

Report of the IUC Review Event

April 16, 2024

1. Objectives of the day

The aim of this meeting was to:

- harness peer-to-peer learning between IUC projects from different intakes and to create collective knowledge out of it.
- integrate these lessons learned into the new IUC call that will be launched in summer 2024. Where relevant, these lessons learned will also be translated in ongoing IUC projects.

The event consisted of 2 parts.

1. **Restitution of the final evaluation of 8 IUC/NETWORK partnerships:** the lessons learned identified in the evaluation of 8 IUC/NETWORK partnerships which are in phase-out status at present, and related to a number of collective learning questions, were presented by the external evaluation team.
2. **Workshop sessions (6)** were organised under the form of brainstorm sessions related to lessons learned and to other policy questions relevant for the upcoming IUC call / for ongoing IUC projects.

2. Programme of the day

9:30 – 09:45	Registration and coffee	
9:45 – 10:00	Formal welcome and introduction by VLIR-UOS. <i>Peter Bols, Chairman VLIR-UOS</i> Objectives and programme of the day / Position of IUC within the VLIR-UOS ambitions of 'Connect. Learn. Inspire.'. <i>Kristien Verbrugghen, VLIR-UOS director</i>	
10:00 - 11:00	Synthesis of 8 IUC/NETWORK evaluations, followed by a Q&A: Lessons learned and future pathways. <i>Presentation by Patrick Stoop (C-Lever) and Corina Dhaene (ACE Europe) from the evaluation consortium</i>	
11:00 – 11:30	Break	
11:30 – 12:45	Interpersonal success factors in IUC coordination	Lessons Learned from NETWORK projects
12:45 – 13:30	Lunch & networking	
13:30 – 14:45	Accelerating institutional capacities & institutional assessments as lever of IUC	Developing a broad & diverse IUC consortium
14:45 - 15:00	Break	
15:00 - 16:15	PhD trajectories	Preconditions at the level of the Flemish HEI for IUC project management
16:15 – 16:30	Closing by VLIR-UOS: Key takeaways and way forward	
16:30 – 17:30	Reception & networking	

3. Restitution final evaluations of 5 IUC and 3 Network projects

For detailed information, please check out the presentation (made available to participants) and the full synthesis report that will be published on the VLIR-UOS website before end of May 2024. Below we only list the key conclusions and recommendations. The full presentation and report also contain general findings about the results of the evaluated projects, as well as general conclusions and recommendations.

Key conclusions and recommendations

1. When supporting the development of **joint, hybrid and research-based, MSc programmes** at country or regional level (involving different HEI in the Global South and Flemish HEI)
 - Involve one or two universities with international/IUC experience
 - Ensure (capacity for) online learning and strengthen the e-pedagogy aspects
 - Inspire and support involved institutions to analyse and review administrative processes, processes to facilitate inter-institutional collaboration etc.
 - Establish capacity and mechanisms for engagement with private sector
2. Combining complementary leverages and success factors to foster **uptake of research results** may be fostered
 - Adopt an ecosystem approach (considering both research supply and demand) to stimulate research uptake
 - VLIR-UOS can further disseminate and enhance its view and brochure on uptake and stimulate programmes to reflect the envisaged knowledge role and to experiment with projects that implement impact-oriented planning and monitoring
3. Continue to invest in (institutional) **capacity for collaboration** amongst universities
 - Adopting an open “partnership paradigm” should be part of its pathway of change.
4. Promote **Inclusivity**
 - More explicit policies and procedures
 - Identify specific hindrances for access to post graduate studies in each context
 - Consider “pre-PhD programmes”
 - Complaints mechanisms
 - Broader support system
5. Acknowledge that **effective coordination of a VLIR-UOS programme is a multifaceted effort** that requires a combination of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ leverages, as well as strong commitment by both individuals and institutions involved.
6. As the synthesis exercise revealed a generalised appreciation of IUC programmes’ effectiveness and impact, VLIR-UOS is recommended to treasure and preserve the long-term institutional support concept (12 years’ perspective) of the IUC programmes.
7. Fostering uptake of research and other academic outcomes should be a dimension of each IUC programme.

- This should include a component with aspects of Knowledge and Technology Transfer (KTT), combined with intellectual property management and incubation, as best fitting context-specific needs and opportunities.
- Aligned with the developmental roles of the IUC university, incubation could specifically focus on impact entrepreneurship specialised in uptake of research and other academic outcomes.

Questions and Answers

Questions were raised on how to define successful results, realized change, and progress towards impact. How did the evaluators go about this, whereby the evaluators refer to have used mainly qualitative criteria rather than quantitative criteria. Also when talking about hard and soft leverages, what is meant by this is that the presence of management manuals, procedures, clear roles and mandates refer to hard leverages, but the soft skills required by coordinators, how to interact and lead a team of academics, change management approaches, etc. these are important elements for success.

Also comments were made that it would be interesting to identify the core elements in success stories of research for social change, whereby it is evident that the quality of collaboration, interaction and connection with stakeholders from the start is very important.

4. Workshop sessions

4.1. Interpersonal success factors for IUC coordinators

Workshop Context

Across the IUC projects, several recurring key leverages and factors of success can be identified related to successful coordination. A consistent theme across the IUC partnerships is the pivotal role of a conducive partnership between the local partner institution and the involved Flemish HEIs. The partnership is jointly managed by the IUC partner institution and the Flemish coordinating university, respectively by the partner (=local) and Flemish coordinator. While effective project coordination requires a good combination of institutional, procedural and interpersonal factors, in this workshop we will zoom in on the interpersonal factors.

The evaluation highlighted amongst others the importance of the soft skills of the coordinators, together with their commitment, as well as creating and cultivating a culture of trust, transparency and respect.

Main points in the discussion per guiding question

- *What would be the ideal profile of an IUC coordinator, and more in particular what kind of skills, competencies and motivation are to be present to perform this mandate? Do we see important differences in terms of these required skills between the Flemish coordinator and partner coordinator? And what does this mean for the position of the Flemish/partner coordinator within the home institution? VLIR-UOS had a standard blueprint for IUC management, explaining the standard roles of coordinators, team leaders, project manager, ICOS, and provides general procedural training but what could be useful/offered in terms of skills development to support the ideal set of skills of an IUC coordinator?*

- *What are the expectations towards the Flemish coordinator, from the perspective of the team leads, the ICOS/GEO, and VLIR-UOS? And what does the Flemish coordinator expect from them? Linked to expectations: how to be involved (in a specific subproject) and at the same time take up a neutral position when expected: how important is it for a coordinator to be involved in IUC project/research objectives?*

Given the overlap in the answers of both above mentioned questions, this part is being reported as one.

Ideal profile of an IUC coordinator/expectations:

he/she needs to be:

- empathetic and curious, open and patient
- willing to learn and involved/committed
- communicative, transparent (without overload in communication) and trustworthy
- close to the university authorities esp. for the partner coordinator, Flemish and partner coordinators need to have a shared vision and leadership, need to share the vision with PM, ICOS and TLs
- willing to move between roles and positions and keeps an overview
- neutral in the subprojects management/coordination
- someone who does not compete for funds or competes with TLs and team members (perhaps someone at the end of his/her academic career, also timewise)

he/she needs to know:

- how to identify opportunities
- how to coordinate the TLs, PM and ICOS in getting the work done but who can also let go, who knows when to intervene and when not (including activities and (not) spent budget)
- the context beyond IUC

he/she needs to have:

- sufficient authority to take decisions (being decisive but also humble)
- sufficient intrinsic motivation to be a driving force and have affinities with the partner country and partner university
- networking skills, with fostering synergies – internal & external
- management competencies, who has an eye for managerial practical issues and who can help with budget and financial reporting, who can manage/ prevent conflicts, is able to put difficult issues on the table
- intercultural sensitivity and a sense of humor
- awareness of (financial) power imbalance

Recommendations:

- Organize onboarding of coordinators
- A coordinator should not be a TL at the same time to avoid conflict of interests
- At the start of an IUC, the coordinator has a lot of work which is not academically rewarding, therefore it would be beneficial to have a postdoc to assist the coordinator, at least during the first 2 years; the start of phase 1, and in a lesser extent of phase 2; the mandate is time consuming, both the coordinating Flemish university and partner university should take this into account (average of 2 full days per week during first 2 years)
- Look into the double roles: combination of being a TL and PhD promoter is often the case and logical based on the content relevance, but it was mentioned by some participants that it is found easier being a PhD promoter without being a TL

- Discussion about emeritus status : it is not advised to go for a combined mandate of coordinator and deputy as a general set-up. However, in case of retirement of the coordinator in Phase 1, it is advised to work with a deputy coordinator as from the beginning. This deputy can take over once the coordinator is retired. This person will then have the necessary track record and experience with the project.

Main conclusions from the discussion

- A coordinator needs to have a range of interpersonal soft skills, along with management skills and policy experience. Especially for the partner coordinator, a strong connection with the university authorities is important, in some contexts this will mean that a high position in hierarchy is advisable, but on the other hand this should be in balance with the importance of having sufficient availability.
- Some recommendations are given with regards to possibility to foresee in an onboarding trajectory for coordinators
- As was already indicated as a good practice, the fact that a double role as coordinator and team leader of a subproject is to be avoided, was again confirmed.
- Given the time taken into (starting) an IUC, it was also suggested that it could be beneficial to take onboard a postdoc to assist the coordinator.

4.2. Lessons learned from Networks

Workshop Context

The Network University Cooperation (NETWORK) programme was designed as a national level institutional network project led by a former IUC partner institute and with focus on a priority theme in terms of sustainable development in a given country (at the time linked to a VLIR-UOS country strategy). The NETWORKs aimed at pooling expertise, bringing together inter-institutional capacity around a central theme, and multiplying and levelling up capacity building efforts in view of a broader/national level potential impact. The Networks supported inter-university collaboration in educational/curriculum development (master, PhD, postgraduate level) and collaborative research, engaging the involved partner institutions in broader international networks via the partnership with Flemish HEI partners.

According to the end-term evaluations, NETWORKs had a clear impact on the wider university environment of the participating universities and beyond (national higher education system), enhancing collaborative processes. Within its current portfolio VLIR-UOS wants to build on its ambitions to CONNECT, LEARN and INSPIRE, and to contribute with broader networks (e.g. international educational programmes & networks linked to ICP Connect), building bridges between science and society.

Q&A related to restitution of the evaluation:

Participants agree that even if the focus is on strengthening interuniversity cooperation in support of development at the national level, the NETWORKs can be very different in terms of needs and contents. The specific local context of the universities and the country level political context are very determining factors (e.g. in Ethiopia there is a huge need of PhD and capacity building and the focus was on specific support towards postgraduate training; in Cuba a combination of bringing other partners up level, and advancing in pre-doc type summer school activities identifying potential Phd candidates in areas related to computer sciences and IT applications; in Ecuador/Vietnam the focus is on strengthening interuniversity cooperation nationally, or internationally in terms of master programmes).

Networks should not be overrated when talking about **societal impact** with “only” supporting co-operation between 4-5 universities. Also what can one expect, there are so many elements to put in place to make strong collaboration possible, to set-up interuniversity agreements, in the case of Vietnam to link up with the international master programmes (ICP Aquulture & Food Sciences) and then the step to also expect a connection with labor market, or direct impact on the broader society might be too far-fetched. Impact on policies, impact on future research and education in related areas of biodiversity and food, that for sure will be extremely important in Ecuador and Vietnam. In Cuba, the interactions are different, government actors and local industries were involved in concrete applications. It is definitely crucial to involve government stakeholders, and to connect with specific end user groups, but also in Belgium certain discussion of water stakeholders took more than 20 years, and we are talking about a Network of 10 years and expecting a lot. Also the impact and quality of the scientific research results should be taken into account and there the potential for actual use of research results is in most case very important.

Main elements in the discussion per guiding question

1. *What can we learn from the Network programmes with regards to building effective collaboration between universities and between universities and society?*

- To build effective collaboration, the network needed to have a clear and common goal. Based on the shared vision, networks created new collaboration modalities between national institutes, starting from the relation/cooperation with an IUC partner institution, but targeting specific thematic research, education and perhaps other opportunities.
- Important in Networks is to work on the partnership relations, the power relations between the former IUC and lead in the Network, versus the other members, and in particular new institutions is a challenge. As such it is important to work on equal partnerships with awareness of power relations, shared interests with new partners, ready to share complementarity (academic/societal/technology) and the connection between people and funds.
- The capacity to collaborate needs to be developed, and effective leadership goes/evolved with the institutionalisation of the network. Soft diplomacy was also considered important with an adapted language, culture and shared values, and trust.
- The Network programme provided multiple quick wins but (small) complementary funds for collaboration should have been available for mobility and government involvement, in order to strengthen the interactions and engagement with non academic actors. Budgets were in fact quite limited, in particular for the newer partner institutes that did not benefit from an IUC in the past.
- Even if the Network builds on an IUC, it needs time to turn into an effective collaboration structure (e.g. interuniversity agreements, discussion on joint programmes, putting in place a networking structure).

2. *Would there still be an added value for Network type modalities taking into account the current VLIR-UOS portfolio?*

- The Networks were created in a sphere of wanting to reach national impact and this was definitely realized in most cases, in particular in Cuba (link with national policies, local business), Ecuador (policy level), Ethiopia (feed in national HE policies on postgraduate education), Vietnam (strengthened interuniversity collaboration within Vietnam and stronger international connections, applicability of research, connections of master programmes with labor market opportunities).
- Today VLIR-UOS does not have such a programme anymore, but within its new portfolio opportunities for networking can be realized within TEAM/SI, ICP Connect, IUC. Is this enough?
- The audience felt a lot is possible with TEAM/SI/ICP Connect but that this is not similar. Networks via TEAM are not institutional, shorter in time, within ICP Connect this remains mainly linked to the ICP master programme, it is evolving, but will not focus on interuniversity collaboration in the global South, or at least not in a national context. So, something would be needed to add on the ICP Connect funding, or to add on the later stages of an IUC maybe? Extra budget for networking? Also with Accelerate potential for support is certain, but it is more focused to specific themes, lower scale. So the answer is that there is no current solution for similar networking initiatives within the portfolio, now since 5-10 years ago the situation is different and the focus is more global, on Agenda 2030, so maybe future networking opportunities should also be more crossnational. Anyway, a specific incentive, a specific programme is required for this level of institutional networking, of national impact.
- Also it has to be said that in case of stronger integration in IUC, this was a pitfall in the current networks, it was important to move away from the IUC, in particular in countries where the Networks

were based on 1 strong partner, 1 IUC, then the tendency is that it remains a challenge, a criticism, that too much is still linked/related to the previous programme.

- Opportunities for connection with ICP Connect are evident, but maybe something else is needed for Universities of Applied Sciences and Arts, since the step from SI to TEAM and to ICP Connect is maybe too big. Now, even if the experience in Vietnam would have been linked from the start to ICP Connect rather than core ICP funding, the Network initiative would only have been possible with these extra dedicated funding, otherwise the relationship would have been different, and based only on the connections of the master programme, so a sort of matching fund is needed. Maybe connecting post ICP Connect and post IUC?
- Maybe Networking projects should not necessarily start from an IUC, but from different TEAM partners, or combine international networks of ICPs with other partners in a country. It is clear that combining IUC and ICP Connect communities, opportunities exist to connect, benefit via network style interventions.
- The IUC partner university is seen as a leader but how to make sure this does not interfere with the main purpose of a Network which is actually creating a network! After building capacity it is now time to share it with other partner universities around a specific theme.
- The Flemish partner should continue being of added value, this took some time, but in the end cooperation networks were strengthened, the networks got more strongly connected, in most cases within international networks, together with the Flemish partners. Universities of Applied Sciences and Arts should also more often be involved.

3. What post IUC? How can we valorise the IUC Cooperation? Are other type of modalities imaginable or do NETWORKs remain as best fit option?

- NETWORKS are a good modality to valorise IUC cooperations. The networks enabled and strengthened the spirit of collaboration between involved partner institutions and created an important spill-over effect at level of these institutions with complementary proposals being introduced, in a way an opening within the VLIR-UOS community. However, a question was raised: what after the Network comes to an end?
- It would be important also to investigate other modalities, whereby the support of transversal skills can be very important: create capacities to attract external funding and find future opportunities, also in view of creating ownership. Example: Mekelle University managed to receive more (governmental) fundings after IUC came to an end. Funding they wouldn't have been able to apply for/receive if it wasn't for the IUC.
 - Getting to know the way to EU-funding can be valuable, e.g. intra-ACP
- Success may also be linked to the economic context of a (partner)country but it is important to make linkages to the labor market where possible. Example: Growing economy in Vietnam results in more students searching job opportunities on the private market after finalising their PhDs;
- Networks were considered seed money to enlarge network/collaborations/partnerships between different universities within a country (also institutions initially not part of the project). This provided other (funding) opportunities.
- Thanks to Network, capacity built thanks to IUC was able to be transferred to other (smaller) institutions within the region that weren't part of the IUC. This way – throughout the Network Project - other institutions were able to benefit indirectly from an IUC.

Main conclusions from the discussion

- Lessons learned: The post IUC Networks were not just 'post IUC initiatives', they needed to have a clear and common goal, shared interests, also with the newly identified collaborating partner institutions. This was very important to get the new partners on board. The Networks created and strengthened collaboration among VLIR-UOS partner institutions whereby it was important to develop these networking skills in the process, sharing and exchanging experiences, finding complementarities, developing capacities to collaborate, etc. Networks require a lot of soft diplomacy skills since many parties are involved. Now, in terms of interaction outside the academic and higher education field, it was mentioned that time and resources are an important factor, as also the focus of the collaboration. Networks more focussed on applications (e.g. Cuba) had more direct interaction with society. Maybe also complementary funds should have been made available for these science-society interactions.
- Place in portfolio for Network type projects: Networking initiatives are very much valued and should receive a clear place in the VLIR-UOS portfolio, being through specific incentives within existing programmes (TEAM, ICP Connect, IUC, ..) or via special programmes similar to the Network programme. Only within the Network programme, broad interuniversity collaboration of Flemish HEIs within a given partner country was developed up to such an institutionalized level, leading to effects of strengthened national level interinstitutional collaboration that were beyond the specific ambitions of the programmes themselves (e.g. Ecuador HE policy impacted, Ethiopia postgraduate policies impacted, Vietnam connections with national policies in Aquaculture and Food Sciences, Cuba connection with national HE and ICT policies and applications). Also the duration is an important factor, as also a minimal level of dedicated budget.
- However, contexts have evolved, and within the broader ambitions of Agenda 2030 and knowledge driven global partnerships, opportunities of connecting global IUC and ICP Connect networks certainly could be further explored. The Networks in Vietnam and Ecuador were already built, or strengthened via these connections with ICP. However, it should not be limited to this, important is that these connections within the VLIR-UOS and broader HES4SD community could be supported with network type projects, addressing collective local/international/global development challenges. Maybe when discussing about post IUC or post ICP, the idea of connecting both is something to explore?
- Post IUC: Networks were a good post IUC modality, to build upon relations and topics developed within an IUC and broaden the Network at a national level, bringing other/new partner institutions within the VLIR-UOS community. However, within the current more global agenda, it seems important to also connect these networking ambitions with other ways to support transversal skills of partner institutions, to assist them in getting to know the way to EU-funding, make linkages to the labor market where possible.

4.3. Accelerating institutional capacities & institutional assessments as lever for IUC

Workshop Context

In previous IUC intakes, an institutional assessment was organised at partner institution level. The approach was thoroughly reformed in 2022, based on an impact evaluation and feedback from partners. It is now based on the Core Capabilities model (developed by ECDPM, European Centre for Development Policy and Management) and identifies an institution's strengths and weaknesses, and conducts targeted data collection to have a well-documented baseline of the partner's capabilities. It looks at 5 core capabilities that are further divided into domains and descriptors. This approach allows, in a relatively efficient way, a 360° view of an institution. The IA approach was initiated and improved to further build VLIR-UOS expertise in increasing organizational capacities of partner institutions, one of the recommendations of the [2018 special evaluation office's Impact evaluation](#) of the Belgian University Development Cooperation.

The institutional assessment (IA) consists of two phases: (a) a self-assessment by the university of its institutional capacity and (b) a joint assessment of the university's institutional capacity by external assessors. The same framework is used for both phases of the assessment. The IA involves discussing, assessing and documenting each criterion, or domain, including the identification and justification of the current maturity level, rated on a scale from 1 (absent or extremely weak) to 6 (a role model).

Each IA, facilitated by external assessors, includes a preparation phase, a field phase and a reporting phase. The field phase, in its original concept, involves a visit of about 1 week to the candidate IUC partner university by a lead assessor (international expert) accompanied by a 2nd assessor, being a national/regional expert.

Institutional assessments have served several purposes in the past:

- Informing the partnership to make the right choices regarding transversal institutional capacity strengthening projects
- Part of the selection process ("fit for purpose")
- Baseline of capacities for later rigorous impact evaluation
- Informing the partnership in order to choose the necessary implementation modalities (e.g. assessing risks regarding financial management, the partner's IT environment, etc.).

Finally, the session also briefly introduced 'Accelerate', a new VLIR-UOS programme which will focus on a number of transversal challenges, and which is an exciting opportunity to link with for current and new IUC projects.

Main elements in the discussions

In the plenary, a short feedback was given by 2 persons involved in an institutional assessment of the previous IUC intake. Both promoters mentioned the approach was quite intensive, but also very useful for the further development of the proposal. It was an approach that led to broad reflections about the capacities of the institution. One of the persons who was involved in a proposal that was in the end not selected highlighted that, even though the university was not awarded with an IUC, the institution has actively used the institutional assessment in the next years (the coordinator became rector and used the IA as part of his policy).

Discussion in subgroups

Which elements would you find important to be covered in the institutional assessment and why?

Below the various elements mentioned by participants are listed. Most elements are already included in the current methodology, but some elements would be very valuable additions and/or emphasis on those topics could be improved in future IAs (indicated in bold).

Capability to achieve...	Elements from the brainstorming
1. coherence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision of the organisation + any uptake strategy • Existing policies (research, quality assurance, etc.) • Gender/DE&I policies • Governance and leadership • Public information availability about the organisational structure
2. deliver on development relevant objectives and commitments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Status of educational programmes (accreditation) • Number of post-graduate programmes • % of time staff can spend on research • Support services for researchers • Track record in uptake • Existence of valorisation offices/officers • All aspects of sustainability
3. relate to external stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of existing collaborations • Match between IA, government policies & proposal • Role of the institution in local, regional and national development plans • Financial data & financial policies • Local financial laws & regulations: to what extent translated into the daily financial management? E.g. cash expenses, purchase orders/public tenders etc. • Quality of the website and the intranet • Internal and external communication strategy • Transparency: list of ongoing projects with donors • Alumni network: does an analysis exist of where alumni currently work? If there are alumni from Flemish institutions working there?
4. act and commit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff promotion policy • Basic infrastructure (power, water, ...) • ICT & techno-pedagogical infrastructure and services: more thorough evaluation (eg staff capacities, online meeting and education capacities, ...) • Quality management and procedures
5. adapt and self-renew	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender & age of staff population, though delicate • Availability of integrated monitoring data • Transversal skills: languages, digital, ... of staff and students (both level of, and trainings available)

What are the potential use cases for the results of an IA – how can the results be translated into the actual programme? Including a discussion on timeline.

Participants gave the general feedback that the different objectives of the institutional assessment are useful and valid. The feedback was given that the assessment is best organized as early as possible in the process so that it can effectively be used for different purposes. The timeliness of the IA is deemed very important. A suggestion was made to maybe split up the exercise in two: a 360° scan during the concept note stage, and looking more thoroughly at specific aspects at the beginning of the phase-in, to inform and guide further operationalisation. It was also stressed that it is important to also highlight that the Call for Expression of Interest and Commitment will also explicitly look at the capacities of the Flemish HEI, making it less of a one-way exercise. Finally, while the institutional assessment may be an intensive exercise, it was noted that it is proportionate to the overall IUC concept and budget, and is also very useful, even beyond IUC. There was a case being made for both developing specific subprojects within IUCs to deal with certain findings of an IA (e.g. a subproject on starting up and supporting an international office and improving capabilities to attract external funding) and at the same time ensure the findings are integrated transversally in all components of the IUC (e.g. directing investment funding in all subprojects towards issues found in infrastructure for instance). Another element of discussion which came to the forefront, was the feeling that this IA approach might be perceived as EU-centric, so we need to ensure buy-in from the start about the exercise, explaining the benefits for the institution beyond the IUC, and linking up wherever possible to national quality assessment procedures already in place by the ministry of Higher Education and/or Research.

Main conclusions from the discussion

- Keep Institutional Assessment with different objectives (selection, informing about institutional status in strategic domains and consequently feeding into further project formulation, etc.)
- Organise the Institutional Assessment as early in the process as possible
- Split up the exercise in two: a 360° scan during the concept note stage, and looking more thoroughly at specific aspects at the beginning of the phase-in, to inform and guide further operationalisation.
- Communicate clearly about purposes of the IA, the timing, the required preparation, the benefits for the institution beyond the IUC, and also clarify the preconditions at the level of Flemish HEI

4.4. Developing a broad & diverse IUC consortium

Workshop Context

IUC partnerships are multi-institutional by design. They involve multiple teams of academics and specialists at the level of the partner institution on the one hand, and at the level of the Flemish universities and universities of applied sciences and arts on the other. At Flemish level, there is a compulsory multi-institutional set-up (MIP) to enable to pool all relevant expertise in the Flemish HE sector and mobilise (parts of) it for the IUC partner university.

IUC partnerships are also supposed to be multistakeholder partnerships (MSP) to connect the partner university and the Flemish HEIs with civil society actors, private sector, and / or government. An analysis of these stakeholders is essential for the start of an IUC to justify the embeddedness of the IUC partnership and project. This also needs to be translated in a strategy in terms of involvement of a broad consortium of actors (academic, societal, governmental, private) throughout project implementation and in view of use, uptake and impact, leading to a true multistakeholder partnership set-up.

Given the increased importance of MIP and MSP, the process for determining the content of projects and their implementers must be tailored to this. Thus, the matchmaking process has become more important. Experience has shown that online meetings do not create the necessary conditions for people to meet and really get to know each other personally and professionally, and for building mutual trust and respect. In-person meetings and open personal conversations as well as site visits must lay the foundation for mutual acquaintance based on a good understanding of each other (expertise, ambitions, contextual factors) and mutual trust, a condition to start with when then moving on to the phase of developing a shared dream and translating it into a joint project thereby guaranteeing the project ownership and commitment of all parties. This process takes time.

Given the policy priority to actively focus on recruitment of pioneers and on MIP and MSP collaboration, the involvement of academics from all Flemish universities and universities of applied sciences and arts and other societal actors sufficiently early in the project formulation process, and thus the process to realize this involvement and the transparency of it, have become more important.

In the past, a live matchmaking was organized after the selection of the Concept Notes with a view to identifying and mobilizing expertise in Flanders. A matchmaking consisted of the visit of delegations from the partner institutions to Flanders, with a central part organized by VLIR-UOS, and visits to the various Flemish campuses. This led to the assignment by VLIR-UOS of the various mandates to the different team leaders, after a call for application for team leadership by VLIR-UOS and a screening of the applications by the partner universities, which ensured the ownership of the partner university, the balanced distribution of the mandates across the various Flemish institutions based on competition as well as the participation of the universities of applied sciences and arts.

For the IUC call 2026 it was decided to change the intake process in the following way. In the first phase of submission of Expression of Interest & Commitment, applicants need to explain what approach they will use to identify and activate available and possibly interested experts within the Flemish HEIs in order to come to a multi-institutional project set-up whereby they can refer to Global Minds funding of their own institution, the “Associatieve Projecten” platforms, ... Also a strategy as to how they will reach out to civil society actors, government and/or private partners both in the formulation and implementation process in order to come to a multi-stakeholder project set-up is to be part of the first application. In the second phase of formulation of Concept Notes, MIP and MSP strategies for involving other academic and non-academic actors in the project formulation are to be implemented : a “light” matchmaking should be organized by the project partners in order to identify and mobilise team leaders, and non-academic

actors need to be involved in order to jointly formulate the different subprojects in a CN format (objectives, description, expertise). In the third phase of phase-in and formulation of Fully Fledged Proposal, a kick-off event will be organized by VLIR-UOS, aiming at training, connecting the new IUC projects among each other and with the other ongoing IUC projects, creating a platform for interested academics to participate in non-supporting roles on the basis of other project funds (e.g. GM, AP, ...), and interacting with DGD, Enabel, ARES, ITM, and other parties.

In conclusion, the objectives, timing and format of the matchmaking have been changed drastically.

Main elements per guiding question

MIP : how to organize the “light” matchmakings in such a way as to mobilise relevant expertise from the different Flemish HEIs and disciplines (interdisciplinarity) thereby guaranteeing transparency throughout the process ?

- **Challenges:**

Finding certain expertise, apart from the usual suspects

What is the role and responsibility of a team leader? To what extent is it (non) binding?

Having quotas for higher education institutions of applied sciences and arts in participating in IUC?

When considering participation in an IUC, should Universities of Applied Sciences & Arts prioritize expertise (preferred by lecturers) or affiliation (preferred by GEO for administrative and other follow-up)? Adapting to another institution's system demands time and effort, whereas the system of the associated University is already familiar and established.

- **Recommendation:**

Bundle the searched profiles into one vacancy message, thereby going beyond team leaders to attract other needed expertise.

- **Role of VLIR-UOS:**

Coordination of the matchmaking(s) in the different institutions

Disclose the expressions of interest to know which profiles and names already known and identify the ones still searching for

Being transparent about the selected and non-selected persons during the whole process

- **Format:**

Provide a platform with supply and demand (is a website a suitable platform, given the substantial workload involved in it, not just in its development but also in its ongoing maintenance?)

Be transparent: mobilize, inform, select

Associative projects, ICOS, GEO should contribute

The higher education institutions of applied sciences and arts can be in a key and supporting role and should make clear which expertise can be provided by them within an IUC

MSP : how to develop a stakeholder engagement strategy to involve a broad range of non-academic actors?

- **Mapping:**

'Mapping' and searching for stakeholders at a local level is difficult as long as there is no more concrete interpretation of the project, which is why it seems useful to first involve the 'key' or large(er)

stakeholders before moving down to small(er) stakeholders. This way you can go from larger to smaller and from broader to more detailed.

A university is located in a region where there is a district head or a governor. Usually there are also 'village chiefs', 'regional commissioners' and 'extension commissioners' and they are jointly responsible for policy and implementation of themes that are important to their region. When looking for project themes, their opinion and possible involvement can be valuable. They then form formal contacts, including with NGOs and networking with civil society and the private sector. It is also valuable to make informal contacts, such as with people from the Political & Social Sciences Department of the potential partner university. They also have contacts with NGOs, civil society and the private sector. The two combined can form a good basis for developing project themes that are necessary/useful for the region.

Flemish stakeholders can also offer added value, such as provinces, cities & municipalities, ANGC and see with whom they collaborate in a partner country and on what themes. This brings us to the JSFs, where both the lead of the JSF and the embassy/DGD in the partner country can play a role in making connections.

Alumni could also be involved to help form contacts and identify themes.

- **Challenges:**

Local NGOs often have little or no resources and are looking for financing; their own profit can also be the priority when it comes to joining an IUC.

Involving official state bodies can also put one's own profit first, because in practice incentives are often requested such as 'per diem', attendance fees, etc.

The partner institution is not always aware of its own expertise and outreach options. Often it exists in-house, but not necessarily within an IUC. It is therefore important to involve the Social Sciences (especially sociology), because they often have more experience with collaboration with civil society and outreach. Even though the Social Sciences Department (e.g. sociology) of the (potential) partner university may not be part of an IUC, it could be interesting to involve these departments, or others, that have existing contacts with civil society.

Main conclusions from the discussions

- **MIP:** Bundle the searched profiles into one vacancy message, thereby going beyond team leaders to attract other needed expertise. VLIR-UOS should coordinate the matchmaking(s) in the different institutions, disclose the expressions of interest and be transparent. The format should provide a platform with supply and demand and needs the contribution of ICOS, GEO and associative projects.
- **MSP:** Including MSP should go incremental, from larger to smaller stakeholders along with the development of the project proposal. MSP could be attracted through governance instances on a regional/local level, through Flemish stakeholders and their networking/partners (JSF/Embassy) and through alumni. Involve university departments (e.g. social sciences) that have strong contacts with civil society and could share their networks, expertise, and as such also lead to broad institutional engagement in the IUC

4.5. PhD trajectories

Workshop Context

During this workshop a round of discussion was organised to formulate a clearer framework for PhD students within VLIR-UOS projects and within IUC projects in particular, and to identify opportunities to pool training requirements and exchange on supervision trajectories of PhDs.

The focus was on experiences with PhD trajectories (doctoral training, monitoring & supervision mechanisms of PhDs, local conditions/commitment, ..) . starting from an experience with the IQ GEAR Network in Ethiopia whereby a survey among PhD students was realized as a basis to gain insights into the myriad factors that shape the trajectory of PhD education and supervision in an Ethiopian context and a starting point towards the project ambition to build higher quality and inclusive postgraduate education trajectories in Ethiopia.

Lessons learned can be valuable to create a clearer framework for the training and supervision of PhD students within projects, bearing in mind also that scholarships granted as part of an IUC partnership are to contribute to capacity building and organizational strengthening at the level of the local partner institution meaning that scholars are not only capacitated as individuals, but also in their role as change agents within their home institutions.

These are the objectives of this session:

- 1) Identify the most prevalent and urgent challenges regarding PhD trajectories
- 2) Identify concrete recommendations for the upcoming IUC call regarding the PhD trajectories (incl. expectations towards VLIR-UOS)

Main elements from the discussion

Out of the presentation on IQ Gear, a number of challenges in PhD Trajectories were listed. These were the following:

- Challenge 1: too many / duplication of PhD programs
- Challenge 2: Brain drain of academic staff/PhD supervisors
- Challenge 3: High inflow/poor outflow of PhD candidates
- Challenge 4: Delayed PhD trajectory
- Challenge 5: Poor PhD supervision
- Challenge 6: Little interdisciplinary/university research
- Challenge 7: Empowering female researchers

From these challenges the audience selected the following to be discussed each by one group.

Delayed PhD Trajectories

Factors

- In the case of Ethiopia local doctoral programmes exist, courses need to be taken, but these imply many delays; in Cuba the challenge is reaching the required publications before being able to defend, also the fact that most are not full-time working on their PhD, in Ecuador there are no local PhD programmes, and with the ambition of national government to increase the number of PhD holders, individuals left positions in universities, but upon return to Ecuador had to apply, were not

assured of professor positions; a lot of uncertainty. Also when enrolling in Belgium, a lot of delay, with registration requirements, requirements of Pre-doc that are differentiated, etc.

- PhD supervisors are not supported, lack of financial incentives, support
- Lack of institutional support, more attention to teaching, less to research

Recommendations

- It is important to clarify from the start that IUC partnerships require that the IUC institution engages in making PhD students available for research, it means a change in culture that these persons should not be overloaded when in the home institution, and should receive support from local supervisors. So, within an IUC the discussion on the PhD trajectories should start as soon as possible, and a list of candidates per subproject theme should be available in Phase In, and potential candidates could be engaged in a sort of Pre-PhD trajectory to be able to assess potential to move further into a PhD, in a successful way, within the time constraints of the programme. “
- “In joint or double PhDs the recruitment criteria of the Flemish university apply simultaneously with those of the partner institution (Cuban, Ethiopian case): early start with procedures locally is also very important. Sometimes delays are in Flanders, sometimes locally. How to align?
- It depends on the situation of the partner institution. Is there already a PhD programme? If so, they should be able to show they have their own regulations. If not, it can be part of the IUC programme to (further) develop a PhD programme and regulations on selections (who selects, how is the selection organized, follow-up etc.). The Flemish universities can support the partner institution in further developing selection procedures and PhD regulations. It can thus be an objective within the programme (e.g. mid-term result to be realized after Phase 1) but the intentions and planning of an institution need to be clear from the beginning.

Empowering female researchers

Factors

- Cultural aspects play an important role
- There is only a small pool of female researchers
- Scoring methods favor male applicants, as they often have attended more conferences, and civil duties typically associated with men are considered more relevant when linked to a PhD application.
- There may be gender biased violence within the higher education institutions
- Women, including women researchers, often have other priorities or tasks

Measures

- Organize better regulated/compensated maternity leave
- Provide child care
- Consider other factors like socio-economic situation, family, ...
- Introduce gender policies, strategies, a focal point at the institution
- Would it be better to talk about ‘inclusion’, rather than ‘gender’? Or does that distract from the core of the topic?
- Focus on trajectories (provide courses) instead of ex-ante evaluation (previously attended conferences)
- Rationalize key issues for gender assessment

Institutional conditions

- Tackling gender biased violence within the institution
- Build consensus on making working time feasible for women
- Take care of childcare/nursery from/within the institution
- Support and promote female examples
- Create a women research network and/or gender faculty
- Promote awareness for STEM
- Create easier access for (PhD) opportunities
- Should institutions work with quotas to have sufficient women onboard?

Main conclusions from the discussions

- Discuss the **PhD trajectories** early in an IUC intake, look at procedures, clarify that the IUC partner institution has to come up with support to make sure PhD students get time to work on their PhD without losing wage. These are embedded PhDs, after training they will serve the institution, so the support, creation of a PhD friendly environment is part of the IUC bargain, part of the in-kind co-funding.
- PhD candidates must have a **clearly defined trajectory** from selection to follow-up stages. A well-defined plan for PhD selection, incorporating pre-selection stages (and potentially pre-programmes), should be developed starting from the IUC Phase In to ensure that PhD candidates can start their studies as promptly as possible.
- To **empower and attract female researchers**, higher education institutions should provide regulated/compensated maternity leave and child care, introduce gender policies/strategies, focus on capacity building trajectories, tackle gender biased violence within the institution, make consensus of working time, create a women research network/gender faculty and easier access for (PhD) opportunities.

4.6. Preconditions at the level of the Flemish HEI for IUC project management

Workshop Context

The IUC partner university (partner institution) and the Flemish coordinating university (Flemish institution) jointly manage, under the guidance of the Flemish and the local IUC Coordinator, the implementation of the partner programme.

During the previous IUC call, an institutional assessment of the partner institution was organised, in the form of a self-assessment and an external institutional assessment, providing a 360° assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the potential IUC partner. Furthermore, the assessment was looking at the match of the institution with the general IUC principles and collecting key institutional data.

The Flemish coordinating university is amongst others coordinating the input from the different Flemish institutions participating in the partner programme and ensures the provision of organisational resources required from the Flemish side. In this workshop we will explore the management quality of the IUC coordination by the Flemish coordinating university, through the following questions:

Main elements in the discussion

What do you expect from the Flemish coordinating university in terms of management and support structure quality, from the perspective of a Flemish team lead/member or ICOS?

- Systems involve human resources
- Systems differ from HEI to HEI
 - o UHasselt: there is no unburdening of the FC (no post-doc. Support); reinforcement of the ICOS when having extra IUCs.
 - o HOWEST: the TL is responsible for accommodation, visa, sending the finances, ... Therefore the TL receives a compensation (30% scaling); for GEO, for financial department: comes on top of the daily work and this is not feasible.
 - o PXL: from the financial resources from the research department (20%, 1 day), collected from taxes (bedrijfsvoorheffing).
 - o Reference is made to the reality of the UASA : not all of them will be able to commit to the tasks that are part of the “interuniversitaire afspraken” agreement. Many GEO do not have the time to be involved in practicalities such as finding and booking accommodation, payout to scholars, or do not know how to deal with it, given the fact that the contracting party is different from the own institution.
 - o KULeuven: everything centralized within ICOS. This is important for networking and knowledge building.
- Discussion about having an extra post-doc besides the FC:
 - o Can only be to fulfill the academic activities from the FC while the FC is taking up the tasks for the IUC. The postdoc is to stay outside of the IUC governance.
 - o UHasselt: wants to embed global partnerships (administrative side, but also content-wise). This could be the task of a post-doc.

How can this minimum management quality be taken into account (which kind of information, which kind of checks) during the IUC selection process? And in which phase(s) in this process?

- To add a disclaimer, covering the list with systems that need to be in place and let this sign by the rector.
- Not having too many details because every institution works differently and is organized differently.
- What about past performance metrics? Timeliness of reporting? What about follow-up of interuniversity agreements? (interuniversitaire afspraken)

Main conclusions from the discussions

- To deepen and refine the interuniversity agreements with the universities of applied sciences and arts.
- Adding a disclaimer/letter of support seems feasible as a check if the systems will be in place to coordinate an IUC. This can be complemented by a narrative description of how the institution will organize itself and what resources it will make available (identify themes)
- How to include past performance metrics remains to be seen (e.g. timeliness of reporting? Performance in terms of the interuniversity agreements (e.g. interuniversitaire afspraken)

5. Way forward

Topic	Main conclusions	Development / adaptation needed for IUC Call(s) and current programmes?	Immediate follow-up required in view of IUC 2026?	Policy decision needed by BUOS
Interpersonal success factors in IUC coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A coordinator needs to have a range of interpersonal soft skills, along with management skills and policy experience. Especially for the partner coordinator, a strong connection with the university authorities is important, in some contexts this will mean that a high position in hierarchy is advisable, but on the other hand this should be in balance with the importance of having sufficient availability. • Some recommendations are given with regards to possibility to foresee in an onboarding trajectory for coordinators • As was already indicated as a good practice, the fact that a double role as coordinator and team leader of a subproject is to be avoided, was again confirmed. • Given the time taken into (starting) an IUC, it was also suggested that it could be beneficial to take onboard a postdoc to deload the coordinator from his/her regular tasks so that the coordinator can dedicate more time to the IUC. The need for a postdoc is bigger in the first two years. The postdoc should be outside the IUC governance, since there is no link between them. . • Discussion about emeritus status : it is not advised to go for a combined mandate of coordinator and deputy as a general set-up. However, in case of retirement of the coordinator in Phase 1, it is advised to work with a deputy coordinator as from the beginning. This deputy can take over once the coordinator is retired. This person will then have the necessary track record and experience with the project. 	Clarify what is expected at level of Flemish IUC coordination within the framework of the IUC Call 2026	Yes	Yes, further follow-up at level of Bureau UOS in view of IUC call 2026
Lessons learned from the post IUC NETWORK model (NETWORK workshop).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The post IUC Networks were not just 'post IUC initiatives', they needed to have a clear and common goal, shared interests, also with the newly identified collaborating partner institutions. • The Networks created and strengthened collaboration among VLIR-UOS partner institutions whereby it was important to develop these networking skills in the process, sharing and exchanging experiences, finding complementarities, developing capacities to collaborate, etc • How to consider these Network type projects within the portfolio: Networking initiatives are very much valued and should receive a clear place in the VLIR-UOS portfolio, being through specific incentives within existing programmes (TEAM, ICP Connect, IUC, ..) or via special programmes whereby we can get inspired by the Network programme. The level of institutionalisation of the networking structure was much stronger than in other programmes, and achievements on a national level in partner countries testified this. 	<p>No new NETWORK calls were programmed within FYP2</p> <p>Opportunities for discussing Network type projects can be foreseen when discussing post IUC, post ICP and broader ambitions of VLIR-UOS in terms of Connect. Learn. Inspire and bridging science and society.</p>	No immediate follow-up required, bring this to the discussion when discussing FYP3, post ICP Connect, etc.	<p>Not immediately.</p> <p>To be on the agenda when starting discussions on FYP3</p>

	<p>Also the duration of the project is an important factor, as also a minimal level of dedicated budget.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • However, contexts have evolved, and within the broader ambitions of Agenda 2030 and knowledge driven global partnerships, opportunities of connecting global IUC and ICP Connect networks certainly could be further explored. Maybe when discussing what post IUC, or post ICP, the idea of connecting both is something to explore? • Post IUC: Networks were a good post IUC modality, to build upon relations and topics developed within an IUC and broaden the Network at a national level, bringing other/new partner institutions within the VLIR-UOS community. However, within the current more global agenda, it seems important to also connect these networking ambitions with other ways to support transversal skills of partner institutions, to assist them in getting to know the way to other funding mechanisms (e.g. EU-funding), making linkages to the labor market where possible. 			
Accelerating institutional capacities & institutional assessments as lever of IUC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep Institutional Assessment with different objectives (selection, informing about institutional status in strategic domains and consequently feeding into further project formulation, etc.) • Organise the Institutional Assessment as early in the process as possible • Split up the exercise in two: a 360° scan during the concept note stage, and looking more thoroughly at specific aspects at the beginning of the phase-in, to inform and guide further operationalisation. • Communicate clearly about purposes of the IA, the timing, the required preparation, the benefits for the institution beyond the IUC, and also clarify the preconditions at the level of Flemish HEI 	<p><u>IUC call 2026</u></p> <p>Clarify the IA approach within the Concept Note stage</p> <p>Include IA as early as possible in the Concept Note stage.</p> <p>Split the exercise</p> <p><u>Existing programmes</u></p> <p>Put the IA again on the agenda and invite the partner institution and project team to report on the use they made / still make of it</p>	To be integrated in the IUC Call and further clarified in IUC general grant management documentation of the IUC Programme	Yes, decision to be taken on timing and approach of IA within the IUC intake/assessment procedure.
Developing a broad & diverse IUC consortium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MIP: Bundle the searched profiles into one vacancy message, thereby going beyond team leaders to attract other needed expertise. VLIR-UOS should coordinate the matchmaking(s) in the different institutions, disclose the expressions of interest and be transparent. The format should provide a platform with supply and demand and needs the contribution of ICOS, GEO and associative projects. • MSP: Including MSP should go incremental, from larger to smaller stakeholders along with the development of the project proposal. MSP could be attracted through governance instances on a regional/local level, through Flemish stakeholders and their networking/partners (JSF/Embassy) and through alumni. Involve university departments (e.g. social sciences) that have strong contacts with civil society and could share their networks, expertise, and as such also lead to broad institutional engagement in the IUC 	Clarify what is expected at level of MIP and MSP within the framework of the IUC Call 2026	Yes	Yes, further follow-up at level of Bureau UOS in view of IUC call 2026

PhD Trajectories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the PhD trajectories early in an IUC intake, look at procedures, clarify that the IUC partner institution has to come up with support to make sure PhD students get time to work on their PhD without losing wage. These are embedded PhDs, after training they will serve the institution, so the support, creation of a PhD friendly environment is part of the IUC bargain, part of the in-kind co-funding. • PhD candidates must have a clearly defined trajectory from selection to follow-up stages. A well-defined plan for PhD selection, incorporating pre-selection stages (and potentially pre-programmes), should be developed starting from the IUC Phase In to ensure that PhD candidates can start their studies as promptly as possible. • To empower and attract female researchers, higher education institutions should provide regulated/compensated maternity leave and child care, introduce gender policies/strategies, focus on capacity building trajectories, tackle gender biased violence within the institution, make consensus of working time, create a women research network/gender faculty and easier access for (PhD) opportunities. 	<p>Clarify the responsibility for PhD trajectories as part of the profile of an IUC institution</p> <p>Clarify the PhD trajectories as part of the IUC Phase In and Management Manual documentation of an IUC</p>	<p>Take this on board in IUC Calls and general grant management documentation of the IUC Programme</p>	<p>No immediate effect at policy decision level.</p>
Preconditions at the level of the Flemish HEI for IUC project management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To include the universities of applied sciences and arts in the inter-university agreements, if they are willing to • Adding a disclaimer/letter of support seems feasible as a check if the systems will be in place to coordinate an IUC. This can be complemented by a narrative description of how the institution will organize itself and what resources it will make available (identify themes) • How to include past performance metrics remains to be seen (e.g. timeliness of reporting? Performance in terms of the interuniversity agreements (e.g. interuniversitaire afspraken) 	<p>Clarify what is expected at level of preconditions at the Flemish coordinating HEI within the framework of the IUC Call 2026</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Yes, further follow-up at level of Bureau UOS in view of IUC call 2026</p>