

MONITORING & EVALUATION POLICY

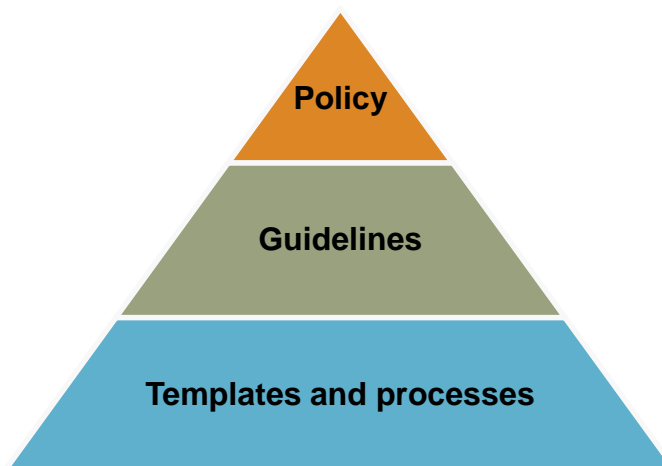
Purpose of this policy

This document describes the general policy of VLIR-UOS regarding result-oriented monitoring & evaluation (M&E). While VLIR-UOS already has considerable experience in M&E, this is the consolidated general policy document drawn up for M&E.

This policy document constitutes the highest level of the normative framework of the VLIR-UOS M&E system. It sets out the general principles and rules regarding M&E.

In addition to this general policy, VLIR-UOS has developed more practical M&E guidelines that adhere to this M&E policy. These guidelines are stand-alone documents for specific users: VLIR-UOS and the projects and programmes supported by VLIR-UOS.

A number of processes, templates and tools have been developed on the basis of the policy and guidelines.



The M&E policy and the various M&E guidelines of VLIR-UOS adhere to the definitions, norms and standards of the OECD-DAC.

This policy document is structured as follows: Chapter 1 briefly explains the context in which this M&E policy was created (why now?) and its scope. Chapter 2 explains the key concepts and definitions of M&E. Chapter 3 elucidates the key elements of monitoring in the VLIR-UOS context. Chapter 4 explains how evaluation is organised by VLIR-UOS. Chapter 5 explains how M&E is linked to several other processes and systems (such as communication, selection, audit and control).

This document was approved by the Bureau UOS on 25/09/2015. The M&E policy applies to all VLIR-UOS-supported interventions¹ (unless stated otherwise) as of this date. The M&E guidelines apply to all interventions developed after their renewal.

¹ "Interventions" is used as a generic term that can refer to all kinds of VLIR-UOS-supported activities: Scholarships, TEAM projects, international congresses, institutional cooperation programmes and so on.

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1. Context and scope of M&E policy

1.1. Context

This M&E policy was developed in the context of a number of national and international tendencies:

- Increased international focus on (the measurement of) development results (see Millennium Development Goals and rise of New Public Management):
 - o Demand for accountability
 - o A need to learn about what works, what does not and why
- Paris Declaration² (and the focus on “Management for Development Results”)
- New law on Belgian Development Cooperation
- The planned reforms for Institutional Actors and Civil Society Organisations (see Royal Decree of 2014)
- The accreditation process that follows the recognition of Institutional Actors and Civil Society Organisations (see Royal Decree of 2014)
- The political agreement (2015) between the Belgian indirect development sector and the office of minister Alexander De Croo: focus on management for development results, results and impact (reporting).

The M&E policy also translates the ambition of VLIR-UOS to invest in better M&E in order to learn about what works and what does not. This will allow VLIR-UOS to help improve capitalisation of lessons learned and knowledge management in university cooperation for development and the development sector in general. It will help VLIR-UOS in its increasingly important role as a centre of expertise on university cooperation for development. The M&E Policy represents both a consolidation of current M&E practices, and a strengthening and renewal of the system.

VLIR-UOS facilitates cooperation by creating an environment that enables project partners to become involved in university cooperation for development in the best possible way, be that awareness raising, recruiting, organising, mobilising, facilitating or training.

Since development cooperation is not the core business of universities and university colleges (higher education institutions), VLIR-UOS provides a platform for collecting, sharing and capitalising on knowledge and experience in development cooperation. VLIR-UOS endeavours to build a bridge between two worlds: development cooperation on the one hand and academia on the other.

University cooperation for development is specific in the following way:

- Innovation also implies risks. The research outcome is never guaranteed. There is always a risk that the expected result will not be produced or will turn out not to be the solution to the identified problem.
- Investing into capacity building also entails a risk. Human capital is mobile. Investing in brains, PhD and/or training capacity also involves a risk that the acquired knowledge will not be applied in the home country / institution, but elsewhere, if academics from the developing world do not

² And wider: the high-level forums on aid effectiveness (Rome 2003, Paris 2005, Accra 2008, Busan 2011).

return to their alma mater. VLIR-UOS aims to establish sustainable partnerships between Flemish and developing world academics, and mobilising and spreading knowledge and expertise is the core focus.

This specificity will be taken into account when developing this M&E policy and the M&E guidelines.

1.2. Scope

The scope of this M&E policy is limited to the monitoring and evaluation of the projects and programmes (interventions) that are supported by VLIR-UOS, and the monitoring and evaluation at country programme level. Some parts of this document only cover VLIR-UOS-supported interventions (projects and programmes), others cover both interventions and country programmes.

		What	Current intervention types
Interventions	Project	A temporary organisation, with a limited timeframe and budget, set up to achieve well-defined objectives.	TEAM, South Initiative, RIP, CTG Outreach, Platform, Expert group, NSS, National Crosscutting, any scholarship, INCO, SRS, ICP PhD, VLADOC, ITP, KOI
	Programme	A temporary organisation set up in order to manage related projects (or projects of a certain complexity) in a coordinated way to obtain a degree of benefit and control that cannot be obtained by managing these projects individually. Programmes are different from projects in the sense that programmes have a longer timeframe (≥ 5 years) and/or a higher budget ($> \text{€}1,000,000$), and that objectives are defined more broadly. Basically, programmes represent a long-term commitment requiring considerable team effort to bring about a sustainable, structural partnership.	IUC, ACROPOLIS, Network, ICP
Country programme		All programmes and stand-alone projects supported within a country. The projects or programmes of the country programme need not necessarily be interdependent or directly related. The monitoring (and management) is done by VLIR-UOS programme officers: country strategy, launching calls, follow-up, aggregate country programme reporting and so on.	Different partner countries + Belgium

	Unlimited timeframe, five-year programming cycles	
Actor programme	The sum of all country programmes of VLIR-UOS. The monitoring at this level is limited to the sum or aggregation of monitoring at country programme level.	

The M&E of projects, programmes and country programmes can be referred to as the M&E of VLIR-UOS' development performance. This is the M&E of the results VLIR-UOS ultimately targets (via projects, programmes, country programmes), but over which VLIR-UOS has limited control. This is different from the monitoring and evaluation of VLIR-UOS' organisational performance, which refers to the performance of internal VLIR-UOS processes, the quality of our services and so on. The M&E of VLIR-UOS' organisational effectiveness is outside the scope of this document.

	Scope	What is assessed
Development performance	Projects, programmes and country programmes supported by VLIR-UOS	Development results
		Academic results
Organisational performance	VLIR-UOS	Inputs, services, processes and so on

2. Monitoring & evaluation: concepts and definitions

VLIR-UOS' interpretation of monitoring and evaluation is based on the OECD-DAC definitions. The OECD-DAC defines **monitoring** as “*A continuing function that uses systematic collection of data on specified indicators to provide management and the main stakeholders of an ongoing development intervention with indications of the extent of progress and achievement of objectives and progress in the use of allocated funds*” (glossary OECD-DAC).

Monitoring thus refers to **continuous** follow-up processes at different levels: mainly the level of an intervention (such as IUC, TEAM project, ICP programme, scholarships) and at the level of country programmes³. Monitoring primarily focuses on progress made in terms of results: What did we deliver? What did we achieve? In some cases, monitoring can go further and also answer questions such as: Why did we (not) achieve certain results? How? Can we improve? In this document monitoring does not focus on financial follow-up, but on the extent to which interventions (or a group of interventions) achieve their planned results. This is done by measuring indicators, reflecting on ongoing development processes (analysis) and reporting. Monitoring is primarily done by the actors involved in managing the intervention or the country programme (**internal**).

The OECD-DAC defines **evaluation** as “*the systematic and objective assessment of an on-going or completed project, programme or policy, its design, implementation and results. The aim is to determine the relevance and fulfillment of objectives, development efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. An evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into the decision-making process of both recipients and donors. Evaluation also refers to the process of determining the worth or significance of an activity, policy or programme. An assessment, as systematic and objective as possible, of a planned, on-going, or completed development intervention*” (glossary OECD-DAC).

In addition to objectively evaluating an intervention (project, programme etc.) or a group of interventions, evaluations provide an in-depth analysis of how and why interventions are successful. In order to do this, evaluations make use of the information generated through monitoring. This makes monitoring and evaluation highly complementary. Evaluations are held at a certain point in time (as opposed to monitoring, which is continuous) and are retrospective. In order to assure credibility, evaluations are conducted by independent experts (**external**). In VLIR-UOS we distinguish two major evaluation types: programme evaluations and strategic evaluations. Programme evaluations are systematic evaluations held mid-term and at the end of programmes. Strategic evaluations are ad-hoc evaluations comprising individual project evaluations, country programme evaluations and thematic evaluations (see chapter 5 for more details).

³ Can also be at the level of intervention type, higher education institution, VLIR-UOS and so on.

2.1. Purpose of M&E in the VLIR-UOS context

Although VLIR-UOS supports a wide range of intervention types, the objectives of M&E are always the same (see table above). We can identify three main generic objectives: accountability, learning and communication. These objectives are integrated into all M&E processes of VLIR-UOS.

Accountability

Accountability refers to the obligation of different actors to act according to defined responsibilities, rules, roles and performance expectations, often with respect to the prudent use of resources. It also covers the responsibility to draw up accurate, fair and credible monitoring reports in order to demonstrate and explain the extent to which results have been achieved and why/how (cfr. OECD-DAC). In the VLIR-UOS context, accountability is also strongly related to learning (accountability for learning): Has the intervention or country programme made use of available monitoring information in order to learn and improve the intervention/country programme?

In the VLIR-UOS context at least four types of accountability relationship can be identified:

- Mutual accountability between Flemish academics/institutions and their partner academics / institutions and/or beneficiaries
- Accountability of projects/programmes in relation to VLIR-UOS
- Accountability of VLIR-UOS in relation to DGD and other donors
- Accountability to the public at large

Learning

M&E processes can enable us to understand “what works, what does not and why” in projects and programmes⁴. These lessons are identified by measuring results and reflecting upon development processes, and are reported on in monitoring and evaluation reports as lessons learned: *“Generalizations based on evaluation experiences with projects, programmes, or policies that abstract from the specific circumstances to broader situations. Frequently, lessons highlight strengths or weaknesses in preparation, design, and implementation that affect performance, outcome, and impact”* (OECD-DAC). All VLIR-UOS M&E formats have a chapter on key lessons learned. M&E processes stimulate learning at different levels: higher education institutions and academics in both Flanders and partner countries, VLIR-UOS, donors, other actors.

Learning is also linked to accountability as VLIR-UOS expects all supported interventions to continually learn and improve. At the level of country programmes and at VLIR-UOS level (all country programmes), lessons learned and knowledge about development processes are accumulated and disseminated to various stakeholders (higher education institutions, academics and so on) and used to improve policies. In this way, VLIR-UOS stimulates inter-institutional, interdisciplinary learning.

Lesson learning has a direct and important link with **decision making processes**. Lessons learned need to be used to improve (1) an ongoing intervention or (2) future interventions and/or (country programme) policies:

⁴ Lessons learning here is about project/programme management in a development context or development processes in general rather than the tangible outputs of academic research.

- (1) Ongoing interventions or (country programme) policies are improved by taking decisions on the basis of lessons learned (documented in monitoring and evaluation reports), reorienting them towards the achievement of objectives when needed (such as during an IUC steering committee meeting, after a mid-term evaluation and so on).⁵
- (2) The design and implementation of future interventions and/or (country programme) policies can be improved by applying/taking into account those lessons learned when designing new interventions or policies.

We can identify three levels of learning:

- Single loop learning (Learning to adapt): This provides short-term solutions to implementation problems and deals with symptoms more than root causes. Small changes are made to specific practices or behaviours, based on what has or has not worked in the past. This involves doing things better without necessarily examining or challenging our underlying beliefs and assumptions. The core questions are: **Are we doing things right?** Are we on track? (efficiency)
- Double loop learning (Learning to change): This leads to insights about why an intervention/country programme works or does not work. By **reflecting** on objectives and the assumptions underlying interventions/country programmes, one probes the change processes of an intervention/country programme. This kind of learning involves more “thinking outside the box,” creativity and critical analysis of the intervention/country programme, and can result in major adjustments in strategies and policies. The core questions are: **Are we doing the right things?** Are we on the right track? Does the intervention work? Are our activities and outputs effectively leading to our objectives? Why (not)? (relevance, effectiveness).
- Triple loop learning (Learning to learn): By reflecting on the learning mechanisms, existing rules are challenged and possibly changed in ways that affect knowledge acquisition and behaviour, by identifying different patterns of recognising and handling problems or coping more effectively with contextual changes. The core questions are: What makes this the right thing to do? In what circumstances is it the right thing to do? (sustainability, impact)

Communication

M&E enables VLIR-UOS to focus its communication on the **results** VLIR-UOS-supported interventions achieve. This requires high quality M&E information, including both analyses and data from indicators.

Moreover, one of the prime objectives of both monitoring and evaluation is learning. Communication is crucial to explain and disseminate **lessons learned** in non-technical reports. We are interested not only in success stories, but also in failures and the lessons learned from them.

VLIR-UOS wants to make lessons learned and knowledge acquired by VLIR-UOS-supported interventions **available to all relevant stakeholders**. This can help raise the effectiveness of VLIR-UOS and the development sector in general.

⁵ Note the similarity with the Deming wheel and the Plan-Do-Check-Act logic: An intervention is planned (P), implemented with continuous monitoring (D), checked on regularly (C; monitoring/reporting), and action (A) is taken (on the basis of lessons learned) in order to improve the ongoing intervention and attain the intervention's objectives.

Communicating the results of VLIR-UOS-supported interventions will also help **strengthen public support** for university cooperation and support within the academic community for the added value of investing into university cooperation for development, as well as the raising awareness among Flemish academics and recruiting those willing to initiate a VLIR-UOS project.

2.2. What do we monitor and evaluate?

This document focuses on result-oriented M&E: *What results have been achieved?* This is in contrast to the traditional focus, which is: *What has been done?* This means that the focus on inputs and activities (*What have we done?*) will evolve to become a stronger focus on results (*What have we achieved?*). Monitoring and evaluation processes at VLIR-UOS are geared towards ensuring that results are achieved, rather than ensuring that all activities are implemented as planned.

The OECD-DAC defines results as: “The output, outcome or impact (intended or unintended, positive and/or negative) of a development intervention”. VLIR-UOS also uses these three result levels in every intervention (projects/programmes): Outputs⁶, Specific Objective (Outcome level) and General Objective (Impact level). Different result levels are used as they represent different types of results, with varying levels of ambition and certainty. These levels form a continuum, with different levels interlinked in a logical way: outputs (short-term, high certainty) lead to the attainment of one or more outcomes or specific objectives (medium-term, lower certainty). This then contributes to mid-term/long-term (low certainty) changes at impact level (general objective):

GENERAL OBJECTIVE	<i>“Positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended” (OECD-DAC).</i>
(Impact)	<p>The general objective refers to a long-term development result to which an intervention wants to <u>contribute</u>, but which cannot be reasonably attributed to an intervention. It focuses on changes at the level of indirect beneficiaries. In most cases, this long-term result only appears after the intervention is over. The general objective mostly draws from country objectives identified in the VLIR-UOS country strategy and/or national development priorities.</p> <p><i>Examples: Agricultural productivity has been sustainably increased in country x; mental health provision in country has been improved; perception of “North-South” relationships has positively changed in Belgium; university X is a top-university in the region and so on.</i></p>

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE	<i>“The likely or achieved short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention’s outputs” (OECD-DAC).</i>
(Outcome)	<p>A specific objective⁷ comprises at least the use of outputs (short term), and whenever feasible the effect of the use of outputs (medium term). The specific</p>

⁶ The term previously used is intermediate result.
⁷ Some interventions will identify the ‘use of outputs’ level as **intermediate outcomes** and the effect of the use of outputs as **specific objectives**. See guidelines for more information.

objective is what needs to be achieved at the end of the intervention. Consequently, **an intervention's success will be assessed against the achievement of the specific objective** as it refers to the intervention's purpose. All outputs need to be geared towards achieving the specific objective. There can be one or more specific objectives (academic-development; see guidelines). The specific objective refers to changes at the level of direct beneficiaries of the intervention

The specific objective is not something that can be created directly: it is only achieved through the realisation of outputs and mostly requires behavioural change (someone or something doing things differently).

Examples: local researchers autonomously use the knowledge (training) and equipment to conduct research; the partner institution has approved the adapted curriculum (use of outputs). The research culture at the partner university has been improved; the partner institution offers a training/course on the basis of a new curriculum (after approval, and implementation); the agricultural productivity in region x has improved and so on.

OUTPUTS

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). Outputs refer to products and services that are delivered ("deliverables") by the intervention (direct consequence of a number of activities) and – depending on the context – the direct results of the products and services. Outputs are realised during the intervention.

Examples: laboratory equipped; article written, group of students trained, curriculum developed, research done and so on.

The result levels explained above are used in planning, monitoring and evaluating interventions. At country programme level, VLIR-UOS monitors the performance of the interventions and (among other things) the extent to which results are achieved at different result levels (aggregation). At the level of interventions, the different result levels are placed in result frameworks, creating a result chain. Result chains are logic diagrams that summarise an intervention or development process, showing the intervention strategies and linking resources, outputs, specific objectives and the general objective to which they contribute. Resources consist of inputs and activities⁸. Result chains visualise how interventions use inputs to implement activities and so deliver a number of outputs. Those outputs result in a number of changes at the (direct) beneficiary level which lead to the attainment of the outcome or specific objective. This then contributes to mid-term/long-term changes at impact level (general objective).

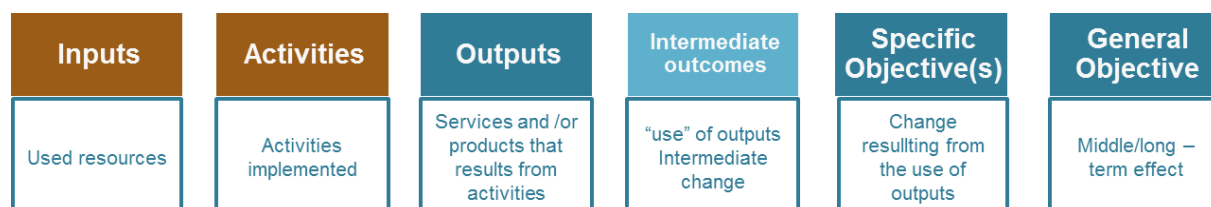
⁸ Input: The financial, human, and material resources used for the development intervention (OECD-DAC). Examples: project budget, time investment of academia, grants.

Activities: Actions taken or work performed mobilising inputs, such as funds, technical assistance and other types of resources, to produce specific outputs (OECD-DAC), Examples: *ordering equipment, shipping equipment, organising training, facilitating a workshop, travelling abroad to do research, collecting data.*



Result chains are translated into result frameworks. A result framework⁹ covering outputs, specific objectives and the general objective needs to be developed for every VLIR-UOS intervention and country programme (see guidelines for more details).

For some VLIR-UOS-supported intervention types, an intermediate results level – intermediate outcomes – will be added between output and the specific objective. Having this intermediate results level can help interventions monitor the change process between the delivery of outputs and the achievement of the specific objective. Making these intermediate changes explicit is particularly relevant with regard to complex, multi-level interventions (such as institutional programmes) that require short feedback loops.



2.3. What approach? Managing for Development Results

Managing for Development Results (MfDR) is an approach that has become a cornerstone of international efforts to improve the effectiveness of aid¹⁰ and is considered a good practice in contemporary development thinking. The aim is to make international development more effective and result-oriented. MfDR is about gearing all resources to achieve desired results. It shifts the focus from resources (inputs – activities) to results (outputs – outcome – impact) in all phases of the development process. At the same time, MfDR focuses on providing sound information to improve learning and subsequent decision-making. This entails monitoring progress and managing based on monitoring and in a way that will maximise results.

MfDR can be summarised in five principles that were agreed upon during the Second Roundtable on Managing for Results held in Marrakesh in 2004¹¹. VLIR-UOS is committed to following these principles¹²:

⁹ Since 1999 VLIR-UOS has used the Project Cycle Management (logical frameworks) for interventions in the developing world.

¹⁰ See the high level forums on aid effectiveness: Rome (2002), Paris (2005), Accra (2008) and Busan (2011).

¹¹ The Roundtable was sponsored by the multilateral development banks – African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Inter-American Development Bank and World Bank – in association with the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. The Roundtable brought together representatives from developing countries and development agencies to discuss the challenges of managing for development results at the country level and the ways in which countries and development agencies are addressing these issues on the ground.

¹² Principles have been adapted to the VLIR-UOS context.

Principle 1: At all phases – from strategic planning through implementation to completion and beyond – focus the dialogue on results (Flemish higher education institutions, partner higher education institutions, academics, VLIR-UOS and other stakeholders).

- Multi-stakeholder dialogue takes place throughout any VLIR-UOS-supported intervention to ensure that the focus always remains on managing towards results.
- Key stakeholders jointly own the process of defining and managing for results in all phases, from formulation (proposal) to closure, and agree to take collective responsibility for the result-orientation of any given initiative.

Principle 2. Align actual programming, monitoring, and evaluation activities with the agreed expected results.

- Implementation strategies are designed to directly support outcomes (and ultimately impact) and are **continuously adapted over time to ensure that planned outcomes are achieved**. Indicators and M&E strategies are logically linked to desired outcomes and impacts, and they demonstrate clearly whether or not the proper results are being achieved.
- Ongoing M&E activities analyse the degree to which planned outputs, outcomes (and where possible impact) are actually attained, so that implementation can be adjusted as needed.

Principle 3. Keep the results reporting system as simple, cost-effective, and user-friendly as possible.

- VLIR-UOS is committed to keeping reporting requirements simple, cost-effective and user-friendly. It will endeavour to avoid duplication of efforts and strike a balance between its own accountability requirements and this MfDR principle.
- Monitoring and evaluation needs to be geared to learning (at different levels) as well as accountability functions
- Indicators are measured by making use of existing monitoring systems whenever possible, strengthened and/or complemented if needed.

Principle 4. Manage for, not by, results, by arranging resources to achieve outcomes.

- VLIR-UOS and academics focus on identifying desired outcomes and impacts when developing proposals and then identify the activities needed (not the other way round).
- Interventions establish indicators, baselines and performance targets (when relevant and worthwhile) for assessing progress.
- As the development intervention moves forward, key stakeholders have the latitude, flexibility, and authority to arrange resources as required to achieve the desired outcomes (with due regard for the applicable rules).

Principle 5. Use results information for management learning and decision-making, as well as reporting and accountability (at all levels: interventions, VLIR-UOS and so on).

- Information generated through monitoring and evaluation is made available to all stakeholders (through reporting).
- Failure to achieve results and/or key targets is a trigger for partners to analyse why things have gone off track and how they could be brought back on track (learning) by taking measures.
- Performance information, be it positive or negative, is used to support constructive and proactive management decision-making and foster learning.

3. Monitoring and VLIR-UOS

3.1. Monitoring cycle and key monitoring products

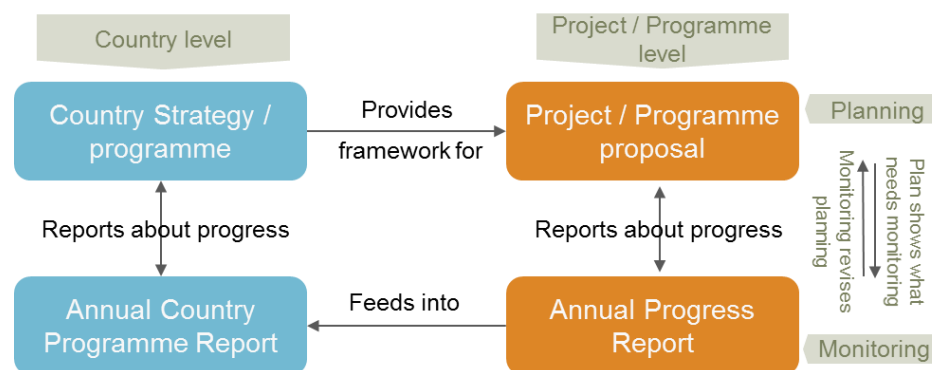
All VLIR-UOS-supported interventions go through a similar cycle.

PHASE	ACTIVITIES	ACTORS	OUTPUTS	Relevance to monitoring?	
COUNTRY STRATEGY IDENTIFICATION	Ex ante evaluation	VLIR-UOS/DGD and other relevant stakeholders	Country Strategies	+	Identification of potential partners, typology of interventions, thematic and/or regional focus per partner country. Valid for multiple programming periods. Provides the general framework for interventions and the development challenges to which VLIR-UOS-supported interventions need to contribute
CALL FOR PROPOSALS	Publishing call In some cases: subsequent initiation of a matchmaking process	VLIR-UOS	Call launched Matchmaking between partners		
FORMULATION	Collection of data, consultation, detailed formulation	APPLICANTS	Project / programme proposals	+++	Includes the result framework for the intervention (intervention logic, indicators and so on)

FUNDING DECISION	Analysis of the proposals and selection by a selection committee	SELECTION COMMITTEES / VLIR-UOS / DGD	Funded programme / project		
COUNTRY PROGRAMME¹³	Formulation of country programme	VLIR-UOS / DGD	Country programme (country “programme”)	+++	Includes the selected interventions and sets out the strategic framework for VLIR-UOS-supported interventions in a country for five years. Will be the reference for annual country reports.
IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING	Planning and monitoring and annual reporting at intervention level	INTERVENTION	Annual Financial Report (AFR)	+	Helps clarify the Annual Progress Report (part of annual reporting)
			Annual Progress Report (APR)	+++	Reports on the achievement of results (among other things) (part of annual reporting)
	Monitoring and annual reporting at country programme level	VLIR-UOS	Annual country report	+++	Reports on the achievement of results (among other things) at country level

¹³ There will also be open or policy initiated calls once the country programme has been developed (not all interventions can be formulated and selected before a country programme has been drawn up. That is why some parts a country programme will always be subject to change.

The flowchart below shows the relationships between monitoring products¹⁴:



¹⁴ Some projects or programmes may already be in an implementation phase before a country programme is developed (such as programmes like IUC with a run-time that exceeds a programme period). For those interventions, the framework is based on the country strategy (or an earlier programme).

3.2. Monitoring principles and rules

Theory of Change

Every VLIR-UOS-supported intervention is based on an explicit “Theory of Change” or “programme theory”. This Theory of Change explains the ‘theory’ or hypotheses behind the change envisaged by interventions and the strategy to attain that change. It explains how the change process is likely to take place (What will change? Who will change?), with due consideration for the context, the characteristics of actors, the existing evidence on (part of) the change process, and, most importantly, the underlying assumptions. In VLIR-UOS guidelines, a generic Theory of Change is provided for every intervention type. It is not intended as a blueprint, but provides a theoretical framework for future interventions.

MfDR and results frameworks

All VLIR-UOS-supported interventions adhere to the MfDR principles. The result chain presented in chapter 3 is central in these approaches and is the basis for all VLIR-UOS-funded interventions. Results frameworks summarise the intervention’s Theory of Change. By linking inputs, activities and outputs to the intended specific objectives and general objective, result chains represent the major steps and the logic (Theory of Change) behind the envisaged development process so that it can be easily understood by all stakeholders. Result chains are also a good starting point for planning and monitoring (and evaluation). At country level (South), VLIR-UOS has also developed a result framework (see guidelines).

Monitoring indicators

Every intervention is required to identify a set of indicators at different result levels. Indicators are very important in monitoring, as they provide stakeholders with information on the extent to which an intervention is achieving results as expected. The OECD-DAC defines an indicator as a “*quantitative or qualitative factor or variable that provides a simple and reliable means to measure achievement, to reflect changes connected to an intervention, or to help assess the performance of a development actor*”. Interventions identify indicators when the intervention is formulated (project/programme proposal) and report on them on an annual basis. The monitoring of intervention indicators feeds into the monitoring and reporting at country-programme level.

Identifying indicators: sharing good practices

In order to make it easier to identify indicators, VLIR-UOS has developed a set of generic indicators (split over key results areas) that are deemed common to most VLIR-UOS-supported interventions in the South. For other types of intervention, the guidelines also provide a list of frequently used indicators.

Transversal themes: Gender and environment

Whenever possible and relevant, indicators need to be included for gender and environment.

Alignment

Higher education institutes have existing quality management systems and already monitor their performance and results. When monitoring VLIR-UOS-supported interventions, alignment to existing systems – if possible – always needs to be considered (without setting up parallel systems).

Risks

M&E processes systematically integrate risk management, which includes the context in which an intervention or country programme is implemented. A risk or threat can be defined as an uncertain event (or set of events) that – should it occur – will have a negative effect on the achievement of objectives. In addition to measuring indicators, VLIR-UOS-supported interventions also need to be aware of risks¹⁵, as they might have a potential negative effect on the attainment of results (the focus of M&E). Therefore they need to receive appropriate attention during planning and monitoring. Risks should not only be identified, they should also be analysed and managed, feeding into decision-making processes in order to deal with them and avoid a crisis situation¹⁶.

Partnership and alignment

Monitoring is done in partnership. Reports are made together (by representatives of both Flemish and partner country HEIs)¹⁷. Whenever possible and relevant, VLIR-UOS-supported interventions will make use of existing monitoring systems (higher education institutions that have their own performance assessment framework, a national monitoring system for higher education and so on), which should be strengthened / complemented, if necessary, in order to process the desired data, in the desired formats.

3.3. Roles and responsibilities

The main roles in monitoring were described in chapter 4.1.

Monitoring product	Responsible for production	Internal approval (quality control)	Validation
Country Strategy	Programme Officer	Coordinator	Bureau UOS
Country programme	Programme Officer	Coordinator	Bureau UOS
Project / programme proposals	Applicants (future interventions)	Programme Officer Selection Commission	Bureau UOS
Annual Progress Report (APR)	Interventions	Programme Officer	Programme Officer
Annual country reports	Programme Officer ¹⁸	Coordinator	Bureau UOS

¹⁵ Within a development intervention, several categories of risks can be identified, depending upon the level in the result framework: financial risks related to the use of funds; operational risks related to the implementation of activities; strategic risks related to the development process of the intervention (the outputs-outcome-impact continuum); reputation risks related to the reputation of DGD, VLIR-UOS, partners or the Flemish university/university college.

¹⁶ The overall risk management cycle comprises four steps. Identification: identifying factors and events that might affect the intervention in a negative way; Assessment: assessing risks based on the likelihood of their occurrence and their potential impact to establish the risk level; Response: a response to risks is formulated; Follow-up: follow up of risk

¹⁷ In the case of programmes, the joint steering meeting is an excellent opportunity to prepare annual reporting

¹⁸ In consultation with relevant stakeholders (including the academics involved)

4. Evaluation and VLIR-UOS

4.1. Evaluation types

VLIR-UOS commissions two broad types of evaluation¹⁹.

Type	Description
Programme evaluations	Programme evaluations are systematic evaluations held mid-term and at the end of programmes (IUC, ACROPOLIS, Network, ICP (see 2.2)). They evaluate the results of the programme and provide recommendations for the next phase.
Strategic evaluations	Strategic evaluations are <u>ad hoc</u> evaluations that respond to specific learning needs or accountability requirements (and so provide a response to strategic issues). Strategic evaluations may comprise: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Geographic evaluations (covering one or more countries or regions)• Thematic evaluations, which cover a specific theme (such as a sector, an intervention modality, an impact evaluation, tracer studies, a value-for-money evaluation and joint evaluations)

4.2. Evaluation principles and rules

VLIR-UOS adheres to the **OECD-DAC evaluation norms, standards and principles**, on which **all evaluations managed by VLIR-UOS are based**. In the paragraphs below, we examine how these norms and standards apply to VLIR-UOS²⁰.

Reasonable coverage of evaluations and alignment with existing evaluation mechanisms

VLIR-UOS is committed to covering a reasonable percentage of its interventions with evaluations. Some intervention types are evaluated in a systematic manner, other evaluation types (often smaller evaluations) are conducted on a sample basis. VLIR-UOS strives to evaluate 75% of its total country programme per programming period²¹.

Whenever possible, VLIR-UOS will align with existing evaluation mechanisms (such as evaluation mechanisms for master's programs and other existing academic evaluation mechanisms) and will refrain from holding parallel evaluations where possible.

¹⁹ As explained in chapter 3, "evaluation" in this policy refers only to evaluations that meet the OECD-DAC definition. This excludes other useful exercises, such as self-evaluation, although self-evaluation, for example, can be a useful instrument in monitoring or an element of an evaluation.

²⁰ In this policy, we focus only on those elements that require further precision or clarification. For more details on the OECD-DAC evaluation norms, standards and principles, see: OECD DAC network on development evaluation (2010) Evaluating development co-operation: summary of key norms and standards. Second edition. <http://goo.gl/hfO8Wj>

²¹ Intervention types can be evaluated on a sample basis and the findings extrapolated (extrapolation also applies to degree of coverage).

Usefulness

The potential usefulness of every evaluation commissioned by VLIR-UOS is key. As stated in chapter 2, evaluations have three broad objectives: accountability, learning and communication.

In order to improve the utility of evaluations – and their use in accountability and learning – VLIR-UOS uses a system of “management response” for all evaluations. This means that the recommendations made by an evaluation need to be treated by the project or programme under review (or at VLIR-UOS level in some cases). By following up the implementation of all relevant recommendations of an evaluation, VLIR-UOS maximises the added value of evaluations (for more details, see evaluation guidelines).

Impartiality and independence

Any evaluation needs to be impartial and independent of the evaluation subject. This contributes to the credibility of VLIR-UOS-commissioned evaluations and avoids a bias in findings, analyses, conclusions and recommendations. Independence provides legitimacy to evaluations and reduces the potential for conflicts of interest that could arise if internal programme/project stakeholders were responsible for evaluating their own achievements. Impartiality and independence need to be guaranteed at three levels (albeit to varying degrees): implementation level (conduct of evaluation), organisation level (preparing terms of reference, commissioning evaluations) and policy level (planning and budgeting).

Implementation level

VLIR-UOS guarantees the impartiality and independence of its evaluations at this level by working with independent evaluators. All evaluations are conducted by independent evaluators. This means that evaluators (1) have not been involved in the implementation of the intervention being evaluated²² (2) and have no contractual relationship, now or in the past, with any of the partners involved with the project/programme under review. Experts are selected through the applicable procurement procedures, with due consideration for gender²³. VLIR-UOS always strives to have a good mix of local expertise and international expertise.

Operational level

The OECD-DAC states that impartiality and independence are best achieved by separating the evaluation function from the line management responsible for planning and managing development assistance. In the VLIR-UOS context, every programme officer per definition has a good degree of independence vis-à-vis interventions as VLIR-UOS is not an implementing organisation.

In order to further strengthen the independence, impartiality and credibility of evaluations, one programme officer of VLIR-UOS has overall assurance responsibility for all VLIR-UOS-commissioned evaluations, acting as an evaluation officer (see job profile; see 4.3 Roles and Responsibilities for more details).

²² This also includes previous interventions with the same partners. Furthermore, a country strategy evaluation cannot be implemented by an expert that has been involved in the preparation of that strategy.

²³ VLIR-UOS does not select peers through procurement procedures for peer reviews – a tool particularly relevant for university cooperation (as an evaluation or part of an evaluation). However, VLIR-UOS does select peers in a way that assures impartiality, independence and credibility.

Strategic level

In addition to the internal operational level, the strategic level also plays an important role in the evaluation system of VLIR-UOS. Who plans evaluations and how? How is the budget for evaluations approved?

Budget: the budget for evaluations is approved by the Bureau UOS for a five-year period (beginning in 2017-2021) with annual readjustments (with due consideration for the evaluation planning). The Bureau UOS takes into account the fact that the FPS Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation issues a recommendation on 1% of the total budget. In the case of VLIR-UOS, this percentage can be lower as VLIR-UOS might be able to rely on existing, reliable and credible evaluation mechanisms.

Planning: The evaluation officer has final responsibility for drawing up the evaluation planning, in consultation with internal stakeholders. The evaluation officer takes into account any issues that may be identified. The Bureau UOS is also consulted during this planning process. The evaluation officer systematically and transparently reports on evaluations to the Bureau UOS and management. The decisions of the Bureau UOS (evaluation planning decision) are recorded in the Bureau UOS meeting minutes.

VLIR-UOS does everything to assure independent, transparent and impartial evaluations. This has been confirmed by the commitment of the Bureau UOS and its recognition of the following:

- The importance of evaluation for accountability and learning
- The fact that sufficient budget needs to be dedicated to evaluation
- The ambition to adequately evaluate all types of interventions and attain a total coverage of 75%.
- The mandate of the evaluation officer to plan, manage and assure the quality of evaluations
- The role of the Bureau UOS is to validate the evaluation planning and budget rather than the evaluation reports as such. The Bureau UOS also has a role in providing a response to the relevant recommendations of evaluations (learning and decision-making)
- The importance of training and networking opportunities for the evaluation officer to keep his/her evaluation knowledge up-to-date

Transparency and dissemination

VLIR-UOS publishes all of its evaluations on its website to ensure transparency. As well as the public disclosure of all evaluations, VLIR-UOS is committed to actively disseminating evaluations (and lessons learned) to relevant stakeholders. In order to make evaluations more accessible (and useful), VLIR-UOS also requires that an executive summary be included in all evaluations.

Budget and planning

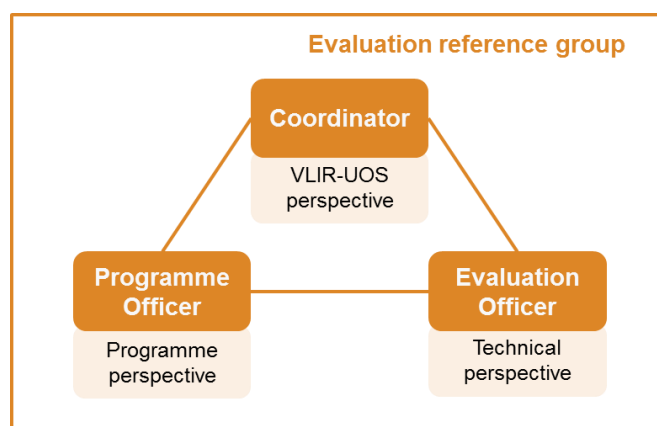
VLIR-UOS uses a rolling planning for evaluations. VLIR-UOS is committed to allocating sufficient budget to evaluations taking into account the fact that the FPS Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation issues a recommendation on 1% of total budget. The evaluation planning is updated at least annually. This is done by the evaluation officer.

Methodology and criteria

Every evaluation uses methodologies that match the objectives, budget and timeframe of the evaluation. Every evaluation uses the DAC criteria for evaluation (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability). These criteria are used in the selection of interventions and provide a good basis for evaluations. If some of the DAC criteria are not used, this must be justified. All VLIR-UOS-commissioned evaluations try to make use of self-evaluation methods and peer review mechanisms.

4.3. Roles and responsibilities

In this chapter we describe the key roles and responsibilities in the management of evaluations at the operational level²⁴. Every evaluation is managed as a project, including a governance structure that is set-up for a given evaluation. This structure – the **evaluation reference group** – has three roles²⁵, representing three different perspectives. These roles are assumed by the coordinator, a programme officer and the evaluation officer. Their task is to facilitate the evaluation process.



The responsibilities of the three roles can be summarised as follows:

Coordinator (South/North): Has the final responsibility in any evaluation and guarantees a VLIR-UOS / organisation perspective

- Validates the Terms of Reference of an evaluation
- Oversees the procurement process
- Validates the final evaluation report

Programme officer²⁶: Is strongly involved in the hands-on management of the evaluation. Guarantees the perspective of the programme/project.

- Gathers input for the ToR and prepares the intervention-specific elements of the ToR
- Provides advice on the selection of experts
- Plans and organises the briefing and debriefing in consultation with the various stakeholders (coordinator, evaluation officer)
- Manages communications with partners

²⁴ The roles and responsibilities at the overall strategic level were detailed in the previous subchapter.

²⁵ Draws on “Managing successful projects with PRINCE2”

²⁶ There can be more than one programme officer.

- Supports field phase of evaluation
- Provides input on the quality assessment of the (draft) evaluation report

Evaluation officer: Has overall responsibility for assuring quality, independence, credibility and impartiality. Provides a technical perspective on the evaluation.

- Develops the ToR, with input from the programme officer
- Assures sound methodological basis for evaluations in ToR
- Manages the attribution process of the evaluation assignment and advises the coordinator of the North or South department on selection
- Assesses the quality of the (draft) evaluation report and advises the coordinator of the North or South department on approval of the final report

Exceptions:

- If the evaluation subject is part of the evaluation officer's own country programme or in the case of a strategic evaluation, he/she will also assume the programme officer's role (programme perspective). When feasible and relevant, the assurance role (technical perspective) can be shared/transferred to a different programme officer or an external peer.
- If the evaluation subject is part of the coordinator's own country programme, he/she will also assume the programme officer's role (programme perspective). The evaluation officer assures the impartiality, independence and credibility of the evaluation. Whenever feasible and relevant, an additional programme officer or an external peer can join the evaluation reference group.

5. How M&E is linked to other processes

5.1. Strategy map of VLIR-UOS

M&E is an important element in the quality management of VLIR-UOS. M&E processes allow VLIR-UOS to follow up a number of result areas of the EFQM framework in a way that is highly complementary to how VLIR-UOS follows up its organisational performance.

5.2. Audit

Evaluation and audits are interlinked, but are different. Audits are compliancy-oriented and focus on checking rules and procedures have been applied properly. Evaluations mainly look at the performance of interventions and the extent to which results are (not) achieved (and why). The focus is on providing advice on how to increase development effectiveness and inform the key stakeholders on the progress. In other words, while audits focus on the organisational effectiveness of interventions, evaluations focus on development effectiveness. Audits and evaluations can be highly complementary in the sense that they can benefit from one another by taking into account the findings of one another.

5.3. External evaluations

The Special Evaluation Unit is authorised to evaluate Belgian development cooperation. It is an external evaluation office under the administrative authority of the President of the Management Committee of the FPS Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. This implies that evaluations managed by this unit can be held alongside VLIR-UOS-commissioned evaluations.

5.4. Joint strategic frameworks

As from 2017, every country programme of VLIR-UOS (including Belgium) must be aligned to the joint strategic frameworks (JSF) to be developed in association with Belgian actors in non-governmental cooperation. These JSFs are set out for five years by the Belgian actors in non-governmental cooperation involved in the country programme. They contain the medium- and long-term objectives of these actors and include a description of the synergies and complementarities between their different programmes. The production and monitoring of these JSFs is linked to the M&E of VLIR-UOS-supported interventions: the M&E of VLIR-UOS interventions feeds into the monitoring of the JSFs.