Formulation guidelines for the development of an IUC concept note South (IUC call 2022)

Introduction

This guide translate the principles of the VLIR-UOS Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) policy into basic guidelines for the formulation of a "concept note South" in the framework of the Institutional University Cooperation (IUC) programme call 2022. The formulation of an IUC concept note South is much more than writing a project proposal. It is also a participative process in which applicants co-create the basis for a potential programme based on a shared vision of change, and a shared understanding of the current situation. Therefore, this formulation guide provides a brief overview of the process that should be followed in order to arrive at a qualitative concept note. The guide is brief, outlining the basic idea of every step, and providing links to approaches/tools that can be used for every stage in the process whenever relevant. It is an optional tool that can assist you in the process of completing the concept note.

References to the integration of the transversal themes gender and environment are indicated in the document with following pictogram. More information can be found at the end of this document (flashcards).

For VLIR-UOS the Theory of Change approach is central in project formulation[1]. Also in the development of an IUC concept note, various elements of the Theory of Change approach are used: the development of a concept note will start with the identification of (i) a long term desired change, (ii) a context analysis and (iii) a mapping of a strategy (main domains of change + some elements of pathways of change). However, in the concept note we only focus on the higher level of the Theory of Change (ToC), the overall programme strategy. This implies that the concept note should not focus on the lower levels, i.e. the specific projects. These projects will, only in a later stage, be designed based on and drawing from this higher level ToC.

The focus and (expected) result of this first meta-level Theory of Change, is to stimulate reflection on change processes with a long term horizon, without going into detail at this stage. Assumptions about causal relations are based on evidence from research and experience in the specific areas of change. In the concept note we look for the key areas of change that will be the focus of the future IUC and the underlying changes envisioned by the IUC programme. This clarity and high quality design of the overall programme strategy (Theory of Change) is considered essential.

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[1] The VLIR-UOS approach and this guide draw a.o. from HIVOS' Theory of Change (ToC) approach

Step 0: Decision to apply for the IUC call

In this document we assume the decision to apply for the IUC call, and to write a first concept note, has already been made. This also supposes that this decision has ownership within the institution and that persons from various disciplines and/or faculties are already involved in this stage (incl. senior management). This is a precondition for any successful IUC application.

Step 1: From the university's strategy, to an IUC dream

ESSENCE

- ✓ Starting from your university's strategy, define a long-term, desired change to which you want to <u>contribute</u> with the IUC programme
- ✓ The desired change needs to be challenging and ambitious

KEY QUESTIONS

In 10-20 years: what would we dream of?

How would our university look like? What will have changed in the local development context?

What is the desired change, why and for who?

POSSIBLE TOOL/APPROACH[2]

- ✓ Rich picture
- ✓ Brainstorm

WHERE IN THE CONCEPT NOTE CAN YOU USE THIS?

Chapter 1 (strategy of the institution) + Chapter 3 (long term desired change)

1. An IUC programme aligns to the existing institutional strategy of the applicant university. In the first step of the concept note development, applicants need to reflect on their institutional strategy (and if relevant, other internal policies/strategies) and reflect on how they see the role of their institution as a driver of change in society. Doing this, the university also needs to reflect on their capacity to network with external actors (such as governments, private sector, communities, civil society organisations, external funders, etc.) as they are crucial stakeholders to attain sustainable impact in an IUC programme. In this section (chapter 1 of the concept note), examples from the recent past can help to illustrate the university's capacity.

2. On the basis of this first reflexion about the organisation's strategy and its role as driver of change in society, the applicant needs to identify a 'dream' for the IUC application. What is the desired change/are the long-term desired changes you would like to see realised through this IUC programme (often these changes will relate to an institutional dream and a more developmental dream)? This dream / desired change(s) should be challenging and ambitious, but not impossible to achieve (reachable in 10-20 year time).

   Concentrate on changes in and among individuals, departments, organisations, social structures, and institutions (both inside and outside the university), to which you want to contribute, in a time perspective of 10 to 20 years. The desired change must be plausible: there must be a sufficient degree of probability that the change can happen.

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[2] In this section we refer to existing tools/approaches that can help you in the development of your proposal. They are not explained further in this guideline.

Step 2: Context analysis

ESSENCE

Develop a broad – and shared – understanding of the system in which the desired change is needed

KEY QUESTIONS

What is the current situation in relation to the dream(s) we have? What are the key problems/capacity constraints related to this? Underlying causes? How are current problems causally linked to each other? What are the key strengths and weaknesses of the institution? What are key areas needing further development? What are key societal/developmental challenges in the region? Underlying causes?

POSSIBLE TOOLS/APPROACHES

- ✓ SWOT analysis
- ✓ Problem Tree / hierarchy of problems
- ✓ Rich picture
- ✓ Venn diagrams
- ✓ Spider diagrams

WHERE IN THE CONCEPT NOTE CAN YOU USE THIS?

Chapter 2 context analysis

Institutional factsheet

Every programme takes place in a context that determines the need, conditions and the opportunities for a successful programme. That is why every programme needs to have a good understanding of the context in order to make informed strategic choices when formulating a programme, increasing the chances of success. This context analysis includes an institutional analysis and a broader development context analysis.

It can be difficult to set boundaries for these analyses, and it might be challenging to limit the scope of these analyses. How deep the analysis needs to be depends on your purpose, so ask yourself what you want to get out of it, what questions you want being answered.

Development context

The applicants need to provide a clear developmental contextual analysis: what are the key development problems in the university's region? The contextual analysis identifies the challenges of an existing situation and analyses the 'cause and effect' relationships between the identified problems. These 'problems' occur in a context which is shaped by historical, social, political, economic, cultural, ecological and geographical parameters. The contextual analysis involves two main steps: (i) Definition of the framework and subject of analysis (**scope**); and (ii) Identification of the major problems faced by target groups and beneficiaries (What is/are the problem/s? Why is it a problem?), and the broader context in which these problems occur, key influencing factors and actors, etc. This analysis is important as it demonstrates the existing needs, and is supposed to underpin the programme strategy. It can refer to existing analyses (e.g. national/regional strategies, international studies, etc.).

The analysis needs to give due attention to the general context, environmental issues (analysing the environmental context and its links with socio-economic issues) and gender issues (analysing the way in which the situations/needs/challenges of men and women and power relations between men and women differ in relationship to the problem).

Institutional context

Similar to the analysis of the development context, applicants need to provide a clear picture of the institutional context. This information needs to be provided in chapter 2 and in the institutional factsheet. The applicants need to identify strengths and weaknesses of their university (and underlying causes). As in the development context, this analysis needs to be accompanied with clear facts. The main goal is to clearly identify the strengths of the university (what can an IUC build upon) and a clear identification of the weaknesses / areas needing improvement.

It can be worthwhile to link those to the development context (e.g. development context: poor agricultural productivity; institutional context: university not research-active in agricultural topics).

In the institutional context analysis it is essential to integrate a gender analysis. The applicant reflects on the challenges faced at the institution considering gender equality and presents the ambitions or engagements of the institution's management for reaching gender equality (e.g. in application procedures and promotion paths, in representation of boards and committees, in the working culture…). The same applies for environment, by reflecting on the environmental impact of the institution (e.g. related to mobility, equipment, infrastructure, waste management…) and the ambitions or engagements at management level.

Step 3: Analysing and prioritising domains of change

ESSENCE

Based on the analysis of the context, different domains where change is needed are identified in order to achieve the desired change. Decide on the strategic priorities (what domain(s) will the project work on, what domains not?) of the project without forgetting the complexity of the process towards the desired change.

KEY QUESTIONS

- What are the key domains of change needed to realise the programme 'dream' ?
- What domains of change can a VLIR-UOS supported programme realistically influence?
- Is it realistic and feasible to contribute to the desired change by working on these domains?

TOOLS/APPROACHES

- ✓ Mapping high level Theory of Change

WHERE IN THE CONCEPT NOTE CAN YOU USE THIS?

Chapter 3 (key challenges / domains of change)

In order for the desired change(s) (the programme dream) to happen, changes need to happen in different domains simultaneously. After having analysed the present context, applicants need to reflect on the domains/areas where important changes need to be made. These domains will relate to the key challenges identified in the context analysis. Identifying these different domains of change can help to get a better understanding of the complexity of the development challenge the programme wants to tackle. These "domains of change" should - ideally -be formulated as objectives (translating the key problems into positive statements).

After having identified the different domains of change that are needed to attain the long term desired change, the programme can start to set priorities. The different possible strategies and domains of change are studied and the most appropriate strategy for the programme is to be selected. The most relevant and feasible strategy needs to be selected on the basis of criteria such as:

- Available know-how, capacities and interest of the stakeholders
- Complementarity with other actions
- Institutional and developmental priorities
- Best value for money
- Potential effects in terms of (gender) equity
- Potential environmental impact

Setting priorities: The programme will not be able to tackle all challenges or domains of change. In order to contribute to the desired change, the programme needs to identify strategic priorities it will work on, without ignoring the complexity of the different domains of required change.

Step 4: Further analysis of the domains of change

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ESSENCE

Analyse the domains of change and reflect on the different underlying changes that need to occur (cf. overall programme strategy)

KEY QUESTIONS

- Who and what needs to change, where, and in which way, for the envisioned changes (domains of change) to take place?
- How can a programme organise these envisaged change processes? How to achieve institutional strengthening?
- Will the change process – or elements of it – work out differently for men and women?
- What are the key risks of the project and what are the most important assumptions the formulation is making? About the sustainability of the envisioned changes? And how could the programme manage these uncertainties.

TOOLS/APPROACHES

- ✓ Theory of Change
- ✓ Objectives tree

WHERE IN THE PROJECT PROPOSAL CAN YOU USE THIS?

Chapter 3 (programme strategy)

Chapter 5 Assumptions, preconditions & sustainability?

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In this step, the domains of change should be further analysed: how will the programme approach the identified domains of change? Project the envisaged change process. Identify different intermediate steps that need to be realised in order to achieve the desired change, question what needs to change for the desired change to occur (and why?). This exercise needs to draw from the earlier context analysis, the identified desired change and the domain(s) of change you chose to work on. The aim is not to focus on projects, but rather to focus on an overall programme strategy.

1. Start by reflecting on the different changes envisaged to happen in the domains of change, and to contribute to the desired, long term change. By identifying these high-level changes, the notions about the programme might evolve as one will want to influence the likelihood of these steps/changes to take place. What needs to change in terms of attitudes, behaviour and performance of key stakeholders? Why is this important? What changes are needed in organisational and institutional capacities/performance? Why? Etc.
2. Gender. Will the change process – or elements of it – work out differently for men and women? Are women likely to benefit at least equally from the changes envisaged? What could be potential negative, unintended effects for women? Will the change influence existing labour divisions of men and women, or existing power relations between men and women?
3. Environment. Will the change process (e.g. introduction of tree species as soil conservation practices) have a positive or negative impact on the environment ? This can be at direct (e.g. reduced erosion rates) or indirect level (e.g. reduction in downstream floods).
4. Look back and review: what are important preconditions for these changes? What are important preconditions/assumptions about the sustainability of these changes? How can the programme deal with them? Discuss how contextual factors and stakeholders (see below) influence the change process you are mapping. Discuss any potential unintended effects (positive or negative).

Step 5: Analysing stakeholders

ESSENCE

Identify the most important stakeholders the programme will need to deal with. Analyse the potential role of these stakeholders and how the programme will engage with these stakeholders.

KEY QUESTIONS

- Who are the stakeholders? What stakeholders will have a role in realising the desired change(s) if the programme
- What is their role in the current context? What interest do they have in the programme and to what extent will these stakeholders be supportive? How much influence/power do these stakeholders have over the success of the programme
- How will the project involve / engage them?

TOOLS/APPROACHES

✓ Stakeholder analysis matrix

WHERE IN THE CONCEPT NOTE CAN YOU USE THIS?

Chapter 4

The programme stakeholders are individuals, groups of people or organisations who have an interest (a stake) in the (proposed) programme and hence can influence or contribute to the project. Stakeholders consist of direct beneficiaries (the group that will be benefiting from the services of the programme), potential indirect beneficiaries (those who will be benefiting from the programme in the long run, e.g. farmers, local governments, etc.) and any other actor with a stake in the project. If a programme wants to be successful, it is not only important to **identify** stakeholders, but it is equally important to **analyse** them. This can be done by analysing 2 dimensions:

- The influence/power the stakeholder has over the success of the programme

- The role of the stakeholder according to:

  o Their interest of the stakeholder (from low interest to high interest): to what extent will the programme impact them?

  o Or by their attitude of support towards the programme (opposing; unaware/neutral; ally)
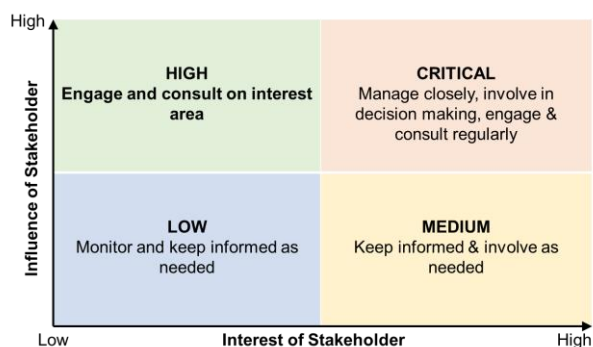
Finally, and most importantly, the concept note needs to formulate approaches to engage with these stakeholders when preparing and implementing the programme. How will stakeholders be consulted and/or involved?

A well-developed stakeholder engagement strategy is critical for the success of the programme in terms of potential impact, sustainability, efficiency, etc. In the concept note we expect an early identification of the most important stakeholders of the programme and a preliminary engagement strategy. Special attention should be given to stakeholders external to the university.

For example: If the programme seeks to have an effect on policy makers, then the project needs to engage with local government during the whole duration of the programme in order to raise interest to make sure the project can actually have a significant impact. The programme can consult policy makers throughout the process, or could even involve them in decision making.

The stakeholder analysis needs to look at these elements taking into account the potential differences for men and women. By studying this in a gender-sensitive way, the intervention can unravel possible gender inequalities. Involving women's organisations is useful for identifying these potential differences.

Practical " Flash cards" on the integration of transversal themes

Flash Card: Environment	
Content	VLIR-UOS highly values the **protection** of the **physical** and **biological environment** in its interventions. Therefore projects are sensitized to think about the impact on and the integration of environment and environmental sustainability in the formulation phase. Different **characteristics** of the environment can be brought into consideration: soil, water, air, biodiversity, climate and climate change, forest, energy, extreme events… The integration of environment can be done on **two levels**: within the **management** of the project and in the **content** of the project (e.g. as an objective or intermediary result).
Motivation	The protection of the environment and natural resources is a **precondition for sustainable development**, as a healthy environment forms the foundation of human welfare and well-being. Sustainable development is development that answers to the needs of the current generations **without endangering** the potential for **future generations** to provide for their needs. In order to guarantee sustainable human development, natural capital, in balance with economic and social capital and with respect for the planetary boundaries, constitutes the foundation for dignified development.
Contact person:	Wannes Verbeeck (VLIR-UOS)
Examples & questions for reflection on environment	**Management of the project** o Does the project foresee in CO_2 compensation? o Does the project integrate the principle of circular economy? (e.g. consider the use of second hand materials) o Does the project aim to reduce waste? (e.g. avoid printing, avoid plastic cups, plates, cutlery,… at events) o Does the project mention sustainable food consumption? (e.g. vegetarian catering at events) o Does the project uses renewable energy sources (e.g. use of solar energy) **Content of the project** o What is the environmental context of the project? (e.g. heavy metals in water) o What are the links between the environmental characteristics and socio-economic issues in the area? (e.g. intensive farming leads to soil depletion, erosion leads to decrease in soil fertility) o Is the main objective of the project in line with the principles of sustainable development? (= environmental relevance) (e.g. risk of deforestation by promoting cocoa production through a project) o What are the possible effects of the environment on the project? (e.g. deregulated agricultural calendars because of climate change) o What are the possible (negative/positive) effects of the project on the environment? (e.g. increase in chemical waste because of the installation of a new laboratory) o Do the beneficiaries of the project have the management capacity to adapt to the environment? (e.g. installation of rainwater collection)
Available tools/links:	Strategic Note on Environmental Sustainability KLIMOS toolkit Louvain Coopération toolkit Free online course: pathways to sustainability (linking environmental integrity with social justice)

Flash Card: Gender	
Content	VLIR-UOS is committed to achieving more gender equity and equality in the VLIR-UOS partner countries, including Belgium, both in the higher education sector and in society in general, through UOS funded interventions. Gender is understood as a **socio-cultural construct** of female and male identities, roles and expressions. There are two pathways of integrating gender, through **stand-alone projects** with a specific focus on gender or through the **mainstreaming of gender** in all projects. Gender mainstreaming is done horizontally (in all interventions regardless of the sector they focus on) and vertically (throughout the different steps of the project cycle).

Motivation	**Sustainable and inclusive development cannot be achieved if women and girls, who constitute half of the population, do not have equal rights and opportunities.** From a human rights perspective, gender equality is a **goal in itself,** although ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls is also **crucial to accelerating sustainable development**. It has been proven time and again, that empowering women and girls has a multiplier effect, and stimulates economic growth and development. Furthermore, insufficient use of human capital **within the higher education sector** has a harmful impact on the development of higher education institutions, as it decreases efficiency and excellence by missing out on women's involvement at all academic levels.
Contact person:	Inge Vandevyvere (VLIR-UOS)
Approaches, examples & questions for reflection on gender	**3 necessary approaches for improving gender equality:** **Fixing the numbers**: focuses on increasing women's (or men's) participation o Does the project ensure gender balanced representation in the team? (cfr. VLIR-UOS policy: 60-40% to 40-60% representation of both sexes) o Does the project incorporate mechanisms to ensure gender balanced participation and representativeness in decision-making processes? o Does the project ensure gender balanced participation and representativeness at project activities? (e.g. by providing day care during training) o Does the project identify cultural/religious/legal restrictions that would not allow women or men to participate in project activities (e.g. identify the reasons making it difficult for young female academics to work outside office hours) **Fixing the content**: focuses on integrating gender analysis (what is the effect of gender on the intervention, how should the intervention be designed to deal with this effect, and what is the effect of the intervention on gender) o Does the project consider the way in which the situations/needs/challenges of men and women differ? (e.g. investigating the role of women in the environmental management practices of indigenous communities) o Does the project integrate sex and gender analysis into research? (e.g. including perception differences between men and women about ecosystem services as confounding factor in a research) o Does the project take different gender roles and divisions of labour between men and women into account? (e.g. taking into account gender differences in a research on unemployment) o Does the project focus on changing gender roles and divisions of labour between men and women? (e.g. working on awareness raising with girls for HIV/AIDS prevention) o Does the project include sex-disaggregated indicators for follow-up? **Fixing the organisation**: focuses on the institutional structure and how gender is (implicitly) understood o Does the project team include a member with gender expertise? o Does the project engage with women's groups, associations, NGOs as project counterparts and/or as gender advisors? (e.g. consulting a microfinancing institution for women on fertiliser use) o Does the project create structural and organisational changes in the integration of gender at the higher education institution (e.g. developing a strategy and action plans on gender, appointing a focal point…)
Available tools/links:	Strategic Policy Note Gender and Action plan for integrating the gender dimension (DGD) Gender mainstreaming in higher education toolkit (INASP) Gender mainstreaming the project cycle (UNIDO) Gender policy (VLIR-UOS) Implicit bias (Jonge Academie) Gendered innovations (European Union, L. Schiebinger) Integrating Gender in Research Policy (Oxfam) Gendercharter (Jonge Academie & VLIR) Genderinspiratiegids (Belgian actors of non-governmental cooperation)