

VLIR-UOS

**Final evaluation of 5 IUC and
3 NETWORK programmes**

**Synthesis of findings and
conclusions across 8
programme evaluations**

Presentation 16th April 2024



Overview

1. Introduction
2. Summary - Key elements of programme level evaluations
3. Findings on learning questions
4. Recapitulation of key conclusions and recommendations

I. Introduction

This 'final' evaluation reviewed the second 5-year phase of 8 VLIR-UOS funded long term partnership programmes:

- ✓ 5 Institutional University Cooperation (IUC) programmes
 - Uganda - Mountains of the Moon University (MMU)
 - Vietnam - Hué University
 - Tanzania – Mzumbe University
 - Tanzania – Nelson Mandela African Institute of Science and Technology (NM-AIST)
 - Cuba – Universidad de Oriente (UO)
- ✓ 3 post-IUC NETWORK programmes
 - Vietnam Network Programme
 - Ecuador Network Programme
 - Cuba Network programme

2. Summary - Key elements of programme level evaluations

Effectiveness and impact

IUC Programmes

- **Research and Teaching capacities:** improved across all 5 IUC programmes
- **Scientific Quality and Publications:**
 - Upswing of publications in Uganda and Tanzania
 - Surge in scientific output in Vietnam and Cuba
 - Overall enhanced academic rigor and knowledge contribution
- **Institutional Capacity enhancement:** all 5 IUC programmes showcase improvements across most dimensions of capacity ; e.g. in capacity for education, research and industry collaboration
- **Community engagement and outreach:**
 - Bridging distance through action research in Uganda and Tanzania
 - Multiple partnerships in Cuba

Effectiveness and impact

IUC Programmes

- **Technology and ICT Integration:**
 - Improvements in ICT infrastructure in Uganda and Tanzania (NM-AIST)
 - Significant research outputs in Vietnam
 - Application of latest technology for service challenges in Cuba
- **Factors of success for PhD trajectories and research uptake:** several good practices
 - **Challenges:** excessive workload staff and need sustained funding
 - **Success:** Combined achievements of all 5 IUC programmes: strengthened research and teaching abilities, heightened scientific standards, enhanced institutional resilience, steps in developing community involvement, and technological integration all demonstrate the effectiveness of IUC programs.

Effectiveness and impact

Network Programmes

- **Strong academic results and effects on staff and students:**
 - High degree of effectiveness
 - Good practices of research-based education in Ecuador, Vietnam and Cuba
 - Challenges related to bureaucratic procedures, labour market and/or COVID
- **The impact on society:**
 - Not clearly in Vietnam and Ecuador
 - Evident in Cuba (context of a strongly involved government)
- **The added value of Network Programmes.** Partners appreciated:
 - Collaborative context
 - Competent representation
 - Communication (IT + support to proficiency in English)
- Overall, stronger added value for university partners that had less exposure in the past and weaker research tradition

Sustainability

IUC Programmes

- Significant contribution to **institutional sustainability** of the partner universities by all 5 IUC programmes
 - Enhanced recognition and support by government
 - Improved capacity to attract and manage funding sources
 - Sustainable enhancement of institutional capacity across the full range of core capabilities of these 5 universities - continuing well in phase 2
- Enhancement of **academic sustainability** across 5 IUC programmes
- **Financial sustainability** remains a challenge across IUC partner universities
 - Varying degree of dependence on government funding and/or other limited sources of funding
 - Jeopardizes continuity of enhanced performance levels

Sustainability

Network programmes

- **Institutional sustainability**
 - Evaluation reports document appropriate institutional mechanisms and processes or agreements that integrate the outputs and results of the Network programme in the university systems
 - Less clear when looking at Network approach and structure
- **Academic sustainability** is well ensured overall
- **Financial sustainability** remains a challenge across Network Programmes
 - Vietnam and Ecuador: MsC programmes
 - Cuba: solution is sought through commercialisation of services and IT application, and universities setting up or participating in companies

Leverages and factors of success

IUC Programmes

- **Conducive partnership** between all stakeholders
 - Responsibility and flexibility at all levels
 - Strong commitments by leadership and teams, and by Flemish partners
- **Transparent and effective coordination**, highlighting the importance of a well-organized, proficient and transparent coordination structure, including a dedicated programme manager
- **A shared vision**, long-term and combined with strong leadership and openness to alternative ideas
- **Government support** (Uganda and Cuba) and **emergence of new government policies** (Tanzania)
- **Flexibility and adaptability**, showing resilience
- **Commitment to foster connections between research and education**

Tapestry of interconnected success factors such as: strong partnerships, effective coordination, visionary leadership, government support, adaptability, and a commitment to collaborative practices and transparent governance.

Leverages and factors of success

Network Programmes

- **Investment in ICT equipment:** very important contributing factor overall
 - ICT infrastructure (Cuba)
 - Significant efforts and (well appreciated) results in refining and enriching content of course (Ecuador and Vietnam)
 - Willingness to review existing administrative practices, identify and eliminate (as far as possible) obstacles for collaboration (Ecuador)
 - Synergies with initiatives of other VLIR-UOS programmes (Vietnam, Ecuador and Cuba)

3. Findings on Learning Questions

Learning question 1: How to support PhD trajectories, with a focus on optimising diversity/inclusivity (gender and LNOB)?

- Overall conclusion: **limited specific focus or policy in the programme regarding the equal participation of men and women in PhD programmes nor any special attention to actively attract disadvantaged groups** and strengthen their access to the PhD scholarships
- Attention for equal numbers in selection seems to help in almost every case to ensure that between 30 to 50 % of the selected candidates is female, but attention is not yet or only partly institutionalised
- Because of lack of 'upstream' measures to create a diverse pool of potential PhD candidates, it is not always possible for local institutions to meet diversity ambitions in the composition of the PhD candidates in the programme, while also upholding academic quality requirements and striving for excellence

Learning question 2: What factors and measures, at VLIR-UOS level and/or at partner institute level, support effective coordination of programmes?

- Effective coordination is a **multifaceted effort** that requires a **combination of 'hard' and 'soft' leverages**; including:
 - Institutional support
 - Transparent communication
 - Inclusive decision-making
 - Flexibility
 - Committed team with well-developed soft skills
 - etc.
- These lessons from various IUC programmes provide a **framework for optimizing coordination** in similar initiatives
- However, **VLIR-UOS already provides an enabling environment** to foster effective coordination with a long implementation horizon and flexibility of instruments and procedures

Lessons learned

Related to *the context*:

- Sense of urgency (Cuba) and/or strong support by government (Cuba and Vietnam) facilitates external coherence
- Societal and governmental actors often lack incentives to ask for, inform about and/or use research findings that are relevant for them as they have no tradition in working closely with universities on developing or executing policies (Ecuador)

Related to *research* itself:

- Research projects focusing on direct solutions in response to needs of specific audiences that are easy to be implemented in the workplace and that are more technical in nature have a higher probability for uptake

Learning question 3: How to ensure uptake of research results? (2/3)

- Uptake based on pilot action research and uptake by more vulnerable target groups requires a more multifaceted approach (including intermediaries) in which ‘fit for purpose’ results from needs-based research is only a component
- This means that partnership with other actors (potential intermediaries) needs to receive sufficient attention in the uptake strategies of the VLIR-UOS programmes and of the supported institutions.
- Making clear choices and prioritising in research topics may enhance the probability of effective uptake.
- Uptake through tech transfer and commercialisation requires additional financial means, institutional support and societal support. Synergy between donor programmes is however difficult to realise.

Learning question 3:

How to ensure uptake of research results? (3/3)

- A strategy for uptake requires additional means and time alongside the PhD trajectory (and goes beyond the responsibility of the PhD student).
- Training of trainers could be effective with view to upscaling the adoption or research results by large groups of end users but what is offered is mostly not ToT and lacks effective andragogy approaches and/or incentives for continued effort.

Related to *the institution*:

- The lack of an explicit institution-level strategy on uptake and/or lack of alignment between programme-specific approaches and university approaches weakens the probability of successful uptake
- The evaluations highlight the importance of embedding the strategy in a dedicated department for uptake/outreach

4. Key conclusions and recommendations

4. Key conclusions and recommendations (1/3)

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

4. Key conclusions and recommendations (2/3)

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.

4. Key conclusions and recommendations (3/3)

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?

