring the effectiveness of these materials and their adaptations in tandem with the pedagogies that are fit for purpose. Learning could then be taken to scale.

The evaluators therefore wish to recommend that the Project team revisit the overall conception of the Project 2 and, on the basis of evidence contained within the Dikgale data set compiled by Professor Alberts and using the data that has informed the preparation of the Atlas of Vulnerability by Professor Ayisi, reconceptualise the project around a more focused set of research areas. To this end it should be possible to merge Projects 2, 3 and 4, utilizing Professor Albert's data for points of departure. This would encourage a mushrooming of studies on lifestyles, socio-economic variables and basic skill needs, including the multiple literacies identified in Project 3 and on developing the chronic disease model proposed in Project 4.

To all intents and purposes, Project 7 has collapsed. Its sole remaining member of staff has (somewhat ironically) been one of the most prolific researchers in terms of publication outputs. She, together with the staff in Project 8, sees a merging of these two projects as a viable way forward. The evaluators note that the future of Projects 7 and 8 is framed within the larger institutional issue of the "de-merger" of MEDUNSA from University of Limpopo (see 3.2 below).

Once clarity has been achieved with respect to the purposes and scope of each of the Projects, there would be merit in reconceptualising each of them in relation to each other as well as in terms of their distinctive contributions to the overall theme of 'Human wellness in the context of global change - Finding solutions for Rural Africa'. In addition to the clarity it would bring, a diagrammatic picture or map of conceptualisation of this kind could also contribute to more productive working relationships across project teams.

3.2. The management of the Programme

The points above invoke the necessity of rewriting Logframes. If the logframe modality is to be used as a management tool, as we assume it is intended to be, then the logframe structure and reporting format needs to be sufficiently simple to allow individuals and teams, using agreed indicators, to assess directly and on a rolling basis the goal and purpose of the inputs and activities against the intended outcomes (results) in terms of the inputs (budgetary and other) over time. Formative indicators (milestones), especially quantitative ones, need to be set within a timeframe, usually annual, to enable progress to be measured over the specified time period. Summative indicators should be separately identified and used to measure performance at the end of a programme or project. The intervention logic, therefore, needs to be simple, precise and coherent, and not cluttered with narrative.

The Evaluator's experiences on both Turfloop and MEDUNSA campuses have foregrounded the absolutely key role of the Programme Coordinator (South). This highly specialised and demanding role can be performed effectively only by someone who is a recognised academic but who also has social skills and is adept at the hands-on work necessary to keep the programme running, and to keep

¹⁹ e.g. The Open University's 'Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa' (TESSA) project is an international research and development initiative which brings together teachers and teacher educators from across sub-Saharan Africa. It offers a range of materials (Open Educational Resources) in four languages to support school-based teacher education and training. For materials on Literacy - now the focus of Project 4 - see <http://www.tessafrica.net/pan-african-literacy>. Saide's 'African Storybook Project' is an initiative that stimulates and makes freely available openly licensed stories in local African languages for early reading - see <http://www.saide.org.za/african-storybook-project>

people happy. It would be unfortunate if the associated workload meant that a Programme Coordinator's own research languished as a result of Project demands, and that this person was reduced to simply servicing Projects in which other staff stand to gain - in status, careers, resources, and so on - from their increased research outputs. It is vital that Programme Managers have the benefit of good support at Programme level, and that procedures are as 'user-friendly' as possible in a context in which programme accountability to established and necessary procedures cannot be questioned. Still, it might be possible to simplify paperwork by ensuring that, for example, there is no overlap of data reported on different forms. Other measures such as the competence to roll over a modest percentage of allocations could help both Programme and Project leaders.

Budgetary allocations within Projects are at present left to the discretion of Project leaders. Strategies for distribution appear to range from meeting the needs of the most prolific researchers to equitable distribution amongst all staff as a means of encouraging 'buy in' to the Project. Guidelines in this regard might be worth considering, as long as these did not make procedures more cumbersome.

Even though there is talk of the signing of an MoU with MEDUNSA to enable the existing Projects 7 and 8 to continue, the MEDUNSA "demerger" presents risks. The fragility of relationships between the two institutions is exacerbated by the internal departmental difficulties that led to the collapse of Project 7 in MEDUNSA. The Evaluator's view is that Projects at MEDUNSA should not proceed into Phase II without the assurance that an enabling environment has been established. Establishing such an environment might require the services of an 'honest broker' from VLIR. In addition, whatever decisions are taken, the interests of the students must be taken into account and their commitment and performance to date rewarded.

3.3. Coordination between all parties involved

As listed in Self-Assessments, the names of staff participating in each Project include some who are dormant, or who have withdrawn altogether. It is essential that names be updated in tandem with the rewriting of Logframes as in 3.2 above. It is also important that changes brought about by staff mobility (and, possibly, commitment) are updated as Phase II proceeds.

There should be institutional mindfulness and awareness of possible logjams that hinder the Programme, and that ameliorative action is taken, if necessary. In Phase I, for example:

- Project participants - both staff and students - commented on the length of time taken for the approval of higher degree topics and ethical clearance. In one case, the delay in these procedures led to a student having to forfeit VLIR funding.
- The joint North/South PhD programme is a significant development. However, thought has not yet been applied to the implications of PhD rules that remain unchanged. One student, for example, has met all requirements for the award of PhD bar the University of Antwerp's additional requirement for publications. Under the University of Limpopo rules, which have no such requirement, the student would not have to cope with the present anxiety-filled interregnum as she waits to hear from journal editors.

Apart from the fostering of new skills, the present interaction of academics and staff from across the North/ South divide does much to serve coordination in general. Such effects could be enhanced if the possibility of more enduring exchanges could be promoted. For staff, the possibility of staff sabbatical exchanges could be considered, and more 'Post docs' stationed in the South certainly would build on the considerable benefits noted of the few 'Post docs' currently at Turfloop.

Finally, coordination could be facilitated if there were a clear exit-strategy that would limit staff uncertainties about the sustainability of the research trajectories and interventions they will have engaged in Phase II.

3.4. Overall conclusions and recommendations to VLIR-UOS and towards Phase II

We have highlighted significant Programme achievements during Phase 1 of the Programme. In making the case for a smooth transition to Phase II, we have offered a number of recommendations in respect of how aspects of the programme might be improved from within its present parameters. In this concluding section we offer recommendations from a broader perspective.

The institution itself should be encouraged to capitalise on the many success stories within the project, and take steps to embed advances into the broader university community. The Research Office, for example, could use Project experiences in presenting workshops on, for example:

- the importance of departments developing a clear research focus leading to developmental goals
- ways of leveraging research funding from national bodies.

Thus far the Programme has done well in attracting co-lateral funding. However, more could be done in raising the profile of the programme in the public arena. South African news and television programmes such as 'Carte Blanche' would in all likelihood find relevance and drama in the Programme's highlighting of, for example, serious environmental issues like the poor quality of water in the Olifants River, counterbalanced by the good news story of the development of women researchers, especially in some of the 'hard' sciences.

In moving forward in building on and mounting interventions, there could be advantages in linking with the burgeoning Open Education Resource (OER) movements in Africa. Mention was made above of the advantages to Project 3 of the TESSA resources. Project 6 could well benefit from association with the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM).²⁰ This consortium of 29 universities in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa aims to train a critical mass of Masters and PhD graduates in producing high-quality research responsive to the demands of Africa's farmers for innovations to enable sustainable livelihoods and national economic development. RUFORUM has a close working association with the Gates-funded AgShare project in which Masters students engage in action and participatory research that connects them to communities and smallholders. Outputs include high quality peer-reviewed research, case studies that are developed into OER teaching materials for undergraduates, and extension materials for farmers themselves.²¹

Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region in the world where girls are increasingly disadvantaged at the upper secondary level: there are just 76 girls for every 100 boys.²² Female participation in education is written into Millennium Development Goals and it is an almost obligatory component in most development projects. No such outcomes were written into the VLIR Project KRAs. However, all interventions have unintended consequences, either deleterious or benign. Phase I was no exception. In fact, the enrolment and contribution of women at both masters and PhD levels emerges as one of the as-yet great unheralded Programme outcomes. Much more could be made of this most praiseworthy achievement.²³

²⁰ <http://www.ruforum.org/content/about-us>

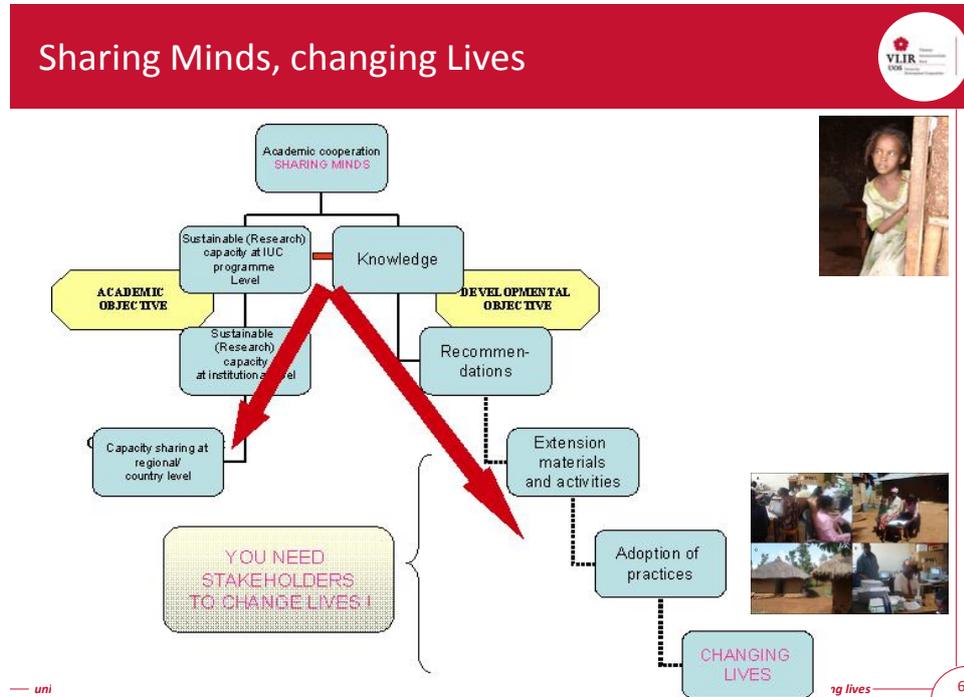
²¹ <http://www.oerafrica.org/agshare>

²² http://www.uis.unesco.org/FactSheets/Documents/Fact_Sheet_2010_Lit_EN.pdf

²³ There could be opportunities for inserting news stories into events such as National Women's Day (9 August 2014), or even in International Women's Day (observed on 8 March, 2014). Events such as these welcome the opportunity to celebrate milestone achievements.

ANNEXURES

Annex 1: The VLIR Programme Model and IUC Cycle in Summary

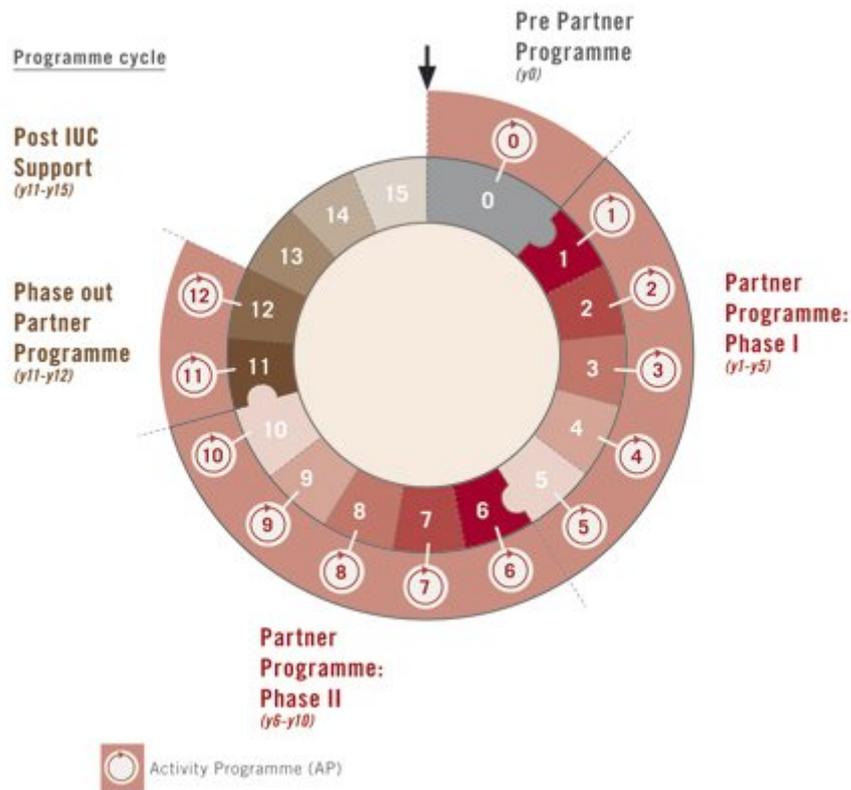


IUC Programme Cycle

Longstanding Partnerships

With reference to the figure underneath, VLIR-UOS engages in IUC partnerships covering approximately 17 years. This period is characterised by different phases which varying roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders involved.

The figures underneath, provide a summary overview of the IUC programme cycle. For more details reference is made to the IUC leaflet.



Phase In

The phase-in of an IUC partnership is marked by the following successive steps:

- a call for proposals followed by a pre-selection of IUC partner institutions
- the commission of an external evaluation resulting in a programme mission report on the basis of which the final partnership selection is made
- signing of a pre partner programme agreement provided resources to support the preparatory process that covers 15 to 24 months and consists of the following steps:
 - training and orientation of all stakeholders including the programme manager who is recruited by the concerned partner university
 - formulation of an identification phase partner programme
 - match making mission to Flanders
 - appointment of Flemish project leaders
 - formulation mission to the partner concerned
- review and expected approval of a phase I partner **programme: 2 successive 5-year programme**

An IUC Partnership is framed by 2 successive Five-year Partner programme (Phase I and Phase II). A Phase II Partner Programme is granted subject to a positive midterm evaluation in year 3-4 of phase I.

A Phase II Partner Programme may necessitate an additional more modest match making and formulation process.

Phase Out

Following a 10-year period of earmarked funding, IUC partnerships enter into a 5-year period of post IUC support. In this regard a distinction is made between:

- the phase out programme (year 11 and 12 if considering Phase 1 & 2 as Year 1-10)
- post IUC support

In order to facilitate the termination of the partner programme phase, limited support is provided such that scholars can graduate, and the financial reporting cycle can closed. In addition, a closing event during which the results of the final evaluation are discussed, as well as equipment handover is organised, marks the end of this phase. Administratively, this is framed by a Phase Out Activity Programme.

Post IUC support consists mainly in providing access to a number of mostly competitive IUC funds and/or activities. Among others, post IUC support is provided through:

- the IUC Research Initiatives Programme (RIP)
- the North South South Cooperation Programme (NSSCP)
- CTG programme for outreach initiatives
- ongoing support through the IUC Alliances (CTG, INASP, IFS)
- participation in partner level meetings and transversal training and exchanges/workshops
- Own Initiatives are possible for departments which did not benefit from IUC funding during Phase 2 of a IUC partner programme.

Annex 2: Interview Schedule

VLIR-IUC-University of Limpopo Programme Evaluation

All personal information gathered from this survey will be kept confidential and not divulged to your institution or VLIR.

Objective: To assess the impact and sustainability of the VLIR-UOS PROGRAMME.

Focus of the survey

The focus of this survey is to establish the key lessons learned for future policy and practice.

Please could you provide the following background information?

Your name. (Optional)	
Name of your university, department / unit.	
Name of the partner university, department / unit.	
Your position in the university, department / unit. (Optional)	
Title of your project.	
Number of years the joint project has been running.	

SECTION 1: Origins and conception of the VLIR-UOS PROGRAMME

1. Where did the ideas for your VLIR-UOS PROGRAMME application come from? How was the need for the application arrived at?
2. What particular features of the VLIR-UOS Programme made it attractive to you?
3. Who were the key stakeholders involved in conceptualising and securing the VLIR-UOS PROGRAMME? What role did you play, if at all?
4. Do you think there were any stakeholders who were not involved in developing the programme but who you now think ought to have been involved? If yes, who were they and what difference do you think their closer involvement might have made to the Programme?
5. Are there any features you would wish to change? Please elaborate.
6. Has the roll-out of the Programme faced any resistance? If yes, where did the resistance come from? As far as you were aware, what was the rationale behind/reason for the resistance? How did resistance manifest itself? How, if at all, was it overcome?
7. Who in your institution are the key supporters of the VLIR-UOS PROGRAMME? How do they 'sell' it to your colleagues?

SECTION 2: Development and Implementation of VLIR-UOS Programme/Project

8. Please describe your VLIR-UOS Project and how it has been rolled out in your Faculty/ Department/Unit.
9. What key factors most facilitated the development of the VLIR-UOS PROGRAMME in your institution?
10. What key factors most facilitated the development of the VLIR-UOS

PROGRAMME in your partner institution?

11. What successes have there been in your institution?
12. What successes have there been in your partner institution?
13. What disappointments have there been in your institution?
14. What disappointments have there been in partner institution?
15. Have there been any specific factors which have made facilitating your programme difficult? If yes, please list them and indicate how they were overcome, if at all?
16. In summary:
 - What problems have you encountered?
 - What have been the major challenges?
 - Were they foreseen at the beginning?
 - How were they addressed, if at all, in your own institution and in the partner institution?
17. What have been the key lessons learned in terms of:
 - Any strengths of the VLIR-UOS Programme?
 - Any weaknesses of the VLIR-UOS Programme?
18. In summary, has the VLIR-UOS Programme been successful so far? Yes/No - Why?
What do you consider are the critical factors in this?
19. Are there any major changes you would recommend should be made to the VLIR-UOS Programme?

SECTION 3: VLIR-UOS Programme Management

20. What is your overall impression of the VLIR-UOS Programme?
What factors have you found particularly important in the management of the VLIR-UOS Programme?
Have there been any major issues with regards the funding of the VLIR-UOS Programme? If yes, please list them.
How were they handled? Have they been successfully handled?

SECTION 4: Sustainability and institutionalisation

21. What measures are you taking to ensure the sustainability of the VLIR-UOS Programme?
22. How and in what ways has VLIR-UOS Programme influenced the rest of your university?
23. What risks do you see in the future sustainability of the VLIR-UOS Programme?
24. What might your university do to assure the development and sustainability of the VLIR-UOS Programme?
 - (a) Through funding arrangements and their disbursement?
 - (b) In terms of management, both at the centre and in the faculties/departments?
25. What might your partner university do to assure the development and sustainability of the VLIR-UOS Programme?
 - i. Through funding arrangements and their disbursement?

- (b) In terms of management, both at the centre and in the faculties/departments?
26. How do you see the VLIR-UOS Programme moving forward in the future?
27. Are the influences of the VLIR-UOS Programme sustainable in your university as regards:
- (a) teaching and learning?
- (b) the University's Mission (outreach and equity agenda)
28. Are the influences of the VLIR-UOS Programme sustainable in your partner university as regards:
- (a) teaching and learning?
- (b) the University's Mission (outreach and equity agenda)
29. Do you have any other comments you would like to make?

Section 5: IMPACT (KRA and Qualitative criteria)

30. On a scale of 1-10, please could you indicate the level of impact of your project on the following areas:

Areas	Scale 1 - 10
Research	
Teaching	
Extension and outreach	
Academic capacity building	
Staff professional development/HR development	
Institutional Management and Development	
Mobilisation of additional resources and opportunities	

31. On a scale of 1-10, please could you indicate the level of Impact of your project on the following areas:

Areas	Scale 1- 10
Quality	
Effectiveness	
Efficiency	
Impact	
Development Relevance	

32. Please add anything further you wish to raise.

Annex 3: Opinionnaire

VLIR-IUC-University of Limpopo PROGRAMME EVALUATION

The following statements were used in the course of the interviews to obtain a snapshot of views on the Partnership. Interviewees were asked whether they Agreed, Agreed in part, Disagreed in part or totally disagreed with the statements.

Statements
1. Academics from Belgium generally feel they are better placed to know what is academically more appropriate for their counterparts at the University of Limpopo
2. Academics from Belgium take the lead in the research, whilst their counterparts at the University of Limpopo play less important roles.
3. It is difficult for northern partners to find areas of research which enable their counterparts at the University of Limpopo to take the lead.
4. University of Limpopo scholars registered with Belgian institutions for higher degrees are more obligated to the Belgian institution than to their own home institution.
5. Building high level capacity, especially in the sciences and information technology, will increase the brain-drain from South Africa.
6. Focusing on research and academic goals and outcomes in Limpopo Province is more important than focusing on development goals and outcomes.
7. To achieve the outcomes intended, at the University of Limpopo it is best for Belgian scholars to adopt a top-down approach..
8. Given its size, it is unrealistic expecting the VLIR-IUC- Programme to have a significant impact on the people of Limpopo.
9. In the context of Limpopo, the use of Interdisciplinary Action Research is more appropriate than in-depth single area research.
10. The strong emphasis on research threatens possible improvements in the teaching and extension/outreach dimensions of the N-S partnership.
11. Focusing on scholarship is more important than developing relationships, trust and mutual respect.
12. The relative lack of resources at the University of Limpopo poses a serious threat to the sustainability of existing partnership programmes.
13. Without harnessing the scientific and educational power of Belgian Universities, the University of Limpopo will fail in its mission to become first rate university.
14. Because of the relatively small scale of the VLIR-IUC, outcomes from the IUC are <u>unlikely</u> to have much impact on UL's policies, strategies or governance.
15. The University of Limpopo sees the VLIR-IUC programme simply as one of a number of externally supported projects, and not significant in changing the institution's strategic planning and programme implementation practices.
16. There is evidence of duplication of resources and effort across the University of Limpopo occasioned by the presence of different donors and funders.
17. In the core area of research the priority outcomes should continue to be limited mainly to the number of published papers in internationally and nationally refereed journals and books.
18. Providing Belgian scholars with grants to undertake collaborative research in South Africa

would raise the level of impact.
19. Without reforms in the enabling Higher Education environment in South Africa and within the University of Limpopo in particular, the gains in scholarship and in the provision of resources (ICT especially) arising from the present partnership programme are unlikely to be sustained.
20. Up to the present, the VLIR-IUC programme has been unable to generate a coherent and efficient research and capacity building environment in the University of Limpopo.
21. Undertaking research based in the University of Limpopo has less value than undertaking research based in Belgian universities.
22. Scholars from the University of Limpopo cannot afford the costs of going to Europe

Annex 4: List of persons interviewed

VLIR-IUC-University of Limpopo PROGRAMME EVALUATION

University Senior Management

Professor N M Mokgalong Vice-Chancellor and Principal
Professor MM Sibara, Deputy Vice Chnacellor, Research & Academic
Mr Herman Du Toit, Executive Director Finance
Dr A. Ngoepe, Quality Assurance

VLIR Management (Limpopo)

Professor Kingsley K Ayisi VLIR Coordinator
Professor Jeffrey Mphahlele VLIR MEDUNSA Coordinator
Ms Dimakatso Administrator
Ms Flora Administrator
Mr Gert Roos Chief Accountant MEDUNSA
Ms Renette Lombaard Financial Controller, VLIR Account, MEDUNSA

Project 1

Professor M. Lesaoana, Dr B.M. Petja, S. Ndou, Richard ,Claudine ,Timotheus
Patricia Sebola, Uche Anokwe, Inos Dhau, Shoki.

Project 2

Professor T Sodi, Professor J Makhubele, Dr C Berman, Maraa Aphanie, Kgopa Bontle, Judy Masola,
Linda Shirindi, Tshishonga Ndivhuwo

Project 3

Professor R. McCabe, Nomatsorane Bongiwe, Mpumy Cele, Lehlogonolo Makola, Johannes

Project 4

Professor M. Alberts, Felistas Mashinya, Jackson Ngwetjana, Thabo Magwai, Makola Phineas,
Mampeula Nakampe, Mary Machotela, Abram Dikotope, Solomon Choma.

Project 5

Professor A Jooste, Dr C. Bal, Jeffrey Lebepe, Kat Matlou, El Makushu

Project 6

Professor J Ng'ambi, Professor P Mashela, Professor I Ncube, Caroline Lebsoalo, Yvonne Maila,
Kagiso Shadung, Vivi Mathabatha, Zakhelein Dube, David Brown.

Project 7

Dr Hendry Heever, Dr Rose Burnett, Dr Rmm Ditsele, Ms Lekoma Kgothatso, Ms Lisbeth Lebelo.
Musa Manganye, Linda Skaal?

Project 8

Professor M. Nchabeleng, Leah Nemarude, Siyazi Mda, Nomathemba Taukobong, Robert
Ramugondo, Lizzi

Northern Partners interviewed

Professor Bob Colebunders, Programme Coordinator.
Professor Koen Verhoef, Project 1.
Professor Herman Meulemans, Project 2.
Professor J-P Van geertruyden, Project 4.
Professor Lieven Bervoets, Project 5.
Professor Marc van Sprundel, Project 7.
Professor J-P Bogers, Project 8.

Annex 5: List of abbreviations

CHE	Council on Higher Education (South Africa).
DDSS	Dikgale Demographic Surveillance Centre.
DHET	Department for Higher Education and Training (South Africa).
EC	Evaluation Commission.
ESKOM	South African Electrical Supply Commission.
GIS	Global Information Satellite.
HE	Higher Education.
ICT	Information and Communication Technology.
IUC	Flemish Inter-University Council.
KRA	Key Results Area.
MEDUNSA	Medical University of South Africa.
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding.
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation.
NRF	National Research Foundation.
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme.
PCM	Project Cycle Management.
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy.
PL	Project Leader.
PM	Project Manager.
PSU	Programme Support Unit.
RAVAC	Risk and Vulnerability Assessment Centre.
RSA	Republic of South Africa.
RUFORUM	Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture.
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic Targets.
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures (financial).
TESSA	Teacher Education in sub-Saharan Africa.
UL	University of Limpopo, South Africa.
URAP	University Ranking by Academic Performance.
VC	Vice-Chancellor.
VfM	Value for Money.
VLIR	Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad.

VLIR-UOS supports partnerships
between universities and university colleges
in Flanders and the South
looking for innovative responses
to global and local challenges

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