

Ontwerp van management response : Tussen-tijdse evaluatie Global Minds – versie dd. 20 november 2020

Algemene reactie VLIR-UOS

Wordt nog aangevuld nadat het conceptueel kader van GM 2.0 finaal is.

Reactie VLIR-UOS op de aanbevelingen

Recommendation 1
<p>Integrate “global engagement” as a strategic orientation in the conceptual framework</p> <p>The evaluation reveals that Global Minds meets a need to innovate and explore new approaches. The programme allows the institutions to take up and work on new trends in development cooperation. These include for instance a “decolonization of knowledge”, “global citizenship education” and a more holistic approach to “global engagement”. In contrast to the “classic” North/South divide, “global engagement” emphasizes the reciprocity of North/South relationships and strives for a committed, meaningful interaction with the world as a whole. The more holistic approach of “global engagement” thereby is equally in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We recommend to more strongly align the programme with the SDGs by focussing more on “global engagement” instead of a narrower understanding of “development cooperation” and to assign Flemish HEI to explore, as part of their Global Minds programmes, how to better integrate these aspects into UDC. In this regard, we also recommend to strengthen the reciprocity of the Global Minds programme to allow for more exchange between academics and students from the Global South and North (see also recommendation 7).</p>
<p>Management response (Agree / partially agree / disagree)</p>
<p>Agree</p>
<p>Response / Actions planned</p> <p>VLIR-UOS agrees with the recommendation to align the Global Minds programme with Agenda 2030 and the associated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The new five-year programme of VLIR-UOS (FYP2), of which the next Global Minds programme (GM 2.0) is an integral part, aligns itself with Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. The focus of the FYP2 will be on the global challenge of sustainable development, thereby expanding the more narrow understanding of “development cooperation” and also abandoning the classic North/South binary. The three underlying principles of Agenda 2030 (leaving no one behind, multi-stakeholder partnerships, interconnectedness) will function as important signposts to achieve the VLIR-UOS ambition of an SDG proof FYP2, including GM 2.0.</p> <p>The conceptual framework of GM 2.0 (which will include a vision and ToC) will be aligned with the overarching strategic orientation of the FYP2, thereby clarifying the specific objective and contributions of GM 2.0 as well as its position with the broader VLIR-UOS portfolio of intervention types.</p>

The conceptual framework for GM 2.0, to be developed in consultation with the Flemish HEIs, will convey a holistic approach starting from the threefold mission of higher education institutions: research, education, and service to society. Furthermore, the framework will provide entry points to incorporate relevant aspects of global citizenship education, decolonization, and a broader understanding of development cooperation and sustainable development, both at the level of the individual HEIs as well as at the level of VLIR-UOS.

As for the term “global engagement, VLIR-UOS is still reflecting on appropriate terminology to better reflect the updated strategic orientation (i.e. sustainable development) of the FYP2, including GM 2.0. VLIR-UOS will maintain the descriptor “Global Minds” for this particular intervention type because it has become an established reference point within the Flemish HEIs.

Next steps

Finalisation of conceptual framework FYP2

Development of conceptual framework for GM 2.0 (vision and ToC) in consultation with Flemish HEIs

Recommendation 2

Use Global Minds to strengthen Belgian UDC through activities outside Belgium

Capacity building can only be relevant if new capacities can also be valorised. A need was therefore expressed to also explore new avenues to (larger) UDC projects in the Global South beyond limited budgets for UDC in Belgium, for example through collaborations/consortia with other universities, non-governmental organisations, or the private sector. It is hence recommended to recognize possibilities to explore and initiate UDC projects not only with HEIs in the Global South, but also including other actors, e.g. other HEI, private sector and civil society actors, through Global Minds. This means that the project’s target system and funding applicability would have to be expanded so that preparatory missions between these actors, if they aim to submit a joint application for a UDC project, could be funded.

Management response (Agree / partially agree / disagree)

Partially-Agree

Response / Actions planned

Multi-actor partnerships will be one of three guiding principles for an SDG-proof FYP2 that will apply to all VLIR-UOS intervention types, including GM 2.0. GM plays a vital role in exploring and initiating collaborations and partnerships with a broad range of (non-)academic actors. While VLIR-UOS agrees with the proposal that GM funded activities outside Belgium should strengthen Flemish UDC, it also wishes to point out that this is already effectively happening within some of the GM programmes of the Flemish HEIs (i.e. short research stays, exploration missions, outgoing staff mobility, collaborations with non-)academic actors). Preparatory missions in view of upcoming VLIR-UOS calls are already taking place within GM. Furthermore, new capacities as a result of GM can be and are effectively being valorised through the various VLIR-UOS funded project modalities in the Global South, or alternatively, via other UDC-related funding sources. The exploration of alternative UDC-funding and/or UDC-relevant multi-stakeholder partnerships at the European/international level as well as linking up ongoing VLIR-UOS projects with European / international projects / networks would certainly fall within the ambit and overarching objective of GM. This does not mean, however, that co-financing GM activities with international funding

sources would be compulsory. VLIR-UOS will review the financial guidelines to identify potential bottlenecks in that regard and discuss with DGD which expenses in this regard would fit within the GM finality. In addition, VLIR-UOS could play a role in identifying additional UDC-relevant funding opportunities at the European/international level.

Next steps

Clarify with DGD which kind of expenses related to the exploration of partnerships and/or UDC alternative funding fits within the GM programme finality and financial guidelines

Recommendation 3

Ensure more internal coherence through results-oriented monitoring

The Global Minds programme’s decentralised character was found essential to ensure it is relevant to the institutions. However, the evaluation also shows that internal coherence regarding the individual programmes’ orientation towards the common framework and objectives of Global Minds is limited and that a clearer framework is needed to provide for more results orientation. The evaluation team therefore recommends that VLIR-UOS should take over the role of overseeing and guaranteeing the quality of the (implementation of) the programme, which is reflected in the individual programmes’ alignment with the common framework and objectives, the quality of the monitoring systems and indicators used, compliance with the reporting requirements, etc. (see also recommendation 8). At the same time, autonomy of the Flemish HEI to choose the specific instruments to contribute to the objectives set and define institutional foci should be preserved.

Instead of an input based financial monitoring and controlling (see also recommendation 8), we recommend to concentrate on results-oriented monitoring by setting up Theories of Change for each of the programmes and formulating joint outcome-level indicators for all Global Minds programmes (see recommendation 10). These would allow VLIR-UOS to evaluate the allocation of funds based on the different instruments’ actual contribution to the common objectives, taking into account that one instrument is likely to contribute to more than one objective and/or to create spill-over effects.

Management response (Agree / partially agree / disagree)

Partially agree

Response / Actions planned

VLIR-UOS recognises the need to strengthen the internal coherence of GM. This can be achieved, among other things, by developing a clearer common framework that can strengthen the internal coherence of the programme and the individual GM programmes as well as its alignment with the overarching strategic of the FYP2.

However, VLIR-UOS does not agree with the recommendation that VLIR-UOS should take over the role of overseeing and guaranteeing the quality of the programme. Considering the autonomy as well as availability of M&E expertise at the level of Flemish HEIs, this process should rather be regarded as a joint responsibility of VLIR-UOS and Flemish HEIs, thereby reflecting that GM operates at two levels: individual GM programmes that are developed and implemented at the level of institutions and, in addition, the overall level of GM managed by VLIR-UOS.

The role of VLIR-UOS at the overall level of GM is to facilitate initiatives and processes that can contribute to the internal coherence of the programme. VLIR-UOS is already putting this approach into practice. Examples include the facilitation of the mid-term evaluation as a joint learning process with ample opportunities for feedback, the joint development of an impact survey with spill-over effects in terms of inter-university cooperation and joint learning, and an online discussion group with Flemish HEIs, as part of the design of FYP2, to discuss the conceptual framework of GM 2.0.

Building on these experiences, VLIR-UOS has convened a working group, in which each Flemish HEI is represented, that is developing a conceptual framework with common objectives that can guide results-oriented monitoring, safeguard internal coherence, and facilitates joint learning and cooperation. In that regard it is important to note that for the current GM programme there was never enough time before submission to DGD to fully develop a results-oriented common framework. By facilitating the joint development of a common framework, VLIR-UOS anticipates that there will be a clearer framework for GM 2.0 in place to guide results-oriented monitoring, both at the level of Flemish HEIs and VLIR-UOS. This common framework will also be discussed with DGD so that there is a common understanding by all parties involved of the finality of this programme, as compared to the other intervention types in the VLIR-UOS portfolio, as well as trust, based on the basis of the consultation and co-creation process and the result of it.

The common framework should be specific enough to enable the Flemish HEIs to align their individual programmes with the common framework and objectives (internal coherence), whilst at the same time ensuring the autonomy of the institutions to develop programmes (and accompanying Theories of Change) in accordance with their own institutional needs and priorities.

Next steps

Development of conceptual framework for GM 2.0 (vision and ToC) in consultation with Flemish HEIs.

Discussion with DGD about the conceptual framework for GM 2.0.

Recommendation 4

Try to fund PhD scholarships outside Global Minds

Due to the way universities function, PhDs are an important instrument and relevant for most institutions. Yet, the evaluation concluded that sustainability concerns, the uncertainty of the expected long-term effects of networks with alumni as well as the fact that the expected effect on education could not be confirmed question the significant investment of (full/“sandwich”) PhD scholarships. Moreover, small(er) research grants were identified as contributing to the same specific objective of promoting concentrated research in development-relevant thematic areas in a more cost-effective way. We thus recommend – aiming for achieving the greatest possible impact with the least amount of money – to give those other instruments that proved to be more cost-effective priority over funding for PhDs. Taking into account that PhDs are central to universities and that PhD scholarships for students from the Global South do make a valuable contribution to the wider objectives of UDC, funding for (sandwich) PhDs should, however, be guaranteed elsewhere (e.g. from a different programme).

Management response (Agree / partially agree / disagree)

Disagree

Response / Actions planned
<p>VLIR-UOS disagrees with the recommendation. PhD scholarships are central to universities in their drive towards innovation and excellence in research and education. Within the GM programme they serve as an important vehicle to raise awareness about the scope and opportunities for UDC-oriented research among academics in Flemish HEIs. As such, PhD scholarships can encourage these academics – as promoters of PhD students - to get further involved in UDC, for instance through VLIR-UOS-funded projects. Compared to VLIR-UOS projects, PhD scholarships offer a less demanding and therefore easier entry point for academics to become active for the first time within the field of UDC. While PhD scholarships represent a significant investment, the cost-effectiveness of this instrument cannot be fully established at the overall level of GM, but should instead be measured against the institutional needs and priorities at the level of individual HEIs. As a matter of fact, universities make very different choices in terms of investing in full or “sandwich” PhD scholarships, thereby taking cost-effectiveness into account. <u>This also means that there is no obligation for the Flemish HEIs to include PhD scholarships in their GM programme.</u> Furthermore, the mid-term evaluation concludes that PhD scholarships for students from the Global South do make a valuable contribution to the wider objectives of UDC. Since GM is supposed to contribute to the wider objectives of GM, PhD scholarships can be retained within GM. PhD scholarships within GM will need to continue to follow the uniform scholarship guidelines and will have to be aligned with the newly developed VLIR-UOS SDG proof strategic framework for scholarships. The development of a common framework for the next GM programme will provide an opportunity to optimize the impact of PhD scholarships and make the specific contributions of this instrument (e.g. development of relevant expertise, exploration of partnerships,...) more visible in results monitoring and reporting.</p>
Next steps
<p>Development of conceptual framework for GM 2.0 (vision and ToC) in consultation with Flemish HEIs</p>

Recommendation 5
Make preparatory and follow-up formats obligatory for travel grants
<p>The evaluation demonstrates that the (cost-) effectiveness of travel grants <u>alone</u> is limited because their intended effect on sensitization depends on preparatory and follow-up formats. We thus recommend maintaining funding for preparatory and follow-up formats in the Global Minds programme, and to integrate these formats as an obligatory component of the grant. This would not only strengthen the instrument’s contribution to informing, sensitizing and mobilizing Flemish students, but also increase overall appreciation for the third dimension of the programme (sensitization). Further reflection, however, is needed on how to improve participation, especially in follow-up formats. Options are, for instance, providing of a certificate for completion of the full trajectory or linking the full payment of the grant and/or receipt of credit points to participation in preparatory and follow-up formats. Moreover, it is recommended that avenues are explored how to make preparatory and follow-up formats accessible also for HEI’s staff benefiting from a mobility grant to foster critical reflection of North-South relationships and hence gradually advance a more equal, fair and sustainable approach to development cooperation.</p>
Management response (Agree / partially agree / disagree)
<p>Partially agree</p>
Response / Actions planned

VLIR-UOS can only partially agrees with this recommendation: ~~preparatory and follow-up formats are indeed crucial elements to maximise the desired sensitization effects of travel grants, but because~~ these preparatory formats are already obligatory for students. This has been pointed out by the Flemish HEIs during the restitution session, but the recommendation was not adjusted. In fact, GM has fostered opportunities for the Flemish HEIs to invest in these formats and to utilize the specialized expertise of UCOS and USOS to make further improvements. VLIR-UOS intends to maintain travel grants within the next GM programme, not least because travel grants (in combination with preparatory and follow-up formats) represent a critical pathway for global citizenship education. VLIR-UOS agrees that for student travel grants there is some scope to maximise the sensitization effects of this instrument. VLIR-UOS will actively encourage the Flemish HEIs – for instance by facilitating exchange, joint learning and cooperation - to further optimise these formats for students. Possible aspects that could be considered in that regard are virtual learning opportunities to complement the sensitization goals of travel grants, ~~potential accessibility of these formats to HEI staff also~~, involvement of (project) partners from the Global South in the design and implementation of formats and/or sensitization activities themselves,.... Also the format of group travels contributes to collective learning and sensitization. Due to its expertise and involvement in the preparation and sensitization of students with a travel grant, UCOS can play an important role in strengthening the effectiveness of travel grants. For HEI staff members that receive a mobility grant, the general recommendation to make these formats obligatory, does not seem realistic or desirable.

Next steps

Discussions with Flemish HEI about scope and opportunities to optimize the preparatory and follow-up formats for student travel grants.

Recommendation 6

Integrate interuniversity cooperation and joint learning into a future ToC at programme level

The evaluation demonstrated that some instruments explicitly aim at improving interuniversity cooperation even though it is not yet a definite objective of the programme. We thus recommend to explicitly formulate an objective “Interuniversity cooperation (between Flemish universities und the university colleges) and joint learning” for the next phase of Global Minds and to integrate the objective into a future ToC at overall programme level. Strengthened interuniversity cooperation, however, is not (only) an end in itself but it strengthens networks for UDC at the individual institutions and facilitates joint learning through creating opportunities to exchange, e.g. on good practice examples and lessons learned. These ultimately contribute to the objective of better (instruments for) UDC. By overseeing all six Global Minds programmes, VLIR-UOS, besides individual initiatives and exchanges, has a prominent role to play in facilitating more systematic interuniversity cooperation.

Management response (Agree / partially agree / disagree)

Partially Agree

Response / Actions planned

VLIR-UOS partially agrees with the recommendation to further improve interuniversity cooperation and joint learning. ~~VLIR-UOS is willing to play a facilitating role in that regard, with, but with~~ the caveat that interuniversity cooperation and joint learning should be encouraged rather than enforced. Furthermore, interuniversity cooperation is not necessarily an objective in its own right, but rather a means to an end (better UDC). How and to what extent interuniversity cooperation can be integrated into the future ToC is

being discussed with the Flemish HEIs during the development of the conceptual framework for GM 2.0. VLIR-UOS agrees that it can play a facilitating role to further encourage interuniversity cooperation and joint learning. It is also important to point out that despite GM is still being a relatively young programme, but there are already promising signs of interuniversity cooperation and learning: the mid-term evaluation that was set up as a joint learning process, the joint development of an impact survey with spill-over effects in terms of interuniversity cooperation and learning, regular meetings with ICOS and VLIR-UOS programme manager to exchange information and share insights, and the development of a common framework for GM 2.0 in consultation with the Flemish HEIs. ~~Integrating interuniversity cooperation and joint learning into the ToC for GM 2.0 could give further impetus to this ambition, but it still subject to discussion whether this should be a programme objective or rather be seen as a means to an end (better UDC) and therefore be integrated as a programme result or output in the new ToC.~~

Next steps

Development of conceptual framework for GM 2.0 (vision and ToC) in consultation with Flemish HEIs

Recommendation 7

Strengthen reciprocity within the programme

In line with the recommendation to strengthen the programme's orientation towards global engagement and to overcome the "classic" North/South divide, the evaluation revealed a need for more reciprocity within specific instruments (XREI and REI). We thus recommend aiming for more South-North mobility in a future Global Minds programme, both for students and academics. Incoming mobility for academics hereby proved effective for integrating a development-dimension in education (e.g. through guest lectures) and research (e.g. through providing an opportunity to work out potential South projects). Incoming mobility for students, in addition, is expected to contribute to the sensitization objective and to strengthen (new) partnerships with HEI in the Global South

Management response (Agree / partially agree / disagree)

~~Partially agree~~**Agree**

Response / Actions planned

VLIR-UOS agrees that the scope for reciprocity within GM could be expanded. This is a logical consequence of a strategic orientation towards Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, which is a universal challenge that goes beyond the classic North/South binary. As a matter of fact, incoming mobility for academics and experts from the Global South is already possible within GM through the XREI instrument. As for incoming mobility for students from the Global South, VLIR-UOS agrees ~~in principle~~ with the recommendation, since such exchanges can contribute to the goal of capacity building at the level of the Flemish HEIs in order to developing more equal partnerships. However, a discussion needs to be had with DGD and other government agencies to ensure that South-North mobility for students is aligned with the financial and immigration regulations currently in place.

Next steps

Discussion with DGD

Recommendation 8

Increase the efficiency of financial controlling (incl. through lump sum agreements and through making use of the institutions' auditing) and focus on quality control in terms of the programmes' contents and implementation

The field missions revealed that, at the moment, Global Minds' funds are audited two to three times (by the institution's own internal and external audit and by VLIR-UOS). It was hence questioned whether this duplication of efforts constitute a justified use of resources as it creates huge costs on the side of the universities and university colleges and at VLIR-UOS in terms of personnel. We recommend that while financial control could be covered by the institutions' auditing (single audit principle), VLIR-UOS could be responsible for a quality control regarding, e.g., individual programmes' alignment with the common framework and objectives, the quality of the monitoring systems and indicators used, compliance with the reporting requirements, etc. In this regard, joint outcome-level indicators for all participating universities and VLHORA, developed under the guidance of VLIR-UOS (see recommendation 10), are essential.

Financial control, in addition, could be simplified through an increased use of lump sum agreements, e.g. per travel day, including average per diems, travel and transport costs as well as accommodation.

Management response (Agree / partially agree / disagree)

Partially agreeAgree

Response / Actions planned

VLIR-UOS agrees that the efficiency of financial controlling – including auditing – should be increased. This is an issue that extends beyond Global Minds and relates to the roles and responsibilities of VLIR-UOS in general as formal contractor with DGD. VLIR-UOS recognises the need for simplification of financial control, but the scope for lump sum agreements remains very limited due to the stipulations of the Royal Decree. VLIR-UOS will identify opportunities to increase the efficiency of financial controlling throughout its portfolio and will discuss these in detail with DGD. The fact that the main bulk of GM expenses are expenses made from the accounts of the Flemish HEIs, will be used to make a plea for a more simplified financial management and control framework.

Next steps

VLIR-UOS to actively identify opportunities to increase the efficiency of financial controlling

Discussion with DGD

Recommendation 9

Allow for more flexibility regarding the annual budget / annual budgets

The evaluation revealed that the annual budgeting makes long-term planning difficult and hinders the ability of universities and colleges to react flexibly to challenges or windows of opportunity in the programmes' implementation. As it is suggested to keep or even stress the programme's innovative and exploratory character (see recommendation 1), the evaluation team recommends allowing – well-founded – transfers of funds between the annual budgets within the programme period/multi-annual budgets. This would further allow to set-up instruments and whole programmes with a more long-term, i.e. multi-year, perspective.

Management response (Agree / partially agree / disagree)
Agree
Response / Actions planned
VLIR-UOS agrees with the need for more flexibility in terms of annual budgeting, a point that has also been reinforced by the impact of COVID-19. Fund transfers between annual budgets as well as multi-annual budgets could indeed amplify the innovative and exploratory character of Global Minds. However, the GM budget allocations for the Flemish HEI are currently calculated with the interuniversity distribution key on an annual basis. Multi-annual budget flexibility would therefore require an adjustment to the inter-university distribution key.
Next steps
Adjust/simplify interuniversity distribution key <u>VLIR-UOS to enable more flexibility regarding the annual budget / annual budgets</u>

Recommendation 10
Set-up joint outcome-level monitoring with uniform indicators
The monitoring systems of the GM programmes are – with few exceptions – not capable of measuring the objectives of the GM programme. Here, the evaluation team identifies a need for more guidance from VLIR-UOS with regard to implementing a coherent M&E system across all Global Minds programmes. Given that all programmes are required to serve the same common objectives, the evaluation team recommends to implement this jointly, under the guidance of VLIR-UOS, formulating uniform indicators for all participating universities and VLHORA at the level of the common (outcome) objectives.
Management response (Agree / partially agree / disagree)
Agree
Response / Actions planned
VLIR-UOS agrees that a more coherent framework for results-oriented monitoring (recommendation 3) implies a limited set of standard indicators to monitor the higher-level objectives that the Flemish HEI have in common. The joint development of a common framework will also provide an opportunity to identify/formulate indicators, in consultation with the Flemish HEIs, that can be easily integrated into the M&E systems of the HEI and that are also aligned with the standard indicators of FYP2. VLIR-UOS will also conduct a needs assessment prior to the start of GM 2.0 in order to identify the need for support and guidance from VLIR-UOS regarding the implementation of a coherent M&E system at the level of Flemish HEI.
Next steps
Development of conceptual framework for GM 2.0 (vision and ToC) in consultation with Flemish HEIs
Identification/formulation of a limited set of joint indicators in consultation with Flemish HEIs
M&E needs assessment among Flemish HEIs

Recommendation 11

Increase Global Minds' valorisation for South projects

Mobility of academics, especially outgoing, to explore and initiate partnerships is a main means to increase the number of project proposals, their quality and hence the number of South projects being (successfully) implemented. Consequently, we recommend to further strengthen the valorisation of Global Minds' instruments for exploring and initiating new partnerships for VLIR-UOS funded UDC projects (South portfolio) by making allowance for fact finding missions in the selection criteria for South projects.

Management response (Agree / partially agree / disagree)

Disagree

Response / Actions planned

VLIR-UOS does not agree with this recommendation, in part because its underlying strategic purpose remains unclear. The GM impact survey conducted by the Flemish HEI confirms that GM has a positive effect on the quality of research proposals being submitted to VLIR-UOS or other funding agents. Adjusting selection criteria for South projects to valorise GM instruments, however, would be illogical. VLIR-UOS calls for proposals are very competitive and need to offer a level playing field for project proponents. Simply rewarding projects that have a prior link with GM would give them an unfair advantage that defies the competitive logic of VLIR-UOS project selection. GM-funded fact finding missions can play a role in improving the quality of a proposal, but that should manifest itself during the selection process.

Next steps

None