

# Evaluation management response - VLIR-UOS

03-09-2020

## General

<b>Evaluation title:</b>	Mid-term evaluation ICP Incremental funding
<b>Evaluation year:</b>	2019-2020
<b>Development and approval of this <u>management response</u></b>	This management response was prepared by the VLIR-UOS secretariat and discussed by the Bureau UOS on 4 June 2020 and 31 August 2020. The ICP programmes were invited to complement/react. The document will be finalised after the discussion at the level of the Bureau UOS on 31 August.

## Background

VLIR-UOS is legally obliged to carry out a number of evaluations of different components of its FYP during the period 2017-2021. One of those components and an important part of the VLIR-UOS portfolio is the support to Flemish international master programmes. Since 2017 VLIR-UOS supports a selection of 15 ICPs with “incremental funding” (IF) and provides 12 scholarships per ICP programme. Between September 2019 and March 2020 a mid-term evaluation was executed by Ace Europe, focusing on the the added value/relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of the new concept of incremental funding as a means to strengthening a South dimension in international master programmes.

VLIR-UOS would like to thank the evaluators for the extensive exercise involving a multitude of stakeholders and for guaranteeing a participative character by providing the ICP programmes the opportunity to give feedback on the inception report, by organizing a sense-making workshop to discuss the first draft findings and to give further directions to the report and by inviting all programmes to read through and comment on the draft fact sheet per programme and the draft general report.

## Conclusions of the mid-term evaluation

VLIR-UOS welcomes the extensive mapping which is a very valuable overview allowing for further exchange and learning. VLIR-UOS also takes note of the conclusions of the mid-term evaluation, showing the following:

### Effectiveness

- All of the ICPs have taken concrete steps related to the IF project activities specified in their application form, and the majority of them can already demonstrate clear outputs and emerging changes.

- The IF scheme is flexible and allows for gradual developments wherein the ICPs can experiment, try and test and adapt the direction of the project towards scenarios that appear to work well and discard others whereby the budget rules of IF have created appropriate space for this gradual development. This flexibility also applies to the selection of project partners.
- The overall dynamics generated by the IF are highly appreciated from a process logic.
- The IF with an underlying project logic has allowed the ICPs to work in a less fragmented manner, whereby fieldwork and other activities with partners are getting better organised, and the interaction with partners and alumni is more adequately structured which also allowed for a more equal partnership between the different project partners (e.g. co-producers of educational content).
- The IF modality has been effective to strengthen both new and existing aspects of ICP South component development. The latter are now becoming more frequent, visible and impacting, and/or are being organized differently. IF proves a modality that allows both newcomers and more established ICPs alike to develop their South components.
- All programmes have set support measures to ensure South students' quality participation.
- The presence of 12 high quality scholars in each (year) of the programmes is key to the effectiveness of the IF projects, and affects positively the level of the class and the quality of the learning process.
- In almost all programmes student numbers have increased. Evaluators assume that this is due to the IF which has made the ICPs more attractive.
- Thanks to the IF the beneficiaries of the ICPs have increased since course content developed with IF is now accessible to many more students at partner institutions than only the ICP students.

## Relevance

- The ICPs demonstrate their relevance by responding to each of the three objectives that were part of the ICP call: (i) Link ICP with the development context, (ii) Strategy to strengthen South dimension through cooperation with partners, and (iii) Activities that can ensure quality participation by students and staff from the South in the ICP.
- Both the content and the didactic style of the ICPs have become more development relevant and South student focused.
- South partners have added value to the curricula beyond what the North-based ICP could possibly offer on its own. The IF has also affected positively the capacity of the Southern stakeholders to teach, to conduct research and/or to draft research and/or educational project proposals. The evaluators have identified a set of conditions at the level of partner universities.
- IF offers universities alternatives to the traditional, professor-professor or professor-PhD relation and allows to develop a wider network (a.o. alumni) and wider support to development work in the institution.

## Efficiency

- The execution of the IF project is strongly oriented by a **focus** on what was promised in the application and by the wider educational objectives of the ICPs concerned. Although clear objectives for the IF project as such have not been defined, activities to strengthen the South dimension were clear and can be considered as **building blocks of a strategy**.
- There is no information indicating that **task division and execution** of the project would not be **efficient** for the majority of the ICPs.

- Budget and other rules are found to be sufficiently flexible for ICPs to use and to change whenever the circumstances demand for adaptations.
- **Monitoring** of results of the ICP is best **organised at the level of ICP students (and alumni)**, which is organized in complementarity both by VLIR-UOS and the ICPs. Monitoring of contribution to **capacity at the level of partners is far less systematic.**
- Three factors contribute to efficiency : (i) a **strong institutional ownership** of the programmes and the IF project in the host institution; (ii) interuniversity and inter-ICP **cooperation**; (iii) **synergy** with other programmes.

## Sustainability

- More visibility and attractiveness of the ICPs can contribute to the institutional ownership in the host institution. The enabling environment paying attention to quality, internationalisation and alumni work is equally supporting sustainability, as well as the commitment of universities to internationalization and development cooperation by valuing staff's investment in development cooperation and outreach by evaluation criteria of academic staff's performance.
- There are strong indications that results of the IF funding, such as the delocalised components that are co-created with partners, might be copied (fully or partially) by partners in the South for their students. It is, however, noted that a period of 5 years might be necessary to integrate a component or full master in a partner institution and then more work needs to be done to ensure financial sustainability.
- Financial sustainability is a risk, more in particular for the following components of the strategy that have been introduced with IF to strengthen the South dimension: diversity of the classroom, mobility aspect of decolonized components and alumni activities.

## Management response of VLIR-UOS

### Recommendations

In what follows, VLIR-UOS responds to the various recommendations from the mid-term evaluation that are addressed to VLIR-UOS:

<p><b>Recommendation 1:</b></p>	<p>VLIR-UOS should continue the IF modality: the introduction of a project modality to ICP funding proves to have been a wise one. It brought about a dynamic allowing for sufficient flexibility to identify adequate partners and build partnerships, that effectively allow for the development of delocalized curriculum components and that infuse the curriculum in general with more South-relevant contents. At the same time, the project modality forced the ICPs to remain focused on the longer-term developments they envisaged. As this evaluation focused on the mapping of IF project activities, VLIR-UOS might prepare for appraisal of effectiveness and impact.</p>
<p><b>Management response</b> (Agree, partially agree, disagree)</p>	<p>Agree</p>

<b>Response / Actions planned</b>	<p>VLIR-UOS welcomes the positive results of the mid-term evaluation, confirming the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of the incremental funding in strengthening the south dimension of a number of existing high quality Master Programmes and allowing for a more systematic and structured approach. Although there are some points of attention related to e.g. sustainability and efficiency, VLIR-UOS wishes to continue supporting Master Programmes through this funding scheme.</p> <p>VLIR-UOS is required to organize an evaluation of its 'Education and scholarships' programme' at the end of the FYP. Effectiveness and impact of IF can be considered as a focus of this end evaluation but the scope and approach of the end evaluation still needs to be discussed.</p>
<b>Next steps, activity, decisions,...</b>	
A new call for proposals for ICP 2022 will be developed and validated by the Bureau UOS, integrating insights from a.o. this mid-term evaluation as well as from brainstorm sessions in view of FYP2.	
Preparation of ToR end evaluation – define topic (not necessarily IF), scope and approach	

<b>Recommendation 2:</b>	Ensure continuation of the 12 scholarships/year/ICP. The accompanying scholarship arrangement allowing each ICP to admit 12 excellent students from VLIR List countries, is recognized as a key enabling factor to many aspects of the South component development. VLIR UOS is thus recommended to help ensure continuation of this accompanying scholarship programme.
<b>Management response</b> (Agree, partially agree, disagree)	Partially agree
<b>Response / Actions planned</b>	VLIR-UOS recognises the importance of the scholarships in support of the ICPs and appreciates how they contribute to the effectiveness of the programme. We therefore do aim at continuing linking scholarships with ICPs. It will be up to the Bureau UOS to define the framework for the new ICP 2022 call and an overall scholarship programme in the coming months (link between IF and scholarships, number of scholarships, scholarship types ...), linking up with the overall FYP2 discussions in general, and the discussions on scholarships and portfolio in particular.
<b>Next steps, activity, decisions,...</b>	
Framework for the new ICP 2022 call to be developed and validated by the Bureau UOS and DGD	

<b>Recommendation 3:</b>	The (rare) practice of investing in formulating and supporting explicit financial sustainability strategies for local masters in the South (to be executed by the partners in the South) and of delocalised components should be stimulated more pro-actively by the
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	next IF-call. Providing partners with funds to conduct the study themselves is a good way of creating ownership.
<b>Management response</b> (Agree, partially agree, disagree)	Agree
<b>Response / Actions planned</b>	The new call 2022 can be more explicit on what a 'south dimension' can entail and more importantly how it can be supported, sustained and monitored. VLIR-UOS takes this as an important overall point of attention when developing the next call documents. We believe the incremental funding provides sufficient flexibility to involve partner institutions and even support them financially for specific tasks while studying feasibility and sustainability of south components.
<b>Next steps, activity, decisions,...</b>	
A new call for proposals for ICP 2022 will provide more guidance on what a 'south dimension' can entail and more importantly how it can be supported, sustained and monitored.	

<b>Recommendation 4:</b>	The next IF call should stimulate applicants to pay more attention to alumni work and more in particular have them work on a strategy to ensure input from alumni, for providing alumni with content and supporting them in finding their way in the world of employment and for identifying innovative ways of supporting alumni as actors of change in their environment. As a sub-recommendation to the ICP host institutions: given the fact that students feel most connected to their programme (rather than to the university), universities should facilitate their faculties and programmes to develop their own alumni work.
<b>Management response</b> (Agree, partially agree, disagree)	Partially agree
<b>Response / Actions planned</b>	<p>VLIR-UOS agrees that having an alumni strategy in place with a clear focus on alumni networks, alumni activities and alumni follow-up and support can contribute to a strong south dimension. An alumni strategy with clear goals can e.g. create opportunities for systematic exchange between students, alumni, staff and partners that can also feed into curricula thereby adding to the relevance of the programmes. It can help extend and strengthen the ICP network, also creating linkages with stakeholders beyond academia. We however would like to reiterate that there are already multiple initiatives with/for alumni taken by the ICP programmes and that they are often supported by or in synergy with initiatives at the level of the universities (e.g. alumni chapters) or other programmes like Global Minds that contribute to the development of an alumni strategy at different levels.</p> <p>VLIR-UOS is currently working on an overall scholarship policy, as part of the preparations for a new FYP. This entails discussions on a VLIR-UOS alumni policy as well, in complementarity with what is already happening at the level of the programmes and institutions and with special attention to government requests to create more opportunities for academic diplomacy initiatives. VLIR-UOS is also committed to further develop its monitoring activities of students and alumni through different surveys in order to get a better understanding of how former scholarship beneficiaries act as change actors. Evidently this information will also be shared with the ICP programmes.</p>
<b>Next steps, activity, decisions,...</b>	
A scholarship policy, including an alumni policy, is currently being developed and will be validated by the Bureau UOS, integrating insights from a.o. this mid-term evaluation as well as brainstorm sessions in view of FYP2.	
Alumni work and policy will be described more explicitly, taking into account initiatives at different levels and within different programmes in the new ICP call 2022.	

<b>Recommendation 5:</b>	VLIR-UOS should invest in some mapping activity to ensure systematic data collection on a number of objectives and categories in the course of the programme execution.
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	Together with the current ICP programmes, VLIR-UOS could identify precise objectives that are more relevant than the current three objectives that were formulated in the IF call. The identification could be based on an exercise to define a more explicit theory of change for the IF.
<b>Management response</b> (Agree, partially agree, disagree)	Agree
<b>Response / Actions planned</b>	The 2022 call should clarify what objectives are essential within the incremental funding project and what possible ways can lead to that change. It can thus help to develop a distinct Theory of Change for the incremental funding projects and accordingly develop a system that allows for more systematic monitoring. In order to do so the current ICP programmes will be involved in an exercise to define and select objectives and develop a Theory of Change that will be the framework for a new ICP call.
<b>Next steps, activity, decisions,...</b>	
As part of the preparations of the ICP call 2022, and after approval of the overall framework by the Bureau UOS, a consultation moment will be organized with representatives of the ICP programmes and other stakeholders to select objectives and validate a ToC.	

<b>Recommendation 6 :</b>	ICP stakeholders could invest more in the analysis of the conditions for collaboration at the level of the partner institutions, thus more clearly and in an early stage identify potential risks and develop appropriate measures to address those risks, using a first checklist that was deducted out of the evaluation.
<b>Management response</b> (Agree, partially agree, disagree)	Partly agree
<b>Response / Actions planned</b>	The experiences of (preparing for) collaborations during the first three years of the IF provide valuable 'lessons learned' that can guide further and especially new collaboration. We do agree that it is important for ICPs to be mindful of certain conditions situated at the level of partner institutions in the South that can hinder or support the development of partnerships. It can thus be useful to screen potential partners and especially to formulate responses in case certain risks are detected. We do however want to emphasize that collaborations in the framework of the IF come in different forms and sizes and that for the more far-stretched partnerships aiming at dual degrees for example, other conditions are at play compared to components that are limited in time and scope (e.g. workshop at the partner institution). A checklist can thus be a supportive tool when developing strategies and looking for new partners but it cannot be a restrictive means to exclude certain partners from collaborations that can contribute to strengthening the south dimension of the ICP.
<b>Next steps, activity, decisions,...</b>	

A checklist will be shared as part of the new ICP call 2022. We will discuss the checklist with the programme representatives and other stakeholders during a consultation workshop in September and also define in what form this can be best included.

<b>Recommendation 7 :</b>	VLIR-UOS could be more explicit in its call about what capacity building (within the limitations of IF) could mean, how it can benefit the South dimension of the ICP and propose some guidelines for monitoring of changes at the level of partners (as they did for monitoring students) that are relevant for strengthening the South dimension: such as organising alumni work to understand needs for education, capacity to ensure supervision and support to master theses and internships. Specific attention should be paid to the role of PhD students in this strategy (for e.g. based on an evaluation of the impact of the former ICP PhD scholarship scheme).
<b>Management response</b> (Agree, partially agree, disagree)	Partially agree
<b>Response / Actions planned</b>	A clearer description of what capacity building and potential return on investment can be for South partners as well as for the Flemish host institution(s) in the framework of the IF will provide more focus for the ICP programmes and clarify expectations for potential South partners and other partners involved. The topic of capacity building should be included in the to-be-developed ToC (see recommendation 5), also leading to monitoring systems to follow up on this aspect.
<b>Next steps, activity, decisions,...</b>	
As part of the preparations of the ICP call 2022, and after approval of the overall framework by the Bureau UOS, a consultation moment will be organized with representatives of the ICP programmes to validate a ToC with attention for the concept of capacity building.	
A new call for proposals for ICP 2022 will provide more guidance on the concept of capacity building and how it can be supported and monitored.	

<b>Recommendation 8 :</b>	VLIR-UOS should maintain the flexibility of how to allocate the budget and flexibility for adaptations, while at the same time be more clear about what is expected: clarifying budget rules, asking for more transparency about co-financing in relation to the components of the strategy.
<b>Management response</b> (Agree, partially agree, disagree)	Partially agree

partially agree, disagree)	
<b>Response / Actions planned</b>	<p>VLIR-UOS will keep allowing flexibility, within the framework of what is possible within the formal framework (RD). VLIR-UOS aims at clarifying and simplifying the financial guidelines for FYP2, and the incremental funding in specific as part of a new call.</p> <p>As far as programmes can provide insights in co-funding (systems), this can be included in a new format for reporting.</p>
<b>Next steps, activity, decisions,...</b>	
Financial guidelines and budget rules will be made explicit as part of the new call ICP 2022.	

<b>Recommendation 9 :</b>	Support monitoring and evaluation (allowing for more systematic mapping as suggested in recommendation 5). VLIR-UOS should consider adapting the formats for application and reporting, paying more attention to the IF project and the follow-up of progress in the realisation of specific components in the strategy. The connection to the objectives of the IF call should be more explicit in the reporting formats.
<b>Management response</b> (Agree, partially agree, disagree)	Agree
<b>Response / Actions planned</b>	The current reporting formats focus on both results related to the scholars (appreciation, learning, application) and results of the incremental project but the latter is addressed in a rather generic way that probably makes it difficult to report beyond activities and to also focus on progress towards objectives. In first instance (see also recommendation 5) these objectives need to be re-defined thoroughly in relation to a ToC for the incremental funding which will allow more structured, systematic reporting (while still remaining user friendly).
<b>Next steps, activity, decisions,...</b>	
Reporting formats will be developed as part of the preparations for a new ICP call 2022.	