

Guide – Formulation of Short Initiatives (SI) and TEAM projects

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Introduction to formulation guidelines

This basic guide¹ translates the principles of the VLIR-UOS Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) policy into a basic guide for the formulation of VLIR-UOS supported projects. The formulation of a project is much more than writing a document. It is a participative process in which partners co-create a project based on a shared vision of change, and a shared understanding of the current situation.

This project formulation guide provides practical and operational support and information on the different modules that need to be developed to arrive at a qualitative project proposal. The development of these interrelated modules is explained in a stepwise process.

This formulation guidelines document is specific for Short Initiatives (SI) and TEAM projects.

What is new?

The guide consists of 8 Modules² as demonstrated below:



The added value is that the modules are linked to each other, for example based on the context analysis in Module 1 a theory of change is formulated, alignment is sought with the generic VLIR-UOS Theory of Change for TEAM/SI projects and the standard project domains (of intermediate change) are selected. In the case of SI projects³, these domains are used to plan activities in Module 5 and define the indicators in Module 7. In the case of TEAM projects the indicators are not part of the Stage 1 Concept notes.

Finally, the modules will make it possible in a future online environment to be used as a tool not only for planning, but also for reporting whereby switching between modules will be possible in a swift manner. During formulation, it is recommended to move back and forth between modules, it is not necessary to strictly follow the sequential order from 1 to 8.

¹ This guide mainly draws from the [European Commission's Project Cycle Management guidelines](#), [HIVOS Theory of Change handbook](#) and the [SDG Compass guide](#).

² The modules are inspired on the PRINCE2 methodology and themes for project management.

³ This is a step that at level of the TEAM projects will be part of the 2nd selection stage of fully fledged proposals.

How to use this guide?

The guide outlines the basic ideas and steps related to every module and provides suggestions on useful approaches/tools. The guide is intended to be used as a reference guide in which the brief summaries (blue boxes) at the beginning of every chapter enable the reader to have a quick overview of the document (and the formulation process). At the end of every module, a set of guiding questions is provided on how to integrate the SDG principles (orange boxes).⁴ This information should help to fill out the formats (Excel sheet and Word document) when submitting a new project proposal. For details of a particular call, the future call documents with additional requirements / selection criteria should be consulted when preparing the submission. This guide contains only information about the general concepts per module, not the requirements of a particular call.

The symbols below are used to highlight references to a particular module of the guide, the SDG principles, gender, and specific requirements for Short Initiative of TEAM Concept note proposals.

Legend

-  refers to linkages between the modules
-  Leave No One Behind principle (LNOB)
-  Interconnectedness & indivisibility principle (INT)
-  Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSP)
-  Gender

SDG principles

Before explaining the project formulation steps, the guiding SDG principles and transversal themes need to be introduced which will be useful to keep in mind throughout the different modules. All VLIR-UOS supported projects are expected to be SDG-proof. This means that the SDG principles ‘leave no one behind, interconnectedness and multi-stakeholder partnerships’ should be integrated during the formulation process, implementation and monitoring, evaluation and learning phase. These principles underpin the United Nation’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁵

Leave no one behind

The principle of leaving no one behind (LNOB) can be defined as a three-part imperative: to end absolute poverty in all its forms, to stop group-based discrimination that results in unequal outcomes for

⁴ Adapted from the [SDG Proofing Toolkit](#) (2021) developed for Belgian Development Cooperation.

⁵ [THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development \(un.org\)](#)
[SDGs as a compass for Belgian development cooperation: Capacity building package – HIVA \(ku-leuven.be\)](#)

disadvantaged populations, and to take action to help the furthest behind. This means that VLIR-UOS supported projects should be inclusive, in other words mainstream the LNOB-principle throughout the project cycle to ensure that vulnerable and marginalised populations are included in and benefit from higher education partnerships for development. It is important to acknowledge the heterogeneity in vulnerable groups. There are inequalities between groups (inter-group inequalities: differences between ethnic groups, regions, women and men) and inequalities within a group (inter-individual inequalities: within a certain region some people are more left behind than others, within a group of women some are more vulnerable than others). Being left behind is also multi-dimensional (e.g., it can happen that you are economically left behind but not politically) and context-dependent (e.g., the groups left behind in Indonesia are not necessarily the same as in Kenya).

Having a clear understanding of LNOB is an important first step. Exclusion, discrimination and inequality is a structural problem. It does not disappear spontaneously, because it is grounded in deeply rooted inequality mechanisms and unbalanced power relations. There is a pro-active approach needed to induce systemic transformation and develop inclusive societies in the long run. Such an approach should be based on human rights and support processes striving towards equal rights, participation and empowerment of those left behind. VLIR-UOS supported projects should do no harm and do as much as possible for the far left behind.

VLIR-UOS projects should take the LNOB principle into account by looking at partners with whom they work, at beneficiaries for whom they work and at their topical/methodological focus. VLIR-UOS encourages that projects take vulnerable groups into account, by putting forward partnerships with mid-range or weaker institutions, by awarding scholarships to a diversity of beneficiaries and by promoting transformative or community-based types of research. More precisely, international top higher education institutions are considered only when participating as supporting partners in projects, scholarship attribution is not only based on academic excellence in terms of scientific output but also related to potential as change agent within the institution, and mainstreaming approaches are put in place to consider inclusion and (gender) equality in each project. Moreover, projects are encouraged and facilitated to develop an uptake strategy that takes into account the views and needs of vulnerable groups to ensure that solutions, practices and policies with high development relevance are accessible and beneficial to these groups. In order to achieve this, LNOB should be integrated/operationalised at different stages in the project cycle: preparation/analysis, planning and implementation, monitoring, evaluation and learning (Figure 1). More details are provided in the modules with guiding questions for integrating the principle.

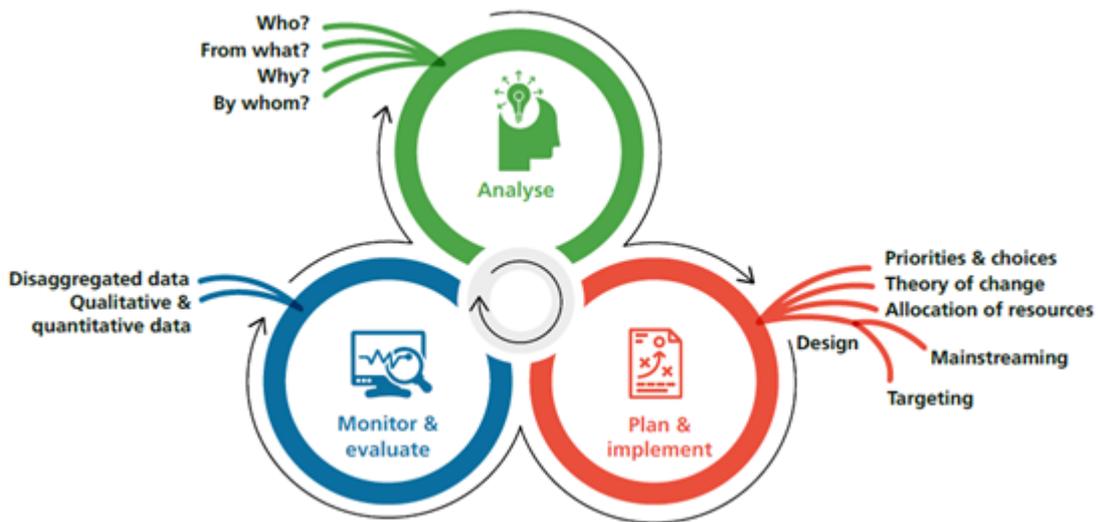


Figure 1: The three steps of the SDC Guide to LNOB (SDC, 2018)

Tools/input	LNOB good practices and thematic working aids (Guide de l'Agence Suisse de Coopération) SDG as a compass for Belgian Development cooperation (HIVA & IOB) LNOB indices of countries (Overseas Development Initiative)
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Interconnectedness

The principle of interconnectedness (INT) refers to the interlinkages and indivisible nature of the SDGs. VLIR-UOS recognises that given the complexity, scale and interconnectedness of current societal challenges, meaningful social, economic and ecological transformations can only be realised by starting from a holistic and integrated approach to the SDGs. To accelerate progress towards realizing Agenda 2030, VLIR-UOS supported projects should follow a more integrated approach that addresses multiple goals simultaneously, rather than narrow, sectoral approaches that focus on one or an excessively narrow subset of goals at a time. More precisely, VLIR-UOS encourages projects to reflect on their position in the interplay of global challenges and national needs, and to bring together the different types of expertise needed to successfully implement the project.

During project formulation, it is important to look at a problem from an interconnected perspective. As an essential first step in considering the complexity of societal change, all VLIR-UOS supported projects develop a holistic context analysis (Module 1) which moves beyond sectoral and disciplinary borders. This context analysis should explore the interlinkages between different SDGs to identify positive and negative trade-offs and side-effects (e.g., agriculture is linked to climate change, health, gender roles, biodiversity, etc.). Those negative trade-offs should also get a place in the risk analysis (Module 6), where mitigation strategies can be proposed.

Creating and sharing knowledge across disciplines is essential to make societal impact, inform systemic change and accelerate progress towards SDGs. Therefore, projects are encouraged to form inter-disciplinary teams in order to build connections between departments, academic disciplines, universities,

regions and even non-academic stakeholders in the case of transdisciplinary research. During the partnering stage, it is useful to reflect on what different types of academic disciplines can be connected in interdisciplinary teams to tackle a problem from a complexity-oriented perspective. The stakeholder analysis should reflect on the potential interlinkages at different levels (academic and non-academic actors in civil society, public, private sectors) and inform the development of strategies for active engagement with other sectors and domains. For example, interconnectedness can be stimulated through stakeholder workshops, knowledge sharing platforms or multi-stakeholder partnerships (see below).

Tools / Background materials	SDG Dashboard Joint Research Center https://www.agenda-2030.fr/beta/
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Multi-stakeholder partnerships

The principle of multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSP) promotes cooperation and partnerships at different stages and spanning the boundaries of civil society, private sector, government, and academia. The concerted effort of a variety of stakeholders is required given the complexity, scale, and interconnectedness of the current societal challenges. For VLIR-UOS, MSPs are key to increase impact in society and stimulate uptake of results.

Three different types of multi-stakeholder partnerships can be plotted on a spectrum from mere add-on to an eco-systems perspective (Figure 1Figure 2). Short and medium-term projects supported by VLIR-UOS, such as Short Initiatives and TEAM, should work towards an integrated approach, and at least embrace the principle as an ‘add-on’.

As an add-on	A more integrated approach	Eco-system perspective
<p>Multiple actors exchange information, coordinate, or work alongside each other to address different components of a development-related goal.</p> <p>Actors implement their own programmes but the interaction generates an add-on value to the existing plans and programmes of the respective partners.</p>	<p>Multiple actors work in an integrated way to jointly address a development-related goal.</p> <p>Different actors are involved in the planning, implementation and follow up of joint programmes.</p>	<p>Contributing to the strengthening of an ecosystem of different societal organizations working on a specific theme. Depending on the thematic area, the focus might be on different combinations of academic, business, civil society, and/or governmental institutions.</p> <p>(e.g.: social and ecological upgrading of supply chains)</p>

Figure 2: Different types of multi-stakeholder approaches (HIVA and IOB, 2020: p. 28).

Multi-stakeholder partnerships should be seen as a means to an end, not a solution in itself. It has to be functional and allow for continuous learning and flexibility to solve complex, global challenges.

The potential obstacles for working with different stakeholders can be part of the risk analysis and risk responses to deal with diverging interests or powerful actors in a partnership (Module 6).

VLIR-UOS considers it a minimum requirement for all interventions to develop a thorough stakeholder analysis with an uptake-oriented stakeholder management strategy to maximise impact and application of new knowledge, practices or services (Module 4). As compared to the TEAM projects, where the stakeholder management strategy is part of the 2nd stage of fully fledged proposals, the requirements for SI projects are in this respect rather during project development, than at the moment of project proposal writing.

The engagement of a diverse range of stakeholders in interventions is promoted, especially those left behind (local grassroots movements, women’s associations, youth networks, trade unions, business,

government, ...). The scope of involving a wide variety of stakeholders will depend on the context, resources, ambition and capabilities of the project. Crucial is that the most relevant stakeholders are consulted from the start of the project, to identify their needs and influence, until the uptake of results, to make sure the project has societal impact.

Tools / background materials	Multistakeholder partnerships MSP (Universiteit Wageningen) The Partnership Initiative Guidebook Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships 2030 Platform (GIZ)
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Transversal and priority themes

Gender

VLIR-UOS is committed to achieving more gender equity and equality in the VLIR-UOS partner countries, including Belgium, both in the higher education sector and in society in general, through its programmes and projects. VLIR-UOS gender policy follows a threefold strategy to promote gender equality. Firstly, projects should **fix the numbers** and monitor sex-disaggregated data. Secondly, (long-term) projects should **fix the organisation** and ensure adequate structures, decision-making mechanisms and policies are in place to promote gender equality. Thirdly, projects should **fix the content** and improve knowledge on gender. There are two pathways of integrating gender in VLIR-UOS portfolio, through **targeting** stand-alone projects with a specific focus on gender or through the **mainstreaming** of gender in all projects (e.g. all projects have an outcome / activities related to gender).

Why gender matters?

Sustainable and inclusive development cannot be achieved if women and girls, who constitute half of the population, do not have equal rights and prospects. Furthermore, insufficient use of human capital within the higher education sector has a harmful impact on the development of higher education institutions, as it decreases efficiency and excellence by missing out on women's involvement at all academic levels. More in general, ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls is also crucial to accelerating sustainable development. It has been proven time and again, that empowering women and girls has a multiplier effect, and stimulates economic growth and development.

Fixing the numbers: focuses on increasing women's (or men's) participation to have a balance

- Does the project ensure gender balanced representation in the team? (cfr. VLIR-UOS policy: 40-60% representation of underrepresented group)
- Does the project ensure gender balanced participation and representativeness at project activities? (e.g., by providing day care during training)
- Does the project identify cultural/religious/legal restrictions that would not allow women or men to participate in project activities (e.g., identify the reasons making it difficult for young female academics to work outside office hours)?

Fixing the organisation: focuses on the institutional structure and how gender is (implicitly) understood

- Does the project create structural and organisational changes in the gender balance of the higher education institution (e.g., developing a strategy and action plans on gender, appointing a gender focal point committee / work group / task force)?
- Does the institution have a gender policy (incl. a transparent policy for scholarship selection) and action plan?
- Does the project include a member with gender expertise? Does the project incorporate mechanisms to ensure gender balanced participation in decision-making processes?
- Does the project engage with women's groups, associations, NGOs as project counterparts and/or as gender advisors? (e.g., consulting a microfinancing institution for women on fertiliser use)

Fixing the content: focuses on integrating gender analysis (what is the effect of gender on the intervention, how should the intervention be designed to deal with this effect, and what is the effect of the intervention on gender)

- Does the project consider the way in which the situations/needs/challenges of men and women differ? (= gender analysis) (e.g., investigating the role of women in the environmental management practices of indigenous communities)
- Does the project take different gender roles and divisions of labour between men and women into account? (= gender sensitivity) (e.g., considering gender differences in a research on unemployment)
- Does the project focus on changing gender roles and divisions of labour between men and women? (= gender transformative approach) (e.g., working on awareness raising with girls for HIV/AIDS prevention)
- Does the project integrate sex and gender analysis into research? (e.g., including perception differences between men and women about ecosystem services as confounding factor in a research). Are the team members trained or will they receive training on gender and diversity?
- Does the project develop an uptake strategy that considers the views and needs of disadvantaged groups to ensure that solutions, practices, and policies with high development relevance are accessible and taken up by disadvantaged groups?

Environment

As we work towards sustainable development, VLIR-UOS strives to ensure the protection of planetary boundaries, highly valuing **environmental sustainability**⁶. VLIR-UOS therefore urges projects to integrate the transversal theme of environment throughout all phases of project cycle management, starting with the project proposal. Environment can be integrated on two levels: within the **project management** (e.g. CO₂ compensation, waste reduction, sustainable food consumption at events, ...) and in the **project content** (as an objective or intermediary result or as environmental sensitiveness). We take into account a **reciprocal relationship** between projects and the environment, paying attention to the (negative/positive) effects of the project on the environment as well as the (negative/positive) effects of the environment on the project. VLIR-UOS projects are asked to analyse these mutual effects and to propose measures/actions which strengthen positive effects and/or mitigate negative effects. Throughout this process, projects should be guided by the **'do no harm' principle** as a bare minimum to prevent, reduce and control the risk of environmental harm. Projects should strive to contribute to conservation

⁶ **Environmental sustainability** refers to the capacity of the environment to maintain its key functions and processes on the long run. It means not taking from the Earth more than what it's giving. Source: [the Environmental Integration Tool \(EIT\) by Louvain Coopération](#)

and protection of the environment in the long term. Following the principle of **interconnectedness**, interlinkages between environmental and socio-economic factors should be taken into account and attention should be paid to potential trade-offs.

VLIR-UOS projects are invited to use the **guiding questions** underneath as well as the **additional toolkits on environmental integration** mentioned below.

General

What is the environmental context of the project? What are the main environmental issues? What is the relationship between the environmental and socio-economic context? (Module 1)

Is the project's main objective in line with the 'do no harm' principle, striving to prevent the risk of environmental harm and contributing to conservation and protection of the environment?

Effects of the project on the environment

What are the possible (negative/positive) effects of the project on the environment? (Module 2)

These possible (negative/positive) effects could be related to the **project management** (e.g. CO2 emissions due to international travel) as well as at to the **project content** (e.g. increase in chemical waste due to the installation of a new laboratory).

How do you estimate the degree of impact (low/average, high, positive/negative) of the project on these environmental factors?

What actions/measures will you undertake to strengthen positive effects and/or mitigate negative effects of the project on these environmental factors?

Effects of the environment on the project

What are the possible (negative/positive) effects of the environment on the project? Which risks related to environmental factors might have an effect on the realisation of the project? (Module 6)

These possible (negative/positive) effects could be related to the **project management** (e.g. deregulated seasonal rains have an impact on the project planning) as well as at to the **project content** (e.g. erosion decreases soil fertility). These could be effects on e.g. the implementation schedule, sustainability of the project, quality of the project, results of the project, etc.

How do you estimate the degree of impact (low/average, high, positive/negative) of these environmental factors on the project?

What actions/measures will you undertake to strengthen positive effects and/or mitigate negative effects of environmental factors on the project? These actions/measures can be related to the project management as well as the project content. The mutual relationship and potential trade-offs between environmental factors and socio-economic characteristics should be taken into account.

Table 1: Guiding questions and tools for integrating gender and environment

	Gender	Environment
Guiding questions	See box above	See box above
Other available tools/ approaches	<p>Gender mainstreaming in higher education toolkit (INASP)</p> <p>Gender mainstreaming the project cycle (UNIDO)</p> <p>Selection commission members are made aware of unconscious/implicit biases in evaluating project/scholarship applications, for example through this video (source: The Royal Society).</p> <p>A website providing recommendations, examples, case studies and tools for sex and gender analysis in projects: Gendered Innovations</p> <p>This toolkit clearly explains and provides guidance on how to integrate gender in research. A useful checklist is given Toolkit – Gender in EU-funded research</p> <p>Understanding gender dimension for projects by the European Commission: Video</p> <p>The EU-funded EUGENMED project developed a Roadmap for a gender-sensitive approach to health care research and practice in Europe.</p> <p>Toolkit for Integrating Gender-Sensitive Approach into Research and Teaching</p> <p>Manuals with guidelines on the integration of sex and gender analysis into research contents, recommendations for curricula development and indicators</p> <p>Guidelines Gender-Sensitive Teaching: An introduction for teaching staff in STEM</p>	<p>KLIMOS Environmental Sustainability Toolkit</p> <p>Louvain Développement Environmental Integration Tool (EIT)</p> <p>The Educaid.be methodological sheet</p>
Input/ Background reading	<p>VLIR-UOS gender policy</p> <p>Inspiration guide on how to integrate gender sensitivity in non-governmental cooperation (NL/FR)</p> <p>EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025</p> <p>Communauté de pratique F3E (FR)</p>	<p>KLIMOS Environmental Sustainability toolkit database</p>

In addition to integrating these transversal themes as put forward by the Belgian regulatory framework for development cooperation, VLIR-UOS identifies **Digital for Development (D4D)**, **decolonisation** and **global citizenship** as priority themes which play an important role in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals. Respect for **decent work and human rights** are also important policy areas for the entire VLIR-UOS portfolio and projects, calling for action to prevent and protect involved people and beneficiaries from risks related to violations in these areas. Specifically for Digital for development (D4D) a D4D flash card was developed during FYP1 to support project promoters in formulating project proposals and annual reports. These aspects will be further explored during the coming five year programme 2022-2026.

Module 1: Context

ESSENCE

This aspect describes the context and justifies the importance of the project. It delimits the scope, contextualizes the reasons and describes why the project is needed (i.e. the problems being faced). The objective is to develop a broad – and shared – understanding of the system in which the desired change is needed.

KEY QUESTIONS

Sustainable development context:

- ✓ *Scope & identification:* Why is the project needed? What are key societal/developmental challenges in the region? Who is being left behind, from what and to what degree?
- ✓ *Causes:* What are the underlying causes / factors and actors shaping the problem?
- ✓ *Interlinkages:* How are sustainable development issues / problems linked to each other?

Partner institutional context:

- ✓ What are the key strengths and weaknesses of the partner institution / unit / department?
- ✓ What would be the added value of the project for the local institution/local team? Any previous experience between the project partners?

TOOLS/APPROACHES

- ✓ [Rich picture](#)
- ✓ [5 Why's?](#)
- ✓ [SWOT analysis](#)
- ✓ Venn diagrams
- ✓ Spider diagrams
- ✓ [What is Context Analysis? - YouTube](#)

Every project takes place in a context that determines the conditions and the opportunities for a successful project. That is why every project needs to have a good understanding of the context in order to make informed strategic choices when formulating the project, increasing the chances of success. This context analysis includes a thorough analysis of the sustainable development problem(s) the project wants to tackle and the added value for the local partner institution.

Context and problem analysis

Sustainable development context

A problem analysis identifies the challenges of an existing situation and analyses the 'cause and effect' relationships between the identified problems. These 'problems' occur in a context which is shaped by various **actors** and **factors** (e.g., historical, social, political, economic, cultural, ecological, geographical factors). The problem analysis involves three main steps:

- (i) Definition of the framework and subject of analysis and identification of the major problems faced by target groups and beneficiaries (scope & identification);
- (ii) Analysis of the causes of the problem (Why is it a problem?);
- (iii) Interlinkages and effects in the broader context in which these problems occur.

During project formulation, it is important to reflect on who is at risk, from what, why and by whom in the context you want to work. The context analysis should delve deeper into the factors and actors that make certain people vulnerable. These factors can include discrimination, geography, vulnerability to shocks, governance, socio-economic status (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Five factors of LNOB: assessing the evidence of who is left behind and to what degree? (adapted from UNDP “What does it mean to leave no one behind?”, 2018)

To support the analysis of the factors shaping the problems, the following table can be used during a project formulation workshop and adjusted to the specific project context :

Factors	
Discrimination	<i>On the basis of assumed or ascribed identity or status (sex, age, disability, social groups)</i>
Geography	<i>Isolation, risk or exclusion due to location, includes environmental degradation, transport, technology</i>
Socio-economic status	<i>Multidimensional poverty, inequalities</i>
Governance	<i>Laws, policies, institutions, voice & participation, includes informal and traditional governing systems</i>
Vulnerability to shocks	<i>Includes conflict, climate, environmental shocks</i>

The identified problems also need to be framed within United Nation’s Agenda 2030 and the [17 Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs). During the context analysis, it is desirable to start reflecting on how the problems are interconnected; taking a holistic approach and acknowledging the complexity and global nature of the problems under consideration. A holistic context analysis moves beyond sectoral

and disciplinary borders and should describe how working on one sustainable development challenge can have positive or negative spill-over effects on others, requiring collaboration between different disciplines.

VLIR-UOS considers global engagement for higher education as a goal (SDG 4: Quality Education) and a means for attaining other SDGs through knowledge co-creation, transfer and valorisation. **In the long run, Short Initiatives and TEAM projects are expected to contribute to more sustainable and equitable development by fostering:**

- **Application of solutions and evidence-based policies**
- **A global community of skilled individuals who act as global citizens in relevant sectors**
- **Knowledge-driven global partnerships**

✚ **The targets linked to particular SDGs will come back in other modules when specifying the desired changes (Module 2) and indicators (Module 7).**

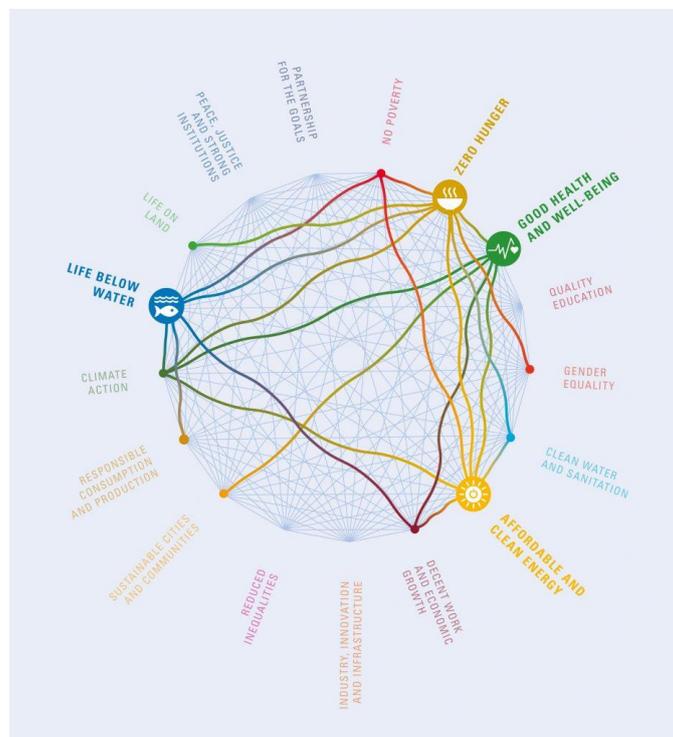


Figure 4: Illustration of interconnectedness of some SDGs (Adapted from International Council for Science, *"A guide to SDG interactions: From Science to Implementation"*, 2017)

Institutional context of the partner HEI

The institutional context analysis focuses on the capacity constraints and needs/priorities of the local partner institution (partner HEI) and in particular the involved research & educational units/departments.

Describe the added value of the project in addressing these capacity constraints and in enabling the local institution to become a driver of change (within the sustainable development context described under 1.1.) linked with the proposed project outcomes. Moreover, it should demonstrate local ownership of the project.

Checklist to integrate the SDG principles in Module 1

The problem analysis needs to give due attention to the general context integrating the three SDG principles and reflect on **environmental** issues (analysing the environmental context and its links with socio-economic issues) and **gender** issues (analysing the way in which the situations/needs/challenges of men and women differ in relationship to the problem). Below a check list with an number of proposed questions to assist in the reflection process.

<p>Leaving No One Behind 🧑🏿</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Have you identified which groups are (at risk of being) left behind within the intervention area (country, region) and from what they are excluded? ✓ Have you analysed why they are left behind (considering intersecting factors / underlying causes)? ✓ Have you formulated clear definitions or criteria for poverty, marginalization, exclusion, ...? ✓ Does your analysis include the perspectives of those (at risk of being) left behind? ✓ Have you conducted a gender analysis which examines the differences in women's and men's needs, roles and responsibilities, daily routines and activities, and access to and control over resources, services and decision-making, including those that lead to social and economic inequalities? ♀
<p>Interconnectedness & indivisibility 🌐</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Have you gained a solid understanding of the important interlinkages in the system in which you are working (see also illustration of some SDG interlinkages in Figure 4)? ✓ How are these issues linked? What are important co-benefits and trade-offs (e.g. what is the relationship between the main environmental and the main social, economic and institutional issues of the place of the intervention? How do the main environmental factors influence the socio-economic situation of the intervention area, and how does the socio-economic situation impact the environment?) <p>Examples of environmental characteristics that influence the socio-economic situation are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A soil type, access to the sea, the presence of mineral ores, etc. can influence the local development of specific economic activities • Climate change can lower the production rates, leading to poverty and/or population migration • Some contaminants can be dangerous to human health <p>Examples of social and economic factors that impact the environment are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local population's lifestyle (transportation, waste, pollution, etc.) • Agricultural practices • Level of industrialization • Level of interest of local authorities for environmental management
<p>Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) 🤝</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Do you have a solid understanding of the relevant actors and their relationships in the system in which you are working? ✓ Is the context-analysis co-created by the relevant (local) actors and does it include their perspectives?

Module 2: Impact statement, theory of change and project strategy

ESSENCE

Envision the desired long-term change (dream) to which the project wants to contribute. Describe and visualise change pathways to develop an impact-oriented strategy with concrete activities and deliverables in the selected project change domains.

The ToC describes and visualises change pathways and helps to develop an impact-oriented strategy with concrete activities and deliverables to contribute to identified desired changes.

The VLIR-UOS ToC model for TEAM/SI projects can be considered as an easy rough guide to be specified/adapted in order to fit with your project.

- ✓ Define a long-term, desired change /dream to which the project wants to contribute (impact & in line with Agenda 2030).
- ✓ Define the outcome(s) the project can realistically achieve (hereby aligning with the standard outcomes foreseen in the VLIR-UOS ToC objectives) (outcome statement)
- ✓ Define the expected intermediate changes (=results) by using one or more six standard VLIR-UOS project domains and how these will lead to outcomes, incl. particular attention for the standard domain dissemination/uptake strategy
- ✓ When elaborating, the most important uncertainties / assumptions/risks related to the change process should be identified as well

KEY QUESTIONS

Envision the dream:

What is the long-term desired change / dream to which the project wishes to contribute and for whom? (= **impact**)

Identify change pathways and prioritise the key areas for change (STEP 1 and STEP 2):

- What are the key areas where change is needed to realise the desired change / dream?
- What areas of change can a VLIR-UOS supported project realistically influence?
- Translate these into an **outcome statement for the project (by aligning with the standard VLIR-UOS outcome areas)**

Map change pathways (STEP 3): analyse the areas of change and reflect on the different underlying intermediate changes that need to occur and will be worked on through the overall project strategy by looking backwards from the long-term desired change & prioritised change areas

- Who and what needs to change, where, and in which way, for the envisioned changes to become possible?
- How can the project influence these envisaged change processes?
- How to realise impact outside of the university? How will the project create the conditions for the effective uptake of new knowledge, applications and services?
- How can the project integrate gender? Explain the priorities in terms of integration of gender in the project strategy by reflecting on the actual gender situation and the potential impact of the project strategy.
- How can the project integrate environment? Explain the potential influence of the project on the environment and explain how the project will integrate environmental priorities in its strategy.

Design the strategy (=theory of action) by making use of one or more of the six standard project domains of intermediate change (STEP 4):

- How can a set of changes that interact with each other be organised / clustered into the six VLIR-UOS prescribed domains?
- **Define intermediate changes** by using the VLIR-UOS six project domains (**select domains**)
- **Formulate an intermediate change statement** per selected domain
- **Formulate activities/deliverables** to realise these intermediate changes in the selected domains (outputs)

POSSIBLE TOOL/APPROACH

- ✓ [Rich Picture](#)
- ✓ [Force field analysis](#)
- ✓ [Time machine/helicopter](#)
- ✓ [Three spheres model](#) (p. 106)
- ✓ [Theory of Change – Development Impact and You \(diytoolkit.org\)](#)

Impact statement

VLIR-UOS projects are expected to contribute to sustainable and equitable development in society. The first step is to concretise how your project will contribute to sustainable and equitable development. This fits under the impact statement section in the excel format. The impact statement should briefly describe the **long-term change (=impact)**⁷ to which the project wishes to contribute (Figure 5). This cannot be modified once the project has started.

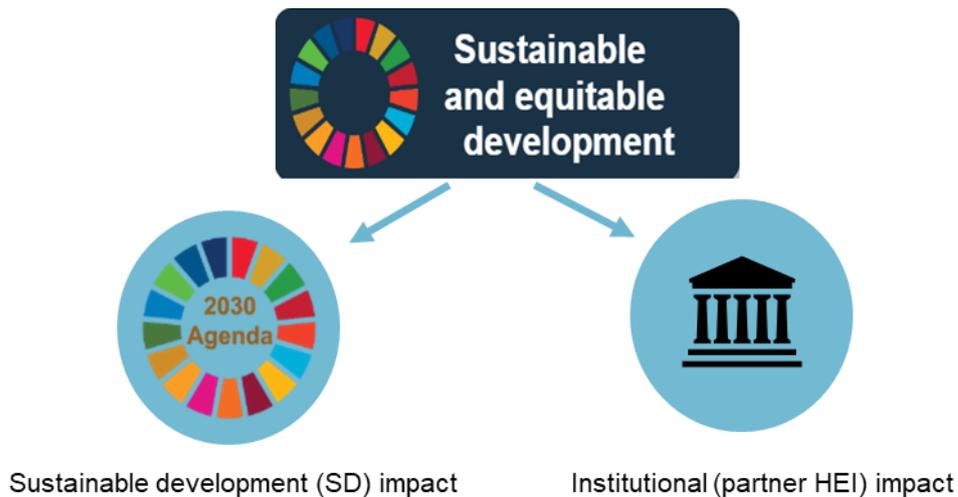


Figure 5: Impact statement visualisation

This first step builds further or runs in parallel with the context analysis and allows to brainstorm and envision what the dream of the proposed project is, in line with local priorities and the local institutional context. The desired long-term change should be challenging and ambitious, but not impossible to achieve (reachable in 15 years' time; the project only contributes). Identify if and how you can ensure synergy and complementarity with other actors with other (Belgian) actors as much as possible in the light of synergy and complementarity.

⁷ Impacts = positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended (OECD-DAC).

The relevant SDGs (one main and one secondary), OECD policy markers and thematic tags for Belgian Development Cooperation should also be specified in the excel format.⁸

For the OECD policy markers⁹, it should be indicated whether the following topics are considered main objective of the project (score 2), important objective of the project (score 1), irrelevant to the project (score 0): Biodiversity, Climate change adaptation, Climate change mitigation, Desertification, Gender equality, Maternal, reproductive, newborn and child health, Participatory democratisation and good governance, Trade development.

For the other thematic tags, it should be indicated whether the following topics are considered main objective of the project (score 2), important objective of the project (score 1), irrelevant to the project (score 0): D4D, Decent work, Decolonisation, Global citizenship education, Human rights.



Figure 6: 17 Sustainable Development Goals

Visualise the ultimate desired change or ‘dream’ in a time perspective of 10-15 years and make sure that the desired change is as concretely as possible:

- **Who** should benefit from the desired change / dream? Will the dream impact differently on certain groups (gender, age, ethnicity, etc.)?
- **What** will have changed?
- **Where** will the change happen?
- **How** this change can be realised forms part of the different pathways “theorizing” the change. Such a theory of change will be further developed throughout this module and translated into a project strategy with concrete deliverables / activities (=theory of action, for VLIR-UOS project translated into 6 standard (project) domains of intermediate change).

The importance of visualisation

A theory of change for a project should not be formulated from behind a desk. A good formulation process is participative and foresees space for collective reflection, discussion, etc. Various steps in the formulation process are specifically designed to be done in a participative way. When a ToC is formulated in a participative way, visualisation is often considered as meaningful. During ToC and project

⁸ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

⁹ [BMZ 2014 The Policy Marker System. DACBMZ Markers. Guidelines. EN.pdf \(oecd.org\)](#)

design, working with visualisation tools (e.g. using cards on a flipchart, drawing a rich picture, force field analysis with restraining and helping factors for change) stimulates critical thinking, complements dialogue and can help in getting all participants on the same page. Discussing while drawing (or working with cards) engages stakeholders in the conversation, and provides the opportunity to actively share perspectives and question each other. Visualisation assists projects in developing causal pathways of change, prioritising, and identifying risks and assumptions.

Example of impact statement:

*“Small scale farmers in region X of country Y have a higher food production contributing to their livelihood and food sovereignty”
(Hypothetical SI / TEAM projects)*

Developing a theory of change and project strategy

A Theory of Change serves as a compass for the project strategy and invites to critically reflect upon the most appropriate interventions and their interaction with processes of change. It visually and narratively describes the envisaged change process: how pathways of change can lead to the realisation of the dream, which actors play a role in the change process and how they interact, with assumptions to go from one change to the other.

Step 1 – Identify areas of change to realise the dream

In order for the dream / desired change to happen, changes need to happen in **different areas simultaneously**. After having analysed the actors and factors in a particular context (Module 1), the stakeholders can start to reflect on the dream and identify the areas where important changes need to be made in order to realise the dream. Identifying these different areas of change demonstrates understanding of the complexity of the sustainable development / institutional challenge(s) the project wants to tackle. Tools that can support this exercise are: rich picture or force field analysis visualising the factors that hamper or help change.

Step 2 – Prioritise the key areas of change to which the project can realistically influence in order to contribute towards the ‘dream

The **second step** is to decide on the **strategic priorities (what area(s) will the project work on)** without forgetting the complexity of the process towards the long-term desired change. This reflection is crucial and acknowledges that, although the project cannot work on everything (and choices have to be made), it still is a part of a bigger reality. It will further in the formulation process determine the project strategy and the levels of the results framework. This can be achieved by visualising the desired change (impact statement) and the areas of change on a flip chart with sticky notes¹⁰ as exemplified in Figure 7 while making choices. It should be realistic and feasible to contribute to the desired change by working on the prioritised area(s) for change. A project cannot work on all problems in the region. Therefore, it is recommended to limit the number of area(s) of change based on the available resources, capabilities,

¹⁰ When doing this exercise online, free creative tools such as [Lucidchart](#) / [Diagrams](#) / [Miro](#) can be used.

ambitions of the project. Moreover, as VLIR-UOS supports partnerships between universities and university colleges in Flanders and partner countries, a number of areas of change will automatically be excluded (*For example: a VLIR-UOS project will never finance road construction*). The different possible strategies and areas of change should be examined and the most appropriate areas of change for the project are to be selected on the basis of criteria such as:

- Available know-how, capacities and interest of the stakeholders
- Complementarity with other actions
- Priority
- Expected value for money
- Expected effect and expected leverage in terms of (gender) equity (Does the strategy respect the principles of inclusive development?)
- Environmental relevance (Does the strategy respect the principles of sustainable development?)

Finally, the prioritised “area(s) of change” should - ideally - be used to formulate a specific change under the form of an **outcome statement for the project**¹¹ and **added in the excel format (Figure 7)**. The VLIR-UOS generic outcome statements can provide guidance as to how to define the outcome statement, whereby SI and TEAM projects often target the outcomes related to higher quality and inclusive education (e.g. generic VLIR-outcome 2) and/or higher quality and needs-oriented research (e.g. generic VLIR-outcome 4) and should include in its outcome statement the vision on uptake (e.g. VLIR-UOS outcome 5 ‘enhanced condition for uptake of new knowledge, applications and services’).

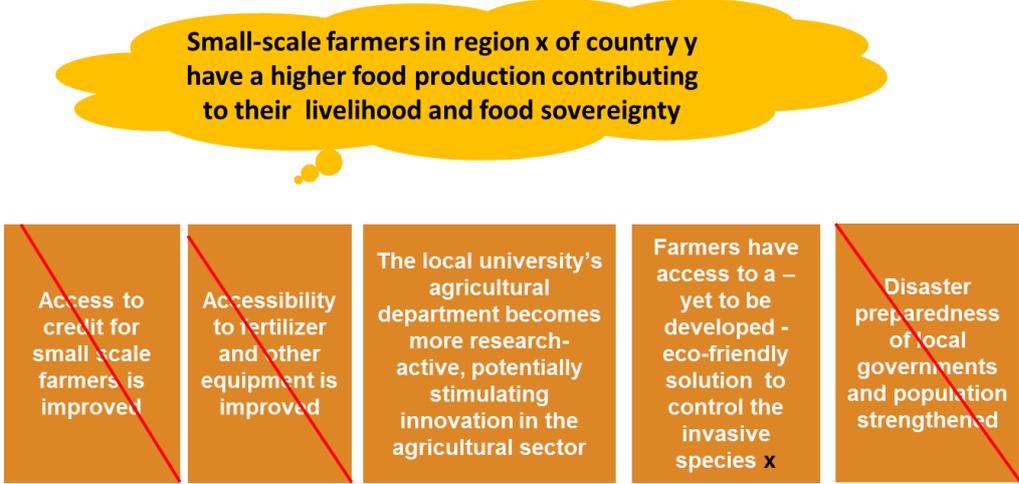


Figure 7: Prioritising change areas into project objectives (outcome statement)

Step 3 – Map pathways of change

In the **third step**, the **pathways of change** are mapped backwards from the long-term desired change and prioritised change area(s) or sub-project outcome statements, questioning further what needs to change for the next change to occur. The pathways of change are projections of the envisaged change

¹¹ Outcomes are the likely or achieved short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention's outputs (OECD-DAC).

process identifying necessary intermediate changes, based on our ideas and theories about how we think change will happen and the causal relations between intermediate steps. Mapping out these pathways of change is central in developing your project strategy. The general recommendation is to look back, review and finetune after each step.

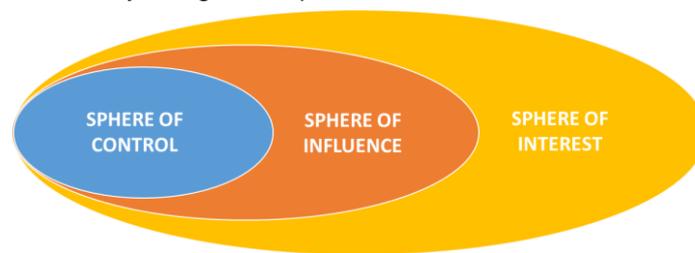
The best way to approach the mapping of pathways of change is by visualising it, together with stakeholders. By involving them, this exercise is turned into a participative, reflective process. It thus guarantees a better quality project proposal, and also makes sure that everyone is on the same page and shares the same expectations.

The following steps should be taken into account:

1. Start by mapping out the **intermediate changes** envisaged to happen and needed to realise the desired, long-term change. It is possible that not all of these intermediate steps can be influenced by the project, but mapping out makes you think about the broader picture and might influence the design of your interventions and activities.. When reflecting upon the changes, consider changes of actors inside and outside the university (either **actors** related to research, or education, or administration and management) and consider various **types of changes** by finding inspiration in the VLIR-UOS standard domains of intermediate change (e.g. **research programmes or methods; educational programmes or methods**, in relation with society and policies (**outreach and policy support**); changes in management **systems, policies and infrastructure**; changes in capacity of **people**, changes in **networks and partnerships**). By identifying these compulsory steps/changes, the notions about the project might evolve as one will want to influence the likelihood of these steps/changes to take place. Think over how various pathways will/need influence one another: e.g. achieved changes in one pathway may be needed to enable a next step in another one. Discuss how contextual factors and stakeholders influence the change process you are mapping. Discuss any potential unintended changes that might occur (positive or negative) in the light of the principle 'interconnectedness' to address later in the module on risk analysis and responses.
2. Try to formulate **how the project would influence change in one or more of the six standard project domains of change of intermediate change**. This means selected the relevant project domains and for those selected domains formulate a generic statement (e.g. check generic examples in table 2).
3. Once this is done, you should map the steps/activities (= the theory of action) to come up with the different key outputs that need to be delivered by the project. Focus on actors and how they need to change. Make a list of contextual **factors** and **stakeholders that will** influence on the change process and the effect of your activities.
4. Try to integrate a gender dimension in the pathways of change (see also **Checklist** 'Leave No One Behind' on p. 31). Will the change process – or elements of it – work out differently for men and women? Are women likely to benefit at least equally from the changes envisaged (e.g. who benefits from improved post-harvesting methods)? What power relations need to be taken into account to achieve change (e.g. which household member decides on budget allocations)? What gender-specific norms are linked to the envisaged change (e.g. is it accepted for women to travel?)? This can be both within and outside the Higher Education Institution (HEI) (e.g. the participation of women in science and research, the representation of women in decision-making bodies at universities or governments, the role of women in product value chains, the influence of household obligations on the availability of female participants, etc.). What could be potential negative, unintended effects for women? If needed, review your pathway(s) accordingly (for e.g. by adding intermediate changes) and plan the necessary action (e.g. provide pre-doctoral trainings for female candidates, plan a

gender analysis on value chains in the research process, install a diverse intervention steering committee).

5. Try to integrate an **environmental** dimension in the pathways of change. What environmental elements need to be taken into account to achieve change (e.g. climate change affecting harvesting seasons)? Will the change process have a positive or negative impact on the environment (e.g. the introduction of soil conservation practices)? This can be on a direct (e.g. the introduction of exotic species) or indirect level (e.g. access to resource-efficient technologies). If needed, review your pathway(s) accordingly and plan the necessary action (e.g. greenhouse gas compensation for travels, integration of environmental awareness in a curriculum, ...).
6. A final check to see whether the outcome, intermediate changes and activities are placed at the right level can be realized by using the 3 spheres model:



- (i) domains of change: the interventions that are under your control are your project activities and deliverables, the changes that you can **influence directly** are intermediate changes (clustered in the intermediate change domains) and the change you can only **influence indirectly** is an outcome statement of a project. Make sure to make a difference between intermediate changes and outcome statement (the outcome statement is not a sum(mary) of the intermediate changes but comes forth from the realisation of the intermediate changes).
 - (ii) In the case of SI and TEAM projects it is very likely that not all domains are represented in your project.
7. Go through your Theory of Change again and ask yourself if the flow of subsequent steps is logical. Are there any steps missing? Is the overall ToC coherent? What else might each step lead to? Will the different changes be sufficient? Did we sufficiently take into account stakeholders' attitudes and interests? What contextual factors are important?
8. The final step in mapping pathways of change is the identification of **risks and assumptions**, which in the case of TEAM fully fledged proposals will provide **input for Module 6. SI projects and TEAM concept notes are not required to fill out the risk module.**
To identify assumptions, following questions might help: If X changes, will Z really happen? Why? Under which conditions? What are we assuming? What evidence do we have that supports our assumptions about causality? *For example, in a project, it is assumed that by introducing new research methods, academics will actually start using those methods, which will lead to more and better research. This is based on the assumption that academics have sufficient incentives (time, interest) for doing research.*

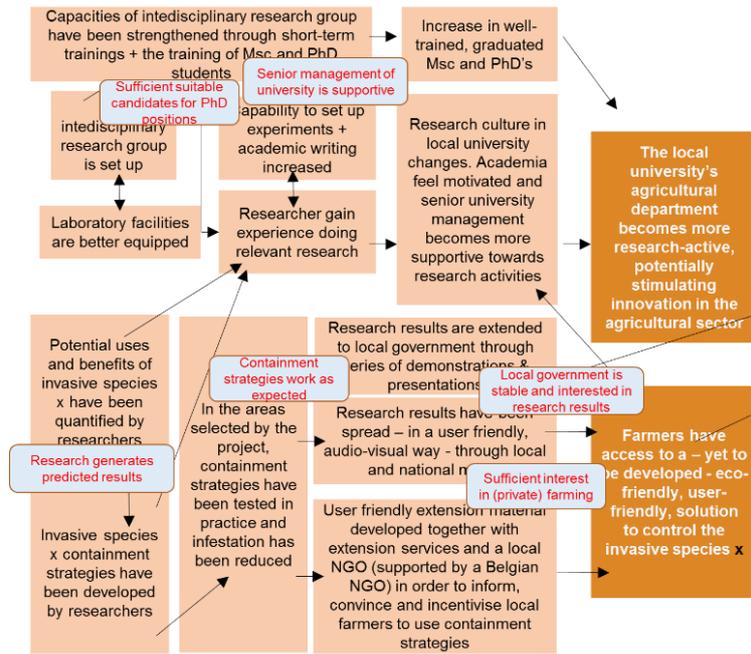


Figure 8: Examples of identification of assumptions

Step 4 – Cluster into the six prescribed standard domains (=intermediate change level) and design the strategy (=theory of action) for the project

The **fourth step** is to design a project strategy (= theory of action) describing how the project will influence the change process through the formulation of activities in the **prescribed standard domains (=intermediate change level)** of the VLIR-UOS theory of change (Table 2). VLIR-UOS distinguishes between **six domains** to structure the intermediate changes and outputs (=deliverables / activities)¹². During this exercise, we recommend using similar colours to identify the intermediate changes and outputs that are linked to one of the six domains in your theory of change (Figure 9).

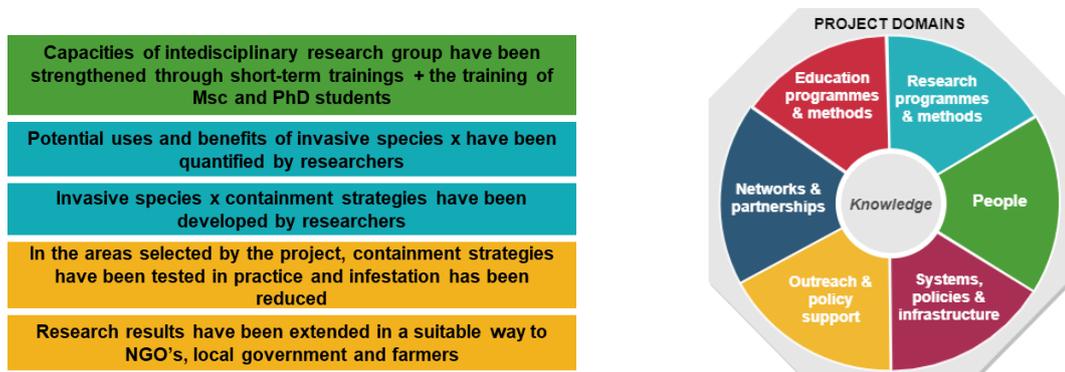


Figure 9: Example of fitting the intermediate changes into the VLIR-UOS prescribed domains using colours

¹² Outputs are the products, capital goods and services which result from a development intervention may also include changes resulting from the intervention that are relevant to the achievement of outcomes (OECD-DAC).

Table 2: General description of change in each domain

Domain	General description (VLIR-UOS ToC)
Research programmes and methods	Improved (interdisciplinary) methodologies and strengthened quality and relevance of research to allow for better knowledge management and high-quality research results serving societal needs
Education programmes and methods	Improved, innovative and inclusive teaching methods, didactics, and digital approaches. Improved curriculum content to support knowledge co-creation and equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge ensuring their employability after graduation and ability to tackle global challenges from a holistic, interdisciplinary perspective
Outreach and policy support	Enhanced interaction with relevant public, private and academic stakeholders to share knowledge, create the conditions for uptake and provide policy advice/support
Systems, policies, and infrastructure	Better management, information systems, educational and research policies to improve functioning of HE&SIs, including policies on gender and diversity, research integrity and uptake. Improved equipment, laboratories and offices for education and research
People	Students, alumni, staff, researchers are trained/sensitised in a supportive learning environment to strengthen their knowledge, skills & attitudes in diverse domains (e.g. leadership, global citizenship).
Networks and partnerships	Strengthened interactions within reciprocal partnerships and engagements at local, regional and global levels between HE&SIs, researchers, staff, students and other stakeholders in society (public actors, private actors, other civil society organisations (CSOs), communities, etc.) for sustainable development

It is **not obligatory** to realise changes in **all six domains**. The project can choose the domains it wants to address and corresponding deliverables of your project need to be selected *Typically an SI or TEAM project includes intermediate changes minimally at level of research/educational programmes and outreach & policy support, but a project could as well prioritize the domain of systems, policies & infrastructure and outreach&policy support.*

Putting it simply, the idea is to select the domains (=Define intermediate changes by using the VLIR-UOS six project domains) for the project and formulate an intermediate change statement per selected domain. After this the final step in this module is to Formulate activities/deliverables to realise these intermediate changes in the selected domains (outputs)

Table 3: Examples of intermediate change statement, type of activities/ deliverables in each domain for SI/TEAM projects presents typical intermediate change statements per domain and a non-exhaustive and indicative list of deliverables and activities that projects can undertake within the six domains. The deliverables, processes and changes in these domains are interlinked and not mutually exclusive. It is possible that an activity fits in more than one of the six domains, because a set of changes can interact with each other. However, to avoid duplication, the activity should only be allocated to one main domain.

Table 3: Examples of intermediate change statement, type of activities/ deliverables in each domain for SI/TEAM projects

Domain	General description (VLIR-UOS ToC)	Intermediate change statement (example)	Activities (examples)
<p style="text-align: center;">Research programmes and methods</p>	<p>Improved (interdisciplinary) methodologies and strengthened quality and relevance of research to allow for better knowledge management and high-quality research results serving societal needs</p>	<p>Strengthened thematic research capacities of involved teams/ units/ departments allowing HE&SIs to address local sustainable development challenges</p>	<p>Research components are developed and implemented to contribute to developmental change in the region, especially for vulnerable groups in society (👏).</p> <p><u>Examples:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New knowledge and technologies are developed on sustainable development relevant topics, responding to local needs (prioritizing vulnerable groups 🙏) • High quality research publications and training manuals for academic use are produced, contributing to increased research output and university reputation • Gender balanced participation is promoted in research programmes • Research takes into account the impact on gender issues (how the results positively/negatively impact men/women) and environment 🏡 • Integration of new research methods, training lab techniques in optimized research practices • Improved data collection methods and analysis techniques • Practice-based research leading to an improvement/innovation in the professional practice/work field (e.g. university colleges projects)

<p>Education programmes and methods</p>	<p>Improved, innovative and inclusive teaching methods, didactics, and digital approaches. Improved curriculum content to support knowledge co-creation and equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge ensuring their employability after graduation and ability to tackle global challenges from a holistic, interdisciplinary perspective</p>	<p>Strengthened thematic education capacities of involved teams/ units/ departments via improved curricula and didactical/pedagogical approaches and methodologies allowing HE&SIs staff, students and alumni to address sustainable development challenges</p>	<p>(research-based) Educational components are developed and implemented to contribute to developmental change in the region, especially for vulnerable groups in society (👤).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated Master programmes are implemented • New courses were included in the curricula • New trainings were developed for academic and non-academic stakeholders 🧑 (e.g. in hospitals, child care centers) of mentors for trainees (students) in order to enhance the work placement/internship of students (e.g. Flemish university colleges and partner HE&SIs and workplaces) • New didactical, pedagogic and teaching methodologies are introduced, adapted and implemented by staff • Research-based educational programmes are developed and implemented, connecting MSc students to research • Courses and trainings content created with improved integration of equity and equality, e.g. gender concepts, intersectionality, inclusion, (implicit) bias,... 🧑 • STEM-programmes are promoted among female students
<p>Outreach and policy support</p>	<p>Enhanced interaction with relevant public, private and academic stakeholders to share knowledge, create the conditions for uptake and provide policy advice/support</p>	<p>Strengthened capacities and improved strategies creating the conditions for uptake of SD-related knowledge, applications, and services by local communities, public/private/civil society organisations and other stakeholders</p>	<p><u>Examples:</u> 🧑</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities to facilitate and contribute to the use of research evidence by policymakers, private sector, civil society and other development actors • Guidelines are developed and made available for uptake by stakeholders (with attention for gender issues related to uptake by women and men) • Collaboration in spin offs, commercialisation of new knowledge products, registration of IP, pilot initiatives • Policy briefs are published for policy advice • Stakeholder engagement strategies are developed • Platform for regular exchanges with stakeholders (incl. women/vulnerable groups) • Demonstration workshops for stakeholders are organised (participation of women is promoted) • Improved scientific communication methods and strategies to share results with broader audience • Seminars with industry, government agencies and development partners are organised on a regular basis 🧑

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance of SD-relevant academic conference by project team members
Systems, policies, and infrastructure	<p>Better management, information systems, educational and research policies to improve functioning of HE&SIs, including policies on gender and diversity, research integrity and uptake. Improved equipment, laboratories and offices for education and research</p>	<p>Improved organisational capacity (management/support systems, policies and infrastructure) of HE&SI instrumental to sustained education and research capacity strengthening</p>	<p>Organisational and institutional capacity is strengthened</p> <p><u>Examples:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of efficient structures, processes and procedures (e.g. introduction of lab procedures) • Integration of structures, processes and procedures in the daily workflows (e.g. well-functioning lab) • Establishment of adequate “institutions”, policies, rules and regulations (e.g. development of a new research/ accreditation/ HR policy, gender policy, environmental policy, technology transfer, a research procurement desk, Grants Directorate, Extension office, etc.) • Adequate policies are in place to support/improve access for students from vulnerable groups and ensure gender-balance among students and staff • Enforcement of rules and regulations for good governance (e.g. implementation of new research, accreditation/ HR policy, ..) • Regular adaptation of institutions, rules and regulations (e.g. evaluation mechanisms for research, curricula, HR, ..) • Improvements in the laboratory and other supporting infrastructure (library, ICT) • Improved software technologies for data collection and analysis • Support systems such as management system, quality assurance, accounting are implemented and used • Governance/management structures of the partner institutions are strengthened • Measures are taken to reduce environmental impact (CO₂ compensation, less paper-based, limited travel, recycling, etc.)  • Upgrade of research and education facilities
People	<p>Students, alumni, staff, researchers are trained/sensitised in a supportive learning environment to strengthen their knowledge, skills & attitudes in diverse domains</p>	<p>Increased individual capacity (skills, knowledge, competencies and attitudes) of students, staff and alumni allowing them to act as change agents within and beyond the HE&SI</p>	<p><u>Examples:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of adequate skills, knowledge, competencies and attitudes (e.g. PhD scholarships) • Application of skills, knowledge, competencies on the workplace (e.g. PhD holder applies new knowledge and skills) • Reduction of staff turnover, facilitation of skills and knowledge transfer within institutions (e.g. PhD remains staff member)

	(e.g. leadership, global citizenship).		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team building and trainings to improve collaboration spirit, leadership skills, research attitudes, communication skills • Transversal competencies (skills, knowledge, attitudes) for becoming critical global citizens and change agents are strengthened, awareness about gender and environmental issues, human rights, global sustainability challenges. (transversal integration of global citizenship in VLIR-UOS portfolio) 🇺🇸
Networks and partnerships	Strengthened interactions within reciprocal partnerships and engagements at local, regional and global levels between HE&SIs, researchers, staff, students and other stakeholders in society (public actors, private actors, other civil society organisations (CSOs), communities, etc.) for sustainable development	Strengthened (multi-disciplinary) academic collaborations focused on addressing sustainable development challenges via interinstitutional and multi-stakeholder networks and partnerships	<p><u>Examples:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional and international HE cooperation on a specific topic is facilitated (e.g. joint research, exchanges, new master programme, etc.) • Expertise is exchanged with different Flemish HEIs and partner HE&SIs • Multi-disciplinary and interconnectivity is implemented by collaborating with different teams/units/departments in the HE&SI, i.e. not be limited to one department (e.g. different projects along the value chain of an agricultural product, strong complementarity & synergy with other projects) 🇺🇸 • New research partnerships with private and public actors or civil society are developed to have more societal impact 🇺🇸 and attract new funding to ensure sustainability • A stakeholder platform concept (e.g. stakeholder advisory board) and associated stakeholder workshops are developed to build a network with local private sector, policy-makers and civil society (e.g. women groups, communities, marginalised groups) 🇺🇸 • Alumni network events are organised to keep alumni connected to HE&SIs • Exploration of partnership potential/formulation missions (matchmaking sessions, seminars, exchange meetings)

✦ Using the excel format, the theory of change can be translated into a **results framework** with a well-defined outcome statement for the project and intermediate changes in the selected project domains.

This forms the basis for determining the indicators in **Module 7** on monitoring and evaluation.

Managing the change – special attention for uptake¹³

In order to be a successful project, a clear vision needs to exist about how the ‘change’ of a project will be managed. This is important to think about during the development of the Theory of Change, as it is often assumed that activities, simple deliverables or ‘training’ personnel and/or stakeholders is sufficient to create genuine change, while this is rarely the case. In (an often complex) reality, these change processes need to be actively managed.

What rarely leads to successful uptake?

Assuming new knowledge will result in uptake by publishing in journals or by organising a one-off dissemination activity at the end of a project or programme.

Assuming training a number of persons in a particular field (e.g. lab techniques, e-learning, etc.) will be sufficient to lead to an effective use of this new knowledge/skills in university’s operations.

The projects also aim to have an **impact outside the academic context** (cf. the VLIR-UOS motto “Sharing Minds, Changing Lives”), not only after the intervention but also during the intervention via **stakeholder involvement** and by creating the conditions for uptake from the start. Societal impact requires uptake of new knowledge created by projects, applications, products, services, etc. This ‘uptake’ does not happen automatically. It is important that projects develop the capacities and strategies to create the conditions for this uptake. Developing an **uptake strategy**, allows projects to make explicit how one thinks a project can go from **producing** knowledge, applications or services, to making an **actual societal impact**.

✦ In Module 4, the uptake strategy needs to detail how the project will **create the conditions for uptake** of the knowledge, services and applications by **stakeholders**.

¹³ We define uptake as ‘the use of research and education results of HEI by non-academic actors (or society at large: policymakers, NGOs, private sector, farmers)’ and creating the conditions for uptake as ‘all activities that facilitate and contribute to the use of research evidence or other results emanating from the work of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) by policymakers, practitioners and other development actors’. (See Uptake Brochure [here](#))

Checklist to integrate the SDG principles in Module 2

The questions below serve to guide you during the formulation and should be used to develop a theory of change and strategy throughout this module.

<p>Leaving No One Behind 🧑🏿🧑🏻</p>	<p>Targeting approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Does your theory of change clearly outline how your intervention expects to contribute to (sustained) positive change for the target groups? ✓ Have you reflected on whether design and implementation reinforce existing exclusion mechanisms, or disadvantages vulnerable groups within and/or beyond your target groups? <p>Mainstreaming approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Does your theory of change outline how your intervention expects to indirectly benefit (important) left behind groups? ✓ Have you adapted strategies or identified remedial action (by yourself, by partners, or by others) to address/mitigate any exclusion effects? ✓ Does the project create structural and organisational changes in the gender balance of the higher education institution (e.g. strategy and action plans on gender, appointing a focal point...)? ♀
<p>Interconnectedness & indivisibility 🧩</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ What are important issues/what change is needed? How are these issues linked? (what are important co-benefits and trade-offs?) ✓ Have you identified important positive and negative links between your intervention area and other SDGs (or targets)? ✓ Have you taken important (positive and negative) links into account in the design and implementation of your theory of change (e.g. in objectives, strategies)?
<p>Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) 🤝</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Potential to establish a MSP or not? Does an MSP offer opportunities to better (e.g. more systemically or sustainably) address the (complex) challenge(s) that your programme focuses on? ✓ Have you identified valuable partners and forms of collaboration? ✓ Have you identified an added value of your participation in the MSP?

Module 3: Organisation

ESSENCE

Describe who is (internally) involved in the implementation of the project – and how.

Clarify the structure of the organisation and assigned roles and responsibilities of individuals working on the project.

KEY QUESTIONS

- ✓ Who is internally involved in the execution of the project?
- ✓ What are the assigned roles and responsibilities of individuals working on the project?
- ✓ How is the project structured / organised?

TOOLS/APPROACHES

- ✓ [Project organogram / project organisation chart](#)
- ✓ [Five types of organizational structures](#)

The implementation of a project depends on several people to make decisions, to provide information, to carry out activities and to monitor and report throughout the project. It is important to clarify and agree upon the structure of the project organisation and task division before the start of the project.

Who is involved?

Individuals who are involved in the execution of the project include: the partner institution / Flemish promoter, local / Flemish team members, other persons / staff involved in the project implementation (such as ICOS, local administrative and financial staff, selected short term/ study and PhD students, etc.). General information (name, e-mail address, position / function, institution, CV link, etc.) should be provided in the excel sheet (space foreseen for max. 20 members per sub-project).

VLIR-UOS is looking for an efficient way to register PhD students and collect data in a central database. At the moment, PhD students that are benefitting from the project should be listed as team members (Note: only PhD students that contribute to the project results are considered relevant, we do not need a list of all PhD students at the partner university department / unit if they are financed through external channels).

In case you have not found a partner yet, we advise you to try to find partners through your academic/professional/alumni network. Alternatively: try to find partner institutions (higher education institutions) through Belgian development actors already active in the targeted country or consult partners of ARES and ITM, active in the thematic JSF HES4SD. The country reference frameworks available on the VLIR-UOS website provide information on “who is doing what, where” and contact details of different organisations active in Thematic and Geographical Joint Strategic Frameworks (JSFs). Belgian development actors already active in partner countries often have extensive networks and know local universities and/or local university colleges. Moreover, these organisations may have ideas about potential projects in line with their own interventions (positive for synergy and complementarity which should be specified in Module 4).



How is the project structured / organised?

Free format, short description of the project organisational structure and distribution of responsibilities with attention for balanced partnership structures and interinstitutional cooperation.

Explain how the project will assure a continuous link with and involvement of the partner university.

How will the tasks be divided among the involved partners (local – Flemish) in a balanced way?

VLIR-UOS also seeks to simulate interinstitutional cooperation between the Flemish universities and university colleges. The vision on how the project will create broad support of / collaborations between Flemish universities and university colleges should be detailed in the proposal. For example, expertise available at a particular university and university college can be combined to enrich the project proposal.

Checklist to integrate the SDG principles in Module 3

Leaving No One Behind 🧑🏿 	<p><i>It is important to keep an eye on the diversity of a team.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Does your organisational set-up ensure the participation of left behind groups in decision-making? ✓ Are left behind groups involved in the decision-making processes (e.g. through an advisory board)? <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Does the project ensure gender balanced representation in the team? (cfr. VLIR-UOS policy: 40-60% representation of both sexes) ✓ Does your project incorporate mechanisms to ensure gender-balanced participation in decision-making processes? ✓ Does the project team include a member with gender expertise, a gender focal point / task force / working group? ♀
Interconnectedness & indivisibility 🧩	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Interdisciplinary approach? <p><i>Ideally teams are multi/inter/transdisciplinary (=approaching a particular problem from different (scientific) disciplines).</i></p>
Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) 🤝	<p>The project team should also reach out to other actors, such as civil society, public and private stakeholders, in order to find opportunities to collaborate during project design and implementation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Have you reflected on the optimal division of roles and responsibilities in the partnership? ✓ Can all partners participate in decision-making when they want to? Do they have voice?

Module 4: Stakeholders and coherence

ESSENCE

Identify and analyse the project stakeholders and elaborate a strategy to manage the stakeholders throughout the project (including communication with stakeholders & uptake strategy)

KEY QUESTIONS

- ✓ Who are the key stakeholders? What is their role in the current context?
- ✓ What is their potential role, interest and influence in the project?
- ✓ How will the project involve / engage with stakeholder?
- ✓ How will the project ensure synergy & complementarity with Belgian actors and other VLIR-UOS projects? ([check out the VLIR-UOS Country Reference Frameworks](#))
- ✓ How will the project create the conditions for uptake of results?

TOOLS/APPROACHES

- ✓ [10 key principles of stakeholder engagement](#)
- ✓ [Seven principles for effective multi-stakeholder partnerships](#)
- ✓ [Forced field analysis](#)
- ✓ [Tools for analysing power in MSPs](#)
- ✓ [Planning sheet for stakeholder engagement](#)
- ✓ [VLIR-UOS Uptake brochure](#)
- ✓ **VLIR-UOS Country reference frameworks for S&C**

Stakeholder identification

Project stakeholders are groups of people or organisations who have an interest (a stake) in the (proposed) project and hence can (positively or negatively) influence or contribute to the project.

The identification of project stakeholders should focus on the key players. Defining and prioritising who are the key players, will help you formulate approaches to engage with them and/or involve them in the project (see engagement strategy later in this module). 

During project formulation, you need to be pragmatic in the choice of target groups and prioritise what strategies are possible to involve/engage with them (e.g. limit the analysis to the 5 or 10 most important stakeholders). These include both **internal** (inside HEI, but external to project team) and **external** (outside HEI) stakeholders, such as local communities, private sector, (local) government, civil society organisations, NGOs, etc. Stakeholders can consist of **direct beneficiaries** (the group that will be benefiting from the services of the project at the outcome level) or potential **indirect beneficiaries** (those who will be benefiting from the project in the long run, e.g. farmers, local governments, etc. (impact level)) and any other actor with a stake in the project. When identifying stakeholders, general terms should be avoided (e.g. not “government” but more specific government level and department). The stakeholders may be users of the research and those who can help or hamper the research uptake strategy (e.g. extension office).

Identifying stakeholders **before the start** of a project can be challenging, but this step should not remain static at one point in time. Stakeholder engagement is a dynamic process that evolves during project implementation. Therefore, it is recommended to regularly update the stakeholder analysis in annual reporting to keep track of stakeholder activities and communication (e.g., which stakeholder is no longer actively participating, which new stakeholders expressed interest, how are relationships and roles changing along the process, what positive and negative elements need to be dealt with, etc.)



The stakeholder identification and analysis need to take into account the potential differences for men and women. It should identify who is left behind in the sector/context the project is working. It is not always needed to work with the poorest of the poor. How far you want to go depends on the context and the ambition of the project.

The following aspects are important to describe the **characteristics** of the project's stakeholders (**type of stakeholder – step 1 in Excel format**):

1. Are they internal or external stakeholders?

<p>Internal stakeholders are part of your institution and might influence your project or have a stake in it. They are however not part of the project team (Project team is part of Module 3). </p> <p><i>For example: students who will follow a master programme that you aim to develop as part of your project or the management board of the university that is responsible for policies that affect the execution of your project.</i></p>	<p>External stakeholders are not part of your institution but have an interest in or are impacted by your project.</p> <p><i>For example: farmers from nearby communities, policy makers, patient representative groups, local NGOs, etc.</i></p>
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2. From which sector are they?

Stakeholders can 'be part of' different kind of sectors: civil society, public or private sector, other academic / research institutions or VLIR-UOS projects. Depending on the scope of your project you can focus more specifically on one sector but it can be helpful to consider all three sectors (public, private and civil society) to make sure you include all key stakeholders and have a broad multi-sector network of stakeholders that can help you generate impact. For example: national policymakers (public sector) might implement policy recommendations with regard to patient health care in law, but patient organisations (civil society) might be necessary to inform patients on new health care insights and practical implications.

3. Are they local, national, regional, international or Belgian actors?

Will the project collaborate with local, national, regional, Belgian or other international actors (EU, UN, etc.)?



*For Belgian actors and other VLIR-UOS projects, **the engagement strategy should also address opportunities for synergy & complementarity. Synergy & complementarity is further specified in the section on coherence in Module 4.***

Stakeholder analysis

Once you have identified the key stakeholders, it is important to study their **role, interests and potential influence and prioritize your stakeholders based on their relative importance to the project**.¹⁴

Guiding questions that can be asked are during the stakeholder analysis are¹⁵:

- Who is interested in the project?
- Who will influence your project and its success? Who is expected to facilitate or block change?
- Who is likely to benefit or experience negative side-effects from the project?
- Which of them need to be involved at what level, and what issues may they bring with them?



By studying this in a gender-sensitive way, the intervention can unravel possible gender inequalities and unbalanced power relations. Ideally, the perspectives of those left behind should be included in the stakeholder analysis.

1. What is the potential role of the stakeholder in the project / for the desired change?

A non-exhaustive list of potential roles is given below.

Roles	Definition
Supporter	acts as a (potential) partner in favour of the project
Contractor	is paid by the project to work on a particular activity
Funder	provides money to pay for a project activity
Disseminator (e.g. extension office)	makes information available by putting research results in the public domain and translates research evidence for non-specialist audiences
Advisor	produces knowledge / information relevant for the project
Regulator	checks whether the project is working according to official government rules or laws
Observer	watches what happens but does not actively take part in the project
Broker	engages in bridging, matching, connecting, convening, linking, networking, facilitating, building local capacity, negotiating, collaborating, managing relationships, changing incentive structures and context to improve knowledge use and enable innovation
Opponent	disagrees with, blocks, slows down, competes with the project activities
Direct beneficiary (e.g. users of research)	will be benefiting from the services/products of the project at the outcome level.
Indirect beneficiary (wider community)	are not in direct contact with a project, but are affected by it, usually via direct beneficiaries. They will be benefiting from the project in the long run, at the impact level.

¹⁴ Source: [Stakeholder Characteristics and Roles Matrix | Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships \(mbspguide.org\)](https://mbspguide.org)

¹⁵ Source: [3 i's advanced stakeholder analysis \(fasttrackimpact.com\)](https://fasttrackimpact.com)

2. What is their interest and influence in the project?

In order to analyse the influence that stakeholders (can) have over your project and their level of interest in it, you can use a matrix, that shows all stakeholders in four categories.

The first question you should ask is how **interested** certain stakeholders are in your project (results), from low to high interest (= **level** of interest). In addition, you can specify what aspects they are likely to be interested in or why are they likely not interested (= **nature** of interest) ? They can be interested in the whole project or in certain aspects (e.g. methods you used or specific research results). You might also bear in mind groups that you think are (currently) not interested, but who you would like to be interested because they can e.g. help you create conditions for uptake.

The second question you should ask is whether stakeholders have the ability to **influence** your project, from low to high influence (= **level** of influence). In addition, you can specify how could they influence the project (= nature of influence). Can they for example facilitate the impact of your project because they focus on similar domains or because they work with groups you want to reach? Do they have certain resources that can be beneficial to your project? What can you gain from connecting with them? What is their potential contribution to the outcomes of the project, in terms of knowledge / expertise, money, time, labour, video material, training, access to information, services, network, help recruit participants, share experiences, dissemination / uptake support, infrastructure / equipment, etc.?

Depending on how likely it is stakeholders have an interest in your project (results) and depending on their level of influence, they will be categorized in four segments:

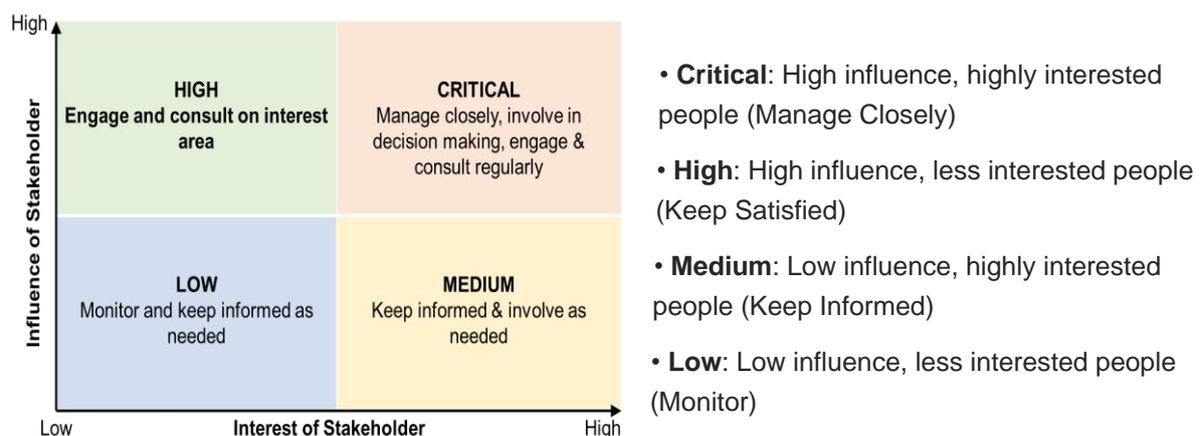


Figure 10: Stakeholder influence – interest matrix

By classifying stakeholders in this way, one can determine cases where: 1) significant awareness-raising is required to turn a highly-influential but low-interest stakeholder into an interested potential partner or 2) significant capacity development is required to turn a stakeholder with high interest but low influence into a stronger potential partner. This exercise helps to define your engagement strategy (see further).

Strategies for stakeholder engagement and uptake

After you have identified and analysed your stakeholders, it is important to come up with a plan for engaging all the major stakeholders throughout the project cycle, especially to invest in building relationship with stakeholders from the start. A well-developed stakeholder engagement strategy is critical for the success of the project in terms of potential impact, uptake, sustainability, efficiency, etc. Already having a good understanding of stakeholders, potential beneficiaries, end-users and/ or intermediaries helps projects create the conditions for uptake. It allows projects to identify actual needs, priorities, capacities, power relationships, etc. which can be taken into account when designing the project.

For example: If the project seeks to have an effect on policymakers, then the project needs to engage with local government during the whole duration of the project in order to raise interest and ensure that the project can actually have a significant impact. The project can consult policymakers throughout the process, or could even involve them in decision-making.

In a stakeholder engagement strategy you define what can be considered meaningful participation for which group of stakeholders, when and how you will build a relationship with them (before, during and after the project). Targeted and accessible communication, trust and mutual respect, early and regular interaction, building capacity of knowledge producers, users and intermediaries, impact oriented planning and monitoring are crucial mechanisms for successful stakeholder engagement and research uptake (For more information on these mechanisms see VLIR-UOS [uptake brochure](#)).

You will develop different approaches for the stakeholders who you consider as 'critical' (see stakeholder analysis - high interest and high influence) compared to those who are in the 'low category' for example. For some stakeholders, this can imply you foresee a limited number of information sessions throughout the project, for other (key) stakeholders it might mean you involve them in an advisory board that helps define the focus and implementation of the project and also follows up on results and how to use them. The questions to ask when developing an engagement strategy are:

- How will they be consulted / reached / approached / involved?
- How to secure their commitment / meaningful participation from the start?
- How will their interests be taken into account?
- How to counter, mitigate negative influence?

The **level of engagement** can vary along a continuum from limited participation to maximal participation as indicated in Table 4. Potential engagement strategies are to monitor, to inform, to consult, to involve, to collaborate and to empower. The methods / activities for stakeholder engagement are various: consultation meetings, webinar discussions, focus groups, social media, working group, task force, network, platform, forum, advisory board, committee, agreement, action plan, information sessions, awareness-raising campaigns, capacity building trainings, participation in other engagement and communication activities. It is important to reflect on what the expected impact from the engagement activities could be and explain how the project will collaborate with stakeholders.

Table 4: Examples of stakeholder engagement strategies

Engagement strategy	Monitor	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Description of stakeholder participation	Pay attention to the actions of stakeholders	Researchers share information on research objective and results to help them understand the research (translated to non-academic audience)	Researchers obtain feedback on the research	Regular dialogue and advice, researchers work directly with stakeholders to ensure that their concerns are considered in the research	Researchers acting together in a partnership with stakeholders for co-creation of aspects of the research (joint decision-making, control, implementation)	Researchers assist stakeholders in conducting their own research
Examples of engagement activities	Attending meetings, activities of stakeholders	Conference Poster Social media Website Webinar Publication Info sessions Video Policy briefs, radio talk shows	Survey Focus group Consultation meetings Interviews Baseline analysis to target trainings for users accordingly	Capacity building & awareness raising activities, workshops, platform, network, forum, targeted dissemination activities, continuous needs assessment, training of intermediaries	Task force, working group, advisory board, committee, agreement, action plan	Community-based research, participatory research methods, participatory monitoring/planning

Source: [Stakeholder engagement in research: The research-modified IAP2 spectrum – Integration and Implementation Insights \(i2insights.org\)](https://www.i2insights.org/)

Research uptake

Stakeholder engagement is key to enhancing the uptake of research results.¹⁶ Research uptake activities aim to support:

- The **supply** of highly relevant results through continuous engagement with stakeholders (including potential end-users). This involves **communicating knowledge** effectively and synthesising and repackaging knowledge for non-expert audiences.

Knowledge communication is not something done at the end of a project, but needs to play an important role throughout the project (engaging stakeholders, raising interest, etc). Knowledge communication goes beyond one-directional ‘dissemination’ of research findings, it is a two-sided process. It is about engagement and knowledge exchange, brokering, etc.

- The **usage** of results by **capacity building** of both users as well as producers, and by increasing commitment of stakeholders.

A recent evaluation of VLIR-UOS projects has shown that the following preconditions (orange) and mechanisms (green) were conducive for the uptake of results (examples):

Precondition or mechanism	Practical application
<p><i>Understanding of the broader system/context, including structural barriers.</i></p>	<p>As experience from the projects analysed shows, the understanding of the broader system/context in which the project operates, can be increased, when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a context analysis identifies barriers and constraints and options to respond accordingly as well as opportunities where an intervention is most feasible and likely to promote innovation. ( Module 1) • the initiative for the project comes from the Southern partner institution(s), or if the project is developed jointly (again, the quality of the cooperation is decisive) with the Southern promoter and potentially other (future) team members at the Southern partner institution(s). ( Module 3) • the project can build on a preceding cooperation/project and takes into account lessons learnt and (potential) hindering and success factors for uptake ( Module 8)
<p><i>Understanding of stakeholders, potential beneficiaries and/or intermediaries.</i></p>	<p>With regard to a good understanding of relevant stakeholders, potential beneficiaries and/or intermediaries, good practice examples propose to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conduct a stakeholder analysis jointly with the Southern partner institution(s), potentially including knowledgeable intermediaries (e.g. extension offices), which considers users’ demand for new knowledge and their capacities to use such knowledge. ( Module 4) • identify end-users early on (i.e. at the proposal stage) and target dissemination activities and/or products accordingly. ( Module 4)
<p><i>Understanding of policy priorities.</i></p>	<p>As experience from the projects analysed highlight, the connectivity (i.e. the degree to which the generated knowledge, technologies, services, etc. correspond to the targeted actors’ capacities and needs) of the knowledge, services or applications generated can be increased, when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the research addresses political priorities and the project team uses the “politicisation” of the problem to reach out to relevant stakeholders. ( Module 1) • end-users’ capacity to absorb (technical) knowledge is taken into account when they are being identified (at the proposal stage). ( Module 4)

¹⁶ For more information on uptake, please consult our recently published brochure [here](#).

<p>Research is participatory, demand-driven and needs-oriented.</p>	<p>With regards to needs-oriented and participatory (research) projects, good practice examples and evaluation data highlight the need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if possible, conduct a baseline analysis on knowledge/attitudes/behaviours of the beneficiaries in order to target curricula/trainings for end-users accordingly. • establish an advisory board whose members are carefully selected, and which is truly integrated into the research process through regular exchanges (e.g. on intermediary research results, research design, approaching communities etc.) to ensure continuous and ‘applied’ needs orientation. (📌 Module 3 & 4) • rather than conducting a single, non-recurring needs assessment, work on continuous and sincere needs orientation through different mechanisms of collaboration (see above). (📌 Module 1 & 4) • use participatory research to increase ownership for the research results. This requires that research results are shared with the participants in an appropriate way. Participatory research can further be combined with trainings and contribute to their effectiveness. (📌 Module 2 & 4)
<p>Collaboration exists between researchers and end-users. Interaction between researchers and users is frequent and long-term and characterized by trust and mutual respect.</p>	<p>Promoters can turn to the following “modes of interaction”, as identified in the best practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings or workshops with stakeholder where final preliminary research results are presented and discussed; or jointly developed (📌 Module 4) • Training of intermediaries (e.g. health workers) and end-users (e.g. local farmers), if possible, applying “hands-on” teaching and exercising (e.g. pilot scale demonstrations, on-site training, participatory research) (📌 Module 2) • Integration of local partner institutions – companies, community-based organisations, local cooperatives, local authorities (e.g. national park management) etc. – into the research process, when formulating the research questions, through participatory or action research, or as members of an advisory board (📌 Module 2, 3 & 4) <p>With regards to contact, interaction and collaboration between researchers and potential users, good practice examples and evaluation data shows the importance of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • selecting collaboration partners purposefully and basing their choice on the decision upon the intended users of the project’s outputs. (📌 Module 2 & 3) • building long-term relationships with stakeholders and users, from the early implementation phase to dissemination. However, collaboration in the set-up phase tends to be less effective (see below). (📌 Module 4) • exchanging frequently; sharing and discussing intermediate results instead of only final results. (📌 Module 4) • making use of local contacts and/or long-term collaboration to overcome skepticism towards researchers. (📌 Module 4)
<p>Opportunities for direct contact between researchers and users exist.</p>	<p>Evidence from the thematic evaluation shows that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • direct physical interaction should, if possible, be preferred over indirect relations with end-users. (📌 Module 4) • intermediaries (i.e. individuals or organisations external to the project that support a transfer of knowledge between users and producers of knowledge) are only effective if opportunities for direct contact between the producers and users of knowledge exist. (📌 Module 4)
<p>Researcher has skills in in storytelling, networking, and translating research results.</p>	<p>As experience from the projects analysed shows, researchers’ and users’/intermediaries’ capacities to take up and to disseminate knowledge increases when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • researchers are sensitised and receive guidance on how to integrate uptake into the research process. (📌 Module 2) • users and/or intermediaries receive training/guidance on how to use projects’ specific research results. (📌 Module 2)
<p>Users’ have skills for evidence use and access.</p>	<p>With regard to the dissemination products and activities, good practice examples suggest the need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • know your users early on and reflect on their capacity to take up new knowledge to target dissemination activities and products accordingly. (📌 Module 2 & 4)
<p>Research products are targeted and accessible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use dissemination activities and products hand-in-hand / complementary to each other. If possible, address one user group through several channels. (📌 Module 2 & 4)

Intra-organisational linkages promote knowledge sharing beyond the organisation

In order to value **organisational structures, processes and resources** for uptake, good practice examples and evaluation data demonstrates to:

- **make use of existing and already established partnerships** as they provide a fertile ground for successful uptake and/or **build strong relationships early on** rather than relying on personal and financial resources for dissemination at the final stage of the project. (📌 Module 3, 4 & 8)
- **know your end-users** in order to draw in the right organisational structures, consider **users' demand for new knowledge** and their **capacities to use such knowledge**, and reach out to intermediaries to access governmental actors and local communities. (📌 Module 2, 3 & 4)
- if possible, draw on **organisational and logistical** support from the university for project management and establish **knowledge management** structures, e.g. with regard to the implementation of VLIR-UOS-funded projects. (📌 Module 3)
- Pre-existing and strong partnerships are a success factor for uptake, in particular for projects with a short timeframe (may result from previous/predecessor projects, structural factors or through collaboration with intermediaries). (📌 Module 8)

It is important to seek alignment to the different stakeholders' needs, mutually agree on engagement strategies and jointly (re)defining desired social change processes. Engaging with stakeholders, right from the start of a project (or better yet: before the start) is crucial to create the conditions for uptake. Implementing a project and holding a one-off dissemination workshop at the end of a project is not sufficient. The earlier you connect, the clearer it becomes what they could possibly mean for the project and vice versa. Especially, for vulnerable groups time is needed to create safe spaces and adapt processes to include their voices and avoid unequal power relationships. Stakeholder engagement is ideally a continuous and active process, especially since interests and coalitions can change throughout the time. It is thus important to also closely follow up on your engagement strategy during project development, being in annual reporting and planning, as highlighted in the Figure 11 below. Ideally, the engagement and uptake activities should be included in the operational plan, for example in the domain 'out-reach and policy support' or 'networks and partnerships' (see also Module 2). The planning should specify when you will engage with stakeholder and who is responsible for each activity and the budget (e.g. budget format operational costs) needed (e.g. continuous process, before the start, year 1, 2, etc.).

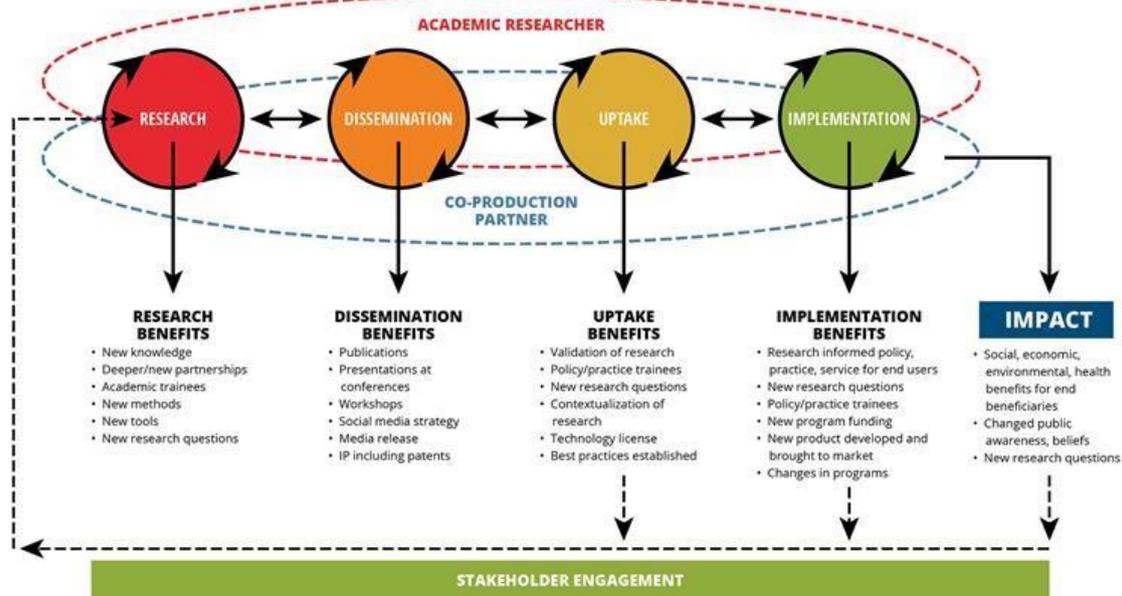


Figure 11: [Impact Framework – Kids Brain Health Network – Réseau pour la santé du cerveau des enfants](#)

Coherence

External coherence

External coherence refers to the complementarity and/or synergy with initiatives taken in the same domain / context by other organisations (local, regional, Belgian actors, etc.). In the proposal, the match / link with other externally funded projects and actors from Belgian development actors already active in the targeted country should be described, including how they plan to engage with the other organisation.

For more information check the VLIR-UOS country reference frameworks on the VLIR-UOS website with more details on the geographical and thematic Joint Strategic Frameworks of Belgian Development Cooperation. The Belgian geographical and thematic Joint Strategic Frameworks (JSFs) provide information on “who is doing what, where” and contact details of different organisations. It is expected that projects identify the opportunities for synergy and complementarity with Belgian development actors in the region and engage with them (where relevant, possible).

Internal coherence

Internal coherence refers to the synergy and/or complementarity with other VLIR-UOS funded activities, for example how the project matches with *other TEAM/Sl, IUC, Global Minds projects, ICP's, etc. working in the same region or on the same topic (potential collaborations with other VLIR-UOS projects are important here, previous experience between the projects partners fits under lessons learned in Module 8).*



Checklist to integrate the SDG principles in Module 4

Leaving No One Behind 🧑🏿 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Does your stakeholder analysis include the perspectives of those (at risk of being) left behind? ✓ Are left behind groups that might be affected by the intervention involved in planning & implementation in an active and meaningful way? ✓ Does your project consider representation and participation of women and disadvantaged groups in the identification and selection of project counterparts and/or advisors (e.g., women's groups, associations of persons with disability)? ♀
Interconnectedness & indivisibility 🧩	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Was your stakeholder analysis co-created by the relevant (local) actors, including marginalised groups?
Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) 🤝	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Have you analysed which actors can support or contribute, and which actors might present obstacles or risks, taking into account interest and power or influence? ✓ Are local actors (beyond institutional actors and including marginalised groups) involved in an active and meaningful way when relevant? ✓ Are partners involved in monitoring, evaluation and learning when relevant, including local actors and vulnerable groups?

Module 5: Planning & budgeting

ESSENCE

This aspect focusses on how the project will contribute to the set goals in the six project domains. It specifies what **activities** must be done to achieve a particular goal (or goals), when they need to be done and who is going to do them. It does not only include the outputs that need to be delivered, but also the financial & human resources attached to it.

KEY QUESTIONS

- What activities per project domain do we need to implement to deliver the results?
- When do we need to implement them?
- What means? Who is responsible?
- What management activities are needed to guarantee a smooth implementation?

Checklist to integrate the SDG principles in Module 5

<p>Leaving No One Behind 🧑🏿</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Do you explain how your choice of target groups and is the planning of activities is informed by the context analysis with attention for left behind groups? ✓ Are (far) left behind groups that might be affected by the intervention involved in planning & implementation in an active and meaningful way? ✓ Does the project ensure gender balanced participation in project activities? (e.g. providing day care during training) ✓ Is sufficient budget foreseen for gender mainstreaming activities?
<p>Interconnectedness & indivisibility 🧩</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Have you taken important (positive and negative) links into account in the planning & implementation of your theory of change (e.g. in objectives / activities)?
<p>Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) 🤝</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Have the different partners reflected on whether the MSP adds value (do the benefits exceed the costs)?

Module 6: Risks

ESSENCE

Identify and manage the key risks the project will potentially face

KEY QUESTIONS

- What are the key uncertainties, assumptions risks (based on Module 2)?
- What is the probability the risk will occur?
- What is the potential impact of the risk?
- How can we reduce the potential impact of the risk or reduce the probability of the risk occurring?
- Who is responsible for follow-up / risk monitoring?

TOOLS/APPROACHES

- ✓ Risk matrix

Module not applicable at time of proposal writing of SI and TEAM Concept notes

Risk identification

What are risks and assumptions?

An **assumption** is a belief that something is true or that something will happen, an assertion about the world we do not always question or check. Assumptions stem from and represent values, beliefs, norms and ideological perspectives that inform our interpretation and understanding of reality, and our expectations of what will happen.

A **risk** is an event or set of related events that are likely to occur and would have an impact on executing a project activity or obtaining a goal / realizing change. Risks are diverse and can be internal and external to the project or organisation.

Examples of risk factors that likely to affect VLIR-UOS projects can be found in the actor-programme risk analysis, where a distinction is made between risk management at the level of **VLIR-UOS** as organisation and at the level of an **individual project**. Risk factors related to a change process can occur at higher education and development sector level, partner institution level, country/regional/thematic level or VLIR-UOS level. Different **types of risks** can be identified during project formulation, a non-exhaustive list of categories is provided below:

- **Financial:** these risks imply potential extra costs or a loss of income (e.g. non digitalised/centralised accounting system)
- **Operational:** potential negative effects on the project activities and the way there are being managed
- **Political:** potential non-compliance with laws, government guidelines, unstable political, security, human rights situation, mobility restrictions (e.g. COVID-19, ebola outbreak), shrinking civic space, etc.
- **Reputational:** potential factors that could have a negative effect on the reputation of the implementing organisations or VLIR-UOS (ethical issues, integrity, fraud, human rights, discrimination, harassment, etc.)

- **Sustainability:** potential factors that could have a negative effect on the continuation after the project ended (e.g. lack of contracts for graduated PhD students, insufficient funds for retainment of staff, laboratory equipment is not well maintained or no trainings are given to local staff on how to use it)
- **Social / cultural:** potential factors that could have a negative effect on (mental) health, family-work balance, stakeholder interest, leadership, HR capabilities, gender equality, etc.
- **Environmental:** potential environmental factors that could have a negative effect on the project

Examples of environmental factors that could impact the project and might pose a risk:

- **Soil:** fertility, pollution, erosion, desertification, land use
- **Water:** quality, pollution, availability, consumption, management
- **Air:** quality, unpleasant smell
- **Forest:** exploitation, species diversity, natural risks (wildfires, diseases, parasites), protected areas
- **Biodiversity:** fauna and flora (endangered or extirpated species), vegetation cover, hazards (invasive species, pests, pathogens)
- **Climate change and extreme events:** drought, flood, frost, hail, hurricane
- **Waste and waste water:** production and management

Examples of actions to mitigate negative effects on the environment:

- Sustainable mobility and (international) travel: raising awareness (discouraging air travel and encouraging alternative compensation of CO2 emission)
- Integrating the principle of circular economy (e.g. purchasing second hand equipment)
- Reducing waste (e.g. introducing composting methods)
- Limiting the use of paper / other material (e.g. standard recto verso printing, focus on digitalisation)
- Sustainable food consumption (e.g. vegetarian catering at events)
- Using renewable energy sources (e.g. use of solar energy)

Identifying assumptions and risks matters for projects because of the following reasons:

- More effective teams

Personal and group values are surfaced, collective energy is generated, and differences are named and sometimes resolved. If not, they are noted and can be taken into account to manage risks and uncertainties and help to choose the most critical pathways on which to focus planning efforts.

- Basis for adaptive management and risk management

Monitoring outputs, assumptions/risks and processes together enables you to respond in a timely manner to new information and adapt planning and strategies, and to decide on the most strategic next steps to take in complex contexts/processes. Critical assumptions are a good basis for risk management.

- More focused learning and evaluation

Critical assumptions for which little knowledge or evidence exists can become the focus for a learning or (action) research to inform the change process. Critical pathways and assumptions help guide analysis and judgements in evaluation and defining risks.

- In Module 2, the change pathways and assumptions related to the change(s) that the project wants to realise were formulated in a theory of change. These assumptions can help to perform a risk assessment of the project.

Risk assessment

Both during formulation and implementation, risks and assumptions need to be assessed and followed up. The expectations for risk assessment and monitoring differs between project types: a more in-depth assessment of the project context is required for longer-term projects compared to short-term projects, which should focus on high-level risks and report on exceptional circumstances in annual reporting.

Risks (and assumptions turned into risks) are assessed on the basis of (1) the *probability* that they will occur and (2) the potential *impact* the risk will have on the intervention. By assessing risks on the basis of these criteria, a risk level (or risk score) is attributed to each risk (probability x potential impact, Table 5).

Table 5: Assessment of risk level based on probability and impact of

Risk level		Impact				
		Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Major	Severe
Probability	Almost certain (4)	Low	Medium	High	Extreme	Extreme
	Probable (3)	Low	Medium	Medium	High	Extreme
	Possible (2)	Low	Low	Medium	Medium	High
	Unlikely (1)	Low	Low	Low	Low	Medium

Risk response and monitoring

Depending on the overall risk level, the intervention needs to formulate measures in order to mitigate the risk (Table 6). When the risk level is low, no action is taken. Medium-level risks do not require immediate action but should be properly monitored and measures should be formulated in case the risk materializes. High-level risks demand immediate action to avoid or weaken its impact. In case the risk level is deemed extreme, the continuation of the project should be questioned and appropriate measures (e.g. referral/escalation to desired levels) should be taken immediately.

Table 6: Risk level and associated response

Risk level	Response
Low:	During formulation and implementation: risks are accepted and are considered as assumptions (we assume everything to go well).
Medium:	During formulation and implementation: At this level, a project doesn't need to take immediate action, but it needs to assure a sound follow-up of the risk. A measure in case the risk occurs is already formulated in this stage.
High :	During formulation and implementation: At this level, action to mitigate the risk is required. Accepting risks is no longer an option. After the risk has been mitigated, the overall risk level is lowered.

Extreme:	When formulating a project, one needs to wonder whether it is still acceptable to start the project. The risk-level of a particular risk is extremely high (killer assumption) that this project should not start/be selected. A project (proposal) needs to be re-oriented to mitigate the risk before submitting the project proposal. During implementation, the project (1) needs to take appropriate measures as soon as possible and (2) communicate the risk to higher levels (Flemish university (college) and VLIR-UOS).
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The risk response determines to what extent risks can be mitigated, by *whom* (assigning responsibility), *how* and *when*. Updating the risk management matrix in the excel format involves both the follow up of *existing* risks (and the implementation of risk responses) and the *identification-analysis-response* of/to new risks during annual reporting. This should be regularly updated at project level (For IUC partnerships, this should be done for all sub-projects together at partnership level).

Checklist to integrate the SDG principles in Module 6

Special attention should also go to risks related to the inclusion of those left behind (LNOB), interconnectedness and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Leaving No One Behind 	<p><i>The risk analysis should discuss the pitfalls and added value to work with certain groups in a vulnerable position. What would happen if they were not included? How can you mitigate any exclusion effects of the project?</i></p> <p><u>Targeting approach:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Have you tailored remedial action (by yourself, by partners, or by others) to address/mitigate any exclusion effects (e.g. in the risk analysis)? <p><u>Mainstreaming approach:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Does your risk analysis include reflections on whether design and implementation might exclude women or vulnerable people from (the benefits of) the intervention within and/or beyond the target groups? ✓ Does the project identify cultural/religious/legal restrictions that would not allow women or men to participate in project activities (e.g. identify the reasons making it difficult for young female academics to work outside office hours) 
Interconnectedness & indivisibility 	<p><i>Negative trade-offs should get a place in the risk analysis, where mitigation strategies can be proposed.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Have you taken important (positive and negative) interlinkages into account in the design and implementation in the risk analysis (e.g. agricultural intervention with potential trade-off for gender, health, climate change)? ✓ Does your risk management allow to follow-up on risks related to important interlinkages (co-benefits and trade-offs between environmental, socio-economic, institutional factors, etc.)?
Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) 	<p><i>The potential obstacles for working with different stakeholders can be part of the risk analysis and mitigation responses to deal with diverging interests or powerful actors in a partnership.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Have you analysed which actors might present obstacles or risks, taking into account interest and power or influence?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Does your risk analysis consider potential obstacles or issues that the MSP or its members might create (e.g. conflicts of interest for private sector actors, inefficient use of resources, ...)?✓ Have you reflected on strategies or remedial action to deal with such risks (possibly only internally)?
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Module 7: Monitoring & reporting

ESSENCE

This aspect focusses on the performance and measures the progress towards realising the goals of the project. This is done on the basis of the planning (see Module 5.) and by collecting the relevant data and analysing indicators at the level of the project. It is relevant for accountability (reporting), but also for learning and steering purposes (see Module 8).

KEY QUESTIONS

- What information do we need to track and analyse the change process as it evolves?
- What information do we need to monitor assumptions or learn about the change process?
- What information do we need to demonstrate the realisations of the project?
- How will we collect this information? Who will do this? When? What systems need to be put in place?

TOOLS/APPROACHES

- List of standard and optional indicators in excel
- [Equal Access Participatory M&E toolkit - Module 2 \(setting objectives & indicators\)](#)

Module not applicable for TEAM Concept Notes / for SI projects only Standard indicators to be filled out.

Develop / Choose (standard) indicators from menu



The logical framework that has been used for several years will be replaced by the results framework consisting of six domains, building further on the project strategy developed in Module 2.

To facilitate the formulation of indicators and allow some aggregation of indicators at different levels (per country/region/programme), VLIR-UOS provides a shortlist of **standard and optional indicators** per project domain (education programmes and methods; research programmes and methods; outreach and policy support; networks and partnership; systems, policies and infrastructure).

For each domain that is addressed by the project, the predefined **standard indicators** should be included in the project's results framework using the excel

An indicator provides a marker of whether a certain change has happened or whether certain conditions exist. Indicators can be quantitative or qualitative, direct or indirect.

format for Module 7. Projects can freely choose **optional indicators** from the menu list to collect additional information in a particular project domain. Only the standard indicators in the **domains** addressed by the project need to be tracked in annual reporting, the optional indicators are as the word indicates "optional". **Disaggregation** by sex and stakeholder type for certain indicators is also required for some indicators. In the light of LNOB, some indicators on disability and minority groups are added to analyse the project results from an inclusion perspective.

In addition to standard and optional indicators, **project-specific indicators** (max. 2) can be put forward by the project to measure progress towards the achievement of their results and to steer decision making by the project management. Development and selection of the indicators should be guided by commonly used criteria to assess the quality of an indicator, such as the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable,

Realistic and Timebound) or SPICED principles (Subjective, Participatory, Interpreted, Cross-checked/Comparable, Empowering, and Diverse/Disaggregated).¹⁷

Use & reporting of indicators

Projects have to report on annual basis the progress made in **standard** and, if applicable, **optional** indicators from the menu. During formulation, the baseline and target values should be provided in the excel sheet. VLIR-UOS asks projects to correctly copy the standard and optional indicators (as to allow future aggregation) and not to alter the formulation (adding information to the formulation is possible). This data will be aggregated at VLIR-UOS level to monitor progress and impact of all VLIR-UOS projects. The project-specific (own developed) indicators will not be followed-up by VLIR-UOS in annual reporting. This the responsibility and own decision of the project.

Failing to plan is planning to fail

Projects need to plan the measuring of indicators and need to take into account the feasibility (cost/benefit) of measuring indicators. That is why there is a column “**Source of Verification**” (where will the project get the information) in the results framework module. Next to identifying the source of verification, projects need to think about:

- How will we measure the indicator?
- Frequency of data collection: annually, every 2 years? Starting when?
- Who in the team is responsible for the data collection?

Checklist to integrate the SDG principles in Module 7

Leaving No One Behind 🧑🏿	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Does the M&E system provide sufficient information about change at the level of the target groups and the (in)direct contribution of the project towards those changes? ✓ Does the project require disaggregated indicators for follow-up? ✓ Are relevant gender-specific indicators and/or indicators that are disaggregated by sex selected? ✓ SPICED ¹⁸use/collection of indicators?
Interconnectedness & indivisibility 🧩	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Have you taken important (positive and negative) links into account in the design and implementation of your indicators?
Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) 🤝	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Have relevant stakeholders been involved in the identification of the indicators that most meaningfully indicate anticipated (intermediate) change? ✓ Is another entity or actor already collecting the data we need? Do we have access to that information, can we use it?

¹⁷ See also [Project Objectives, Indicators and Assessing Social Change \(betterevaluation.org\)](https://www.betterevaluation.org/)

¹⁸ The SPICED approach puts more emphasis on developing indicators that stakeholders can define and use for their own purposes of interpreting and learning about change, rather than simply measuring or attempting to demonstrate impact to meet donor requirements.

Module 8: Learning & steering

ESSENCE

This aspect examines the quality of the project (to what extent does it fulfil the expectations and needs). It involves following-up on changes, adaptations and lessons learned in order to improve the quality of the project.

KEY QUESTIONS

- During project formulation: How will the recommendations of the selection commission / lessons learned from previous experiences be taken on board? What will you do differently?
- What have we learned from previous projects, in particular in the case of follow-up projects? In the case of follow-up projects, what is the added value of this project?
- During project implementation: How do you plan to systematically follow-up on your theory of change / identify good practices / learn (e.g. peer-to-peer between similar VLIR-UOS projects, sharing lessons learned in progress reports)?

TOOLS/APPROACHES

- Thematic evaluation of departmental level (SI, TEAM) projects, VLIR-UOS publication of 2019.
- Feedback selection commission on project proposal
- Regular project evaluation meetings (progress reports, etc.)
- Exchanges and peer-to-peer learning opportunities in the VLIR-UOS community

Formulating lessons learned and learning from experience

Not everything can go as planned. Every project will face certain challenges during its implementation. It is possible that the project strategy / theory of change will have to be adjusted if the project context changes. It is important to learn from mistakes and previous experiences, follow up and correct any changes that are needed to keep the project on track. But projects can also learn from each other. VLIR-UOS wants to stimulate peer-to-peer learning between projects and exchange good practices with the community. This will be further developed and implemented in the future, for example through platform activities aiming at collective learning or storage of key lessons learned in a database / website.

The following questions can help to capture interesting lessons learned, good practices and steer projects in the right direction (at formulation stage, during and after implementation) to have greater results:

- What were the main success factors? What worked well?
- What is useful to share with others? What recommendations do you have for other similar projects?
- What went wrong, what were the key problem areas, what did not turn out as expected and why?
- How did the project overcome certain difficulties?
- What needs improvement / at what level (VLIR-UOS, institution, project team, technical, etc.)?
- How can this be improved in the future?
- If you would do the project again, what would you do differently?

Checklist to integrate the SDG principles in Module 8

Leaving No One Behind 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Are there explicit mechanisms for participation of the target groups in the project M&E system? ✓ Does the project M&E system include systematic reflections on the implications of the intervention for any vulnerable groups who (according to the
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	<p>ToC) may benefit indirectly? (e.g. through existing secondary data sources without you having to collect data on groups that are not direct target groups)</p> <p>✓ Does the project M&E system include systematic reflections about potential negative effects for vulnerable groups (e.g. as identified through risk analysis)? And if any negative effects are observed, does this inform remedial action?</p>
Interconnectedness & indivisibility 	<p>✓ Have you reflected on the extent to which the intervention maximized pre-identified co-benefits and mitigated pre-identified trade-offs? Was a good balance struck?</p> <p>✓ Have you reflected on unforeseen co-benefits and trade-offs, or limiting and enforcing links?</p> <p>✓ Does your M&E system provide sufficient space for learning about important interlinkages (co-benefits and trade-offs)?</p>
Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) 	<p>✓ Have you adjusted partnerships based on lessons learned?</p> <p>✓ Have the different partners reflected on whether the positive impact of the MSP can be improved (e.g. via new partners, other collaboration forms, contribution of the partnership to specific outcomes)?</p>

