

Theory of Change and methodological Guide – support document

Updated for IUC 2026 Fully Fledged proposals

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Introduction to formulation guidelines

This basic guide¹ translates the principles of the VLIRUOS Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) policy into a basic guide for the formulation of VLIRUOS supported projects. The formulation of a project is much more than writing a document. It is a participative process in which partners co-create a project based on a shared vision of change, and a shared understanding of the current situation.

This project formulation guide provides practical information on the different modules that need to be developed to arrive at a qualitative proposal. The development of these interrelated modules is explained in a stepwise process.

This document is available for all project types, but this version is specific for IUC2026 Fully Fledged proposals.

Modular approach

The guide consists of 8 Modules², following the format of the call.



The added value is that the modules are linked to each other, for example based on the context analysis in Module 1, the project strategy is formulated, alignment is sought with the generic VLIRUOS Theory of Change and the standard project domains (of intermediate change) are selected. During formulation, it is recommended to move back and forth between modules, it is not necessary to strictly follow the sequential order from 1 to 8.

How to use this guide?

The guide is intended to be used as a reference guide in which the brief summaries (dark green and yellow boxes) at the beginning of every chapter enable the reader to have a quick overview of the document (and the formulation process). At the end of every module, a set of guiding questions is provided on how to integrate the SDG principles (orange boxes).³ This information should be supportive when submitting a new project proposal.

¹ This guide mainly draws from the [European Commission's Project Cycle Management guidelines](#), [HIVOS Theory of Change handbook](#) and the [SDG Compass guide](#).

² The modules are inspired on the PRINCE2 methodology and themes for project management.

³ Adapted from the [SDG Proofing Toolkit](#) (2021) developed for Belgian Development Cooperation.

This guide contains only information about the general concepts per module, not the requirements of a particular call. For details of a particular call, the call document with additional requirements / selection criteria should be consulted when preparing the submission.

The symbols below are used to highlight references to a particular module of the guide, the SDG principles and gender.

Legend

	Refers to linkages between the modules
	Leave No One Behind principle (LNOB)
	Interconnectedness & indivisibility principle (INT)
	Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSP)
	Gender
	Specific for Institutional University Cooperation (IUC) projects

Integration of overarching principles in VLIRUOS projects

VLIRUOS projects are expected to meaningfully integrate several overarching principles, to be coherent with the SDGs, transversal and priority themes and priority themes of the Belgian foreign affairs and international cooperation. An overview is provided in table 1, with a detailed explanation in the chapters below.

Table 1: Overview of overarching principles in VLIRUOS projects

SDG principles	
Leave no one behind Interconnectedness	Coherence, Multi-institutional collaboration and Multi-stakeholder partnerships
Transversal and priority themes	
Gender	Environment
Policy priorities / priority themes of the Belgian foreign affairs and international cooperation	
Higher Education and Skills Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI)	Climate and Biodiversity Global Health Stability

SDG principles

The SDG principles serve as a compass for VLIRUOS' endeavour of sharing minds, changing lives. As visualised in the VLIRUOS Theory of Change (ToC), they are transversally integrated, using a broad interpretation of the principles, to make the activities and change processes SDG-proof. These principles underpin the United Nation's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁴

Additionally, VLIRUOS uses the SDG principles as a compass to integrate the principles of “synergy and complementarity” and the integration of transversal and priority themes of the Belgian Development Cooperation into its operations. Integration of these principles is an important element in the selection of projects.

VLIRUOS expects a meaningful integration of these principles in all VLIRUOS IUC projects. This will also be an important element for the IUC assessment commission to look into when assessing the IUC Fully Fledged proposals.

Leave no one behind



The principle of leaving no one behind (LNOB) is defined as a three-part imperative: to end absolute poverty in all its forms, to stop group-based discrimination that results in unequal outcomes for disadvantaged populations, and to take action to help the furthest behind.

VLIRUOS recognises the need for pro-active strategies to ensure that vulnerable and marginalised populations are included and benefit from higher education partnerships for sustainable development. The LNOB principle is taken into account by looking at partners with whom we work, at beneficiaries for whom we work, and what we focus on in projects. VLIRUOS encourages projects to take gender and vulnerable groups into account, by putting forward partnerships with mid-range or small-scale institutions, by awarding scholarships to a diversified group of beneficiaries, and by promoting transformative or community-based types of research. More precisely, international top higher education institutions are only considered when they participate as supporting partners in projects, scholarship attribution is not only based on academic excellence in terms of scientific output, and mainstreaming approaches are put in place to consider inclusion and (gender) equality in each project. As mentioned earlier, with regards to **gender**, VLIRUOS and its partners engage in *fixing the numbers*, *fixing the knowledge*, and *fixing the organisation* for gender equality. This is also an important dimension of the Leave No One Behind principle.

This means that VLIRUOS supported projects should aim at mainstreaming the LNOB-principle throughout the project cycle to ensure that vulnerable and marginalised populations are included in and benefit from higher education partnerships for development. It is important to acknowledge the heterogeneity in vulnerable groups. There are inequalities between groups (inter-group inequalities: differences between ethnic groups, regions, women and men) and inequalities within a group (inter-individual inequalities: within a certain region some people are more left behind than others, within a group of women some are more vulnerable than others). Being left behind is also multi-dimensional (e.g., it can happen that you are economically left behind but not politically) and context-dependent (e.g., the groups left behind in Indonesia are not necessarily the same as in Kenya).

Having a clear understanding of LNOB is an important first step. Exclusion, discrimination and inequality is a structural problem. It does not disappear spontaneously, because it is grounded in deeply rooted inequality mechanisms and unbalanced power relations.

The approach to integrate LNOB is two-fold. On the one side, there is the mainstreaming approach, where the project identifies groups left behind or at risk of being left behind, understand the drivers of exclusion (e.g. age, disability, ethnicity, sex & gender, ...) and makes a thorough examination of how an intervention affects the most excluded. On the other side, specific projects can be developed, where interventions are designed, specifically

⁴ [THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development \(un.org\)](https://un.org/sustainabledevelopment/)
[SDGs as a compass for Belgian development cooperation: Capacity building package – HIVA \(kuleuven.be\)](https://www.kuleuven.be/hiva/capacitybuilding/package/)

targeting the groups left behind on the basis of their specific needs and are taking a long-term view of the transformative change. Of course, a combination of both approaches (twin-track approach) is possible as well. Projects are encouraged and facilitated to develop an uptake strategy that takes into account the views and needs of vulnerable groups to ensure that solutions, practices and policies with high development relevance are accessible and beneficial to these groups. More details are provided in the modules with guiding questions for integrating the principle.

Interconnectedness



VLIRUOS recognises that given the complexity, scale, and interconnectedness of current societal challenges, meaningful social, economic, and ecological transformations can only be realised by approaching the SDGs from a holistic and integrated viewpoint. More precisely, VLIRUOS strives for holistic transformations by encouraging projects to reflect on their position in the interplay of global challenges and national needs, and to bring together the different types of expertise that are necessary to successfully implement the project.

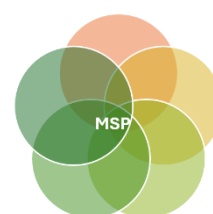
During project formulation, it is important to look at a challenge from an interconnected perspective. As an essential first step in considering the complexity of societal change, all VLIRUOS supported projects develop a holistic context analysis (Module 1) that moves beyond sectoral and disciplinary borders and should analyse the positive as well as negative interlinkages between the SDG goals. This also includes paying attention to the transversal themes [gender](#) equality and [environmental](#) sustainability.

Creating and sharing knowledge across disciplines is essential to make societal impact, inform systemic change and accelerate progress towards SDGs. Therefore, projects are encouraged to establish **inter-disciplinary, multi-institutional** partnerships (MIPs) to build connections between departments, academic disciplines, universities, regions and even non-academic stakeholders in the case of transdisciplinary research. During the partnering stage, it is useful to reflect on what different types of academic disciplines can be connected in interdisciplinary teams to tackle a problem. The stakeholder analysis should reflect on the potential interlinkages at different levels (academic and non-academic actors in civil society, public, private sectors) and inform the development of strategies for active engagement with other sectors and domains. For example, interconnectedness can be stimulated through stakeholder workshops, knowledge sharing platforms or multi-stakeholder partnerships (see below).

Coherence, Multi-institutional collaboration and Multi-stakeholder partnerships

The complexity, scale, and interconnectedness of the current societal challenges the SDG framework is seeking to address, requires a concerted effort or collaboration by a wide variety of actors. This need for concertation/collaboration is translated to 3 potential approaches. Proposals are invited to explore these.

- Coherence:** The Agenda 2030 urges actions to be **coherent** with the actions networks of other actors and/or other HES4SD initiatives. An analysis of complementary actions by academic and non-academic actors is essential for each partnership (to ensure coherence). VLIRUOS wants to facilitate coherence and connections between different actors and projects present in each country and across borders. With these objectives in mind, Country Reference Framework (CRF) documents ⁵ support teams of academics when identifying and formulating project proposals, by providing a context analysis per country, focused on Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development and the higher education sector, and by providing an overview of Belgian development actors active in the country and of their ongoing projects and partners, as a starting point for context analyses.
- Multi-institutional collaboration via a Multi-Institutional Partnership (MIP):** This concerns a structural collaboration between several higher education institutions at Flemish/Belgian (including the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM)) and/or partner level within the framework of a project, with the aim of obtaining



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⁵ Country reference frameworks were elaborated for project partner countries. (see links at the end of this document)

better results by pooling available expertise. The different institutions take up a meaningful and important role in the project. In fact, the Flemish higher education institutions have recently created a platform through their “associatieve projecten” that are dedicatedly fostering these types of cooperation. It goes without saying that an IUC project is by nature a Multi-Institutional Partnership at the Flemish level, considering that next to the Flemish coordinating university, also other Flemish HEIs are structurally involved.

VLIRUOS provides funding for each Flemish university to set-up a minimum policy framework, organisational structure and activities for academic cooperation for global sustainable development at institutional level of each university.

The Institutional Coordinators for Development Cooperation (ICOS) are the contact persons for academic cooperation for global sustainable development at the Flemish universities. The Global Engagement Officers (GEO) are the contact persons at the Flemish universities of applied sciences and arts. ICOS and GEO inform academics, staff members and students about opportunities for cooperation and funding. They help with formulating project proposals and provide support for the execution of VLIRUOS funded projects and scholarships.

Through the “associatieve projecten”, each Flemish university also offers support in the context of academic cooperation for global sustainable development to the lecturers of the universities of applied sciences and arts (UASA) that are associated with the university. This support can relate to support when submitting project proposals, checking the eligibility of promoters or partner universities, explaining the financial, scholarship or operational frameworks, looking for project partners, etc.

The “associatieve projecten” also aim at intensifying cooperation among the university and the UASA. The scope of the “associatieve projecten” is primarily focusing on the UASA of the university’s association, but should ideally go beyond and also focus on all Flemish UASA, regardless of the association they are affiliated to.

- **Multi-Stakeholder Partnership (MSP):** this concerns a structural collaboration with at least 1 non-academic actor (= multi-stakeholder; civil society, private sector, governmental actors, etc.) within the framework of a project, in which this actor plays an active role in the project implementation. The actors in the MSP work towards a common goal, with a clear division of roles and responsibilities, which are formalised, e.g. in the project agreement. VLIRUOS takes into account the MSP principle by promoting collaboration between different actors (beyond HEIs) to co-create, share, and mobilise knowledge and expertise across disciplines, sectors, interest groups, and borders. More precisely, VLIRUOS explicitly puts forward the science-society interface and knowledge uptake, and the importance of strengthening it.

The engagement of a diverse range of stakeholders in interventions is promoted, especially those at risk of being left behind (local grassroots movements, women’s associations, youth networks, trade unions, business, government, ...). The scope of involving a wide variety of stakeholders will depend on the context, resources, ambition and capabilities of the project. Crucial is that the most relevant stakeholders are consulted from the start of the project, to identify their needs and influence, until the uptake of results, to make sure the project has societal impact.



For IUC partnerships: Strong multi-stakeholder collaboration in an IUC is expected. This does not mean that the project is co-executed with other actors, but good practices exist in structural engagement of stakeholders in specific sub-project activities (e.g. local water authorities in a water management sub-project). At the IUC project level we refer to the existing practice of a stakeholder board that monitors the project progress on a regular basis, testifying not only the active role played by key stakeholders, but guaranteeing structural follow-up of the science-society interface.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships should be seen as a means to an end, not a solution in itself. It has to be functional and allow for continuous learning and flexibility to solve complex, global challenges. The potential obstacles for working with different stakeholders can be part of the risk analysis and risk responses to deal with diverging interests or powerful actors in a partnership (Module 6).

VLIRUOS considers it a minimum requirement for all projects to develop a thorough stakeholder analysis with an uptake-oriented stakeholder management strategy to maximise impact and application of new knowledge, practices or services (Module 4).

TOOLS / APPROACHES

- [Multistakeholder partnerships MSP \(Universiteit Wageningen\)](#)
- [VLIRUOS Thematic end-term evaluation of Networks \(2023\)](#)
- [The Partnership Initiative Guidebook](#)
- [Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships 2030 Platform \(GIZ\)](#)

Transversal and priority themes

Gender

With regard to **gender**, VLIRUOS and its partners engage in *fixing the numbers*, *fixing the knowledge* and *fixing the organisation* in line with the theoretical three-fixes model of Londa Schiebinger (See [VLIRUOS gender policy document](#)). Projects are expected to align with this threefold gender strategy in their proposal. Firstly, projects should **fix the numbers** and monitor gender-disaggregated data. Secondly, (long-term) projects should **fix the organisation** and ensure adequate structures, decision-making mechanisms and policies are in place to promote gender equality. Thirdly, projects should **fix the content** and improve knowledge on gender. There are two pathways of integrating gender in VLIRUOS portfolio, through **targeting** stand-alone projects with a specific focus on gender or through the **mainstreaming** of gender in all projects (e.g. all projects have an outcome / activities related to gender) or the twin-track approach.

Why gender matters?

Sustainable and inclusive development cannot be achieved if women and girls, who constitute half of the population, do not have equal rights and prospects. 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. More in general, 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.

Fixing the numbers: focuses on increasing women's (or men's) participation to have a balance

- ✓ Does the project ensure gender balanced representation in the team? (cfr. VLIRUOS policy: 40-60% representation of underrepresented group)
- ✓ Does the project ensure gender balanced participation and representativeness at project activities? (e.g., by providing day care during training)
- ✓ 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 organisation: focuses on the institutional structure and how gender is (implicitly) understood

- ✓ Does the project create structural and organisational changes in the gender balance of the higher education institution (e.g., developing a strategy and action plans on gender, appointing a gender focal point committee / work group / task force)?
- ✓ Does the institution have a gender policy (incl. a transparent policy for scholarship selection) and action plan?

- ✓ Does the project include a member with gender expertise? Does the project incorporate mechanisms to ensure gender balanced participation in decision-making processes?
- ✓ Does the institution have a directorate for gender or a local committee / work group / task force functioning as “gender focal point” for monitoring and planning gender-related actions within the (IUC) project, in line with the institution’s priorities and needs? What is their (potential) role? It is important that the duties of a “gender focal point” are not assigned to one person, but a shared responsibility of a committee or work group within the partner institution to ensure that there is sufficient support for mainstreaming gender in an adequate manner – not just ticking the boxes or fixing the numbers.
- ✓ 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)

Fixing the content: focuses on integrating gender analysis (what is the effect of gender on the project, how should the project be designed to deal with this effect, and what is the effect of the project on gender)

- ✓ Does the project consider the way in which the situations/needs/challenges of men and women differ? (= gender analysis) (e.g., investigating the role of women in the environmental management practices of indigenous communities)
- ✓ Does the project take different gender roles and divisions of labour between men and women into account? (= gender sensitivity) (e.g., considering gender differences in research on unemployment)
- ✓ Does the project focus on changing gender roles and divisions of labour between men and women? (= gender transformative approach) (e.g., working on awareness raising with girls for HIV/AIDS prevention)
- ✓ 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). Are the team members trained or will they receive training on gender and diversity?
- ✓ Does the project develop an uptake strategy that considers the views and needs of disadvantaged groups to ensure that solutions, practices, and policies with high development relevance are accessible and taken up by disadvantaged groups?

TOOLS / APPROACHES

- [VLIRUOS gender policy](#)
- [EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 Gender mainstreaming in higher education toolkit](#) (INASP)
- [Gender mainstreaming the project cycle](#) (UNIDO)
- Selection commission members are made aware of unconscious/implicit biases in evaluating project/scholarship applications, for example through this [video](#) (source: The Royal Society).
- A website providing recommendations, examples, case studies and tools for sex and gender analysis in projects: [Gendered Innovations](#)
- This toolkit clearly explains and provides guidance on how to integrate gender in research. A useful [checklist](#) is given [Toolkit – Gender in EU-funded research](#)
- Understanding gender dimension for projects by the European Commission: [Video](#)
- The EU-funded EUGENMED project developed a [Roadmap for a gender-sensitive approach to health care research and practice in Europe](#).
- [Toolkit for Integrating Gender-Sensitive Approach into Research and Teaching](#)
- [Manuals with guidelines on the integration of sex and gender analysis into research contents, recommendations for curricula development and indicators](#)

- [Gender-Sensitive Teaching: An introduction for teaching staff in STEM](#)

Environment

VLIRUOS strives to ensure the protection of planetary boundaries, highly valuing **environmental sustainability**⁶. VLIRUOS therefore urges projects to integrate the transversal theme of environment throughout all phases of project cycle management, starting with the project proposal. Environment can be integrated on two levels: within the **project management** (e.g., CO₂ compensation, waste reduction, sustainable food consumption at events, ...) and in the **project content** (as an objective or intermediary result or as environmental sensitiveness). We take into account a **reciprocal relationship** between projects and the environment, paying attention to the (negative/positive) effects of the project on the environment as well as the (negative/positive) effects of the environment on the project. VLIRUOS projects are asked to analyse these mutual effects and to propose measures/actions which strengthen positive effects and/or mitigate negative effects. Throughout this process, projects should be guided by the **‘do no harm’ principle** as a bare minimum to prevent, reduce and control the risk of environmental harm. Following the principle of **interconnectedness**, interlinkages between environmental and socio-economic factors should be taken into account and attention should be paid to potential trade-offs.

VLIRUOS projects are invited to use the **guiding questions** underneath.

General	
✓	What is the environmental context of the project? What are the main environmental issues? What is the relationship between the environmental and socio-economic context? (Module 1)
✓	Is the project’s main objective in line with the ‘do no harm’ principle, striving to prevent the risk of environmental harm and contributing to conservation and protection of the environment?
Effects of the project on the environment	
✓	What are the possible (negative/positive) effects of the project on the environment? (Module 2) These possible (negative/positive) effects could be related to the project management (e.g., CO ₂ emissions due to international travel) as well as at to the project content (e.g., increase in chemical waste due to the installation of a new laboratory).
✓	How do you estimate the degree of impact (low/average, high, positive/negative) of the project on these environmental factors?
✓	What actions/measures will you undertake to strengthen positive effects and/or mitigate negative effects of the project on these environmental factors?
Effects of the environment on the project	
✓	What are the possible (negative/positive) effects of the environment on the project? Which risks related to environmental factors might have an effect on the realisation of the project? (Module 6) These possible (negative/positive) effects could be related to the project management (e.g., deregulated seasonal rains have an impact on the project planning) as well as at to the project content (e.g., erosion decreases soil fertility). These could be effects on e.g., the implementation schedule, sustainability of the project, quality of the project, results of the project, etc.

⁶ **Environmental sustainability** refers to the capacity of the environment to maintain its key functions and processes on the long run. It means not taking from the Earth more than what it’s giving. Source: [the Environmental Integration Tool \(EIT\) by Louvain Coopération](#)

✓

What actions/measures will you undertake to strengthen positive effects and/or mitigate negative effects of environmental factors on the project?

These actions/measures can be related to the project management as well as the project content.

The mutual relationship and potential trade-offs between environmental factors and socio-economic characteristics should be taken into account.

TOOLS / APPROACHES

- [KLIMOS Environmental Sustainability Toolkit](#)
- [KLIMOS Environmental Sustainability toolkit database](#)
- [Environmental integration tool](#)
- [The Educaid.be methodological sheet](#)

Policy priorities / priority themes of the Belgian foreign affairs and international cooperation: shifting focus

Shifting Focus: The Post-2030 Horizon: The Joint Strategic Framework (JSF) actors remain firmly committed to the 2030 Agenda. However, as the 2030 deadline approaches, attention is shifting to the next global development phase. While an official "SDG 2.0" is not yet finalized, the process of building a successor is underway alongside several other international frameworks. A pivotal document is the UN's "Pact for the Future" (Adopted September 2024). Its primary role is not to replace the current SDGs, but to ensure their completion and lay the foundation for the Post-2030 global agenda. The Pact sees Higher Education and Science as being central to this.

Element	The Pact's Role in the Post-2030 Context
Higher Education and Skills	It demands investments in future-oriented skills and lifelong learning opportunities. HEIs are therefore the critical hubs for developing the human capital—the critical thinkers, researchers, and innovators—needed to deliver on scientifically ambitious global goals.
Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI)	The Pact explicitly establishes STI and Digital Cooperation as a central pillar, committing to bridging the "STI Divide." This institutionalizes the role of science as an engine of equity and mandates better governance of emerging technologies (e.g., AI), signaling that the next agenda will be highly dependent on scientific capacity.

Beyond the Pact, important regional agendas are also emerging, including Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, the EU's Global Gateway, etc. which are all confirming the important role of Higher Education and Science. For instance, the EU's Global Gateway focuses on sustainable infrastructure and strategic investments, guided by themes like digitalization, climate/energy, transport, health, and education/research. It is a 'values-driven' and security-focused framework that promotes democratic values, good governance, and respect for human rights. Crucially, the Global Gateway emphasizes a "Team Europe" approach to cooperation among EU actors and partner countries, with mutual benefit at its core.

At the Belgian level, the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs, European Affairs and Development Cooperation, Maxime Prévot, refers in his [Policy note Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation](#) of 10 March 2025 (p 12.) to the Belgium’s support to international higher education and research cooperation to contribute to international development and to strengthen Belgium’s position in the world. More than ever before, Belgian diplomacy will need to be deployed to seek partners who, from a well-understood shared interest, can help us safeguard the security and prosperity of our citizens, our businesses, and our institutions in this new context. Our international cooperation focuses on mutually beneficial, sustainable, and consistent partnerships, which are also levers in the broader Belgian and EU policies aimed at peace, stability, and development.

A number of policy themes linked to global challenges have been put forward as part of the policy note (p.32 and following), with an emphasis to ensure policy coherence within a 3D global approach (diplomacy, defence, development), which other public and private entities can join, and which highlights Belgium's comparative added value and expertise. These global public goods (GPG), including stability (including good governance, the rule of law, migration, socio-economic development), climate and biodiversity (including sustainable food systems) and global health (including strong health systems) – require cooperation at international, European and bilateral level between governments, civil society, the private sector and multilateral partners, stimulated by an inclusive and multi-actor approach.

More specifically, the new Belgian policy priorities for international cooperation are built on a 3 x 3 matrix, comprising of:

- 3 key themes: climate and biodiversity, global health, stability.
- 3 Accelerators: women and youth, innovation and skills;
- 3D approach: defence, development and diplomacy



For IUC partnerships: In particular linking up with the 3 Global Public Goods: climate and biodiversity, global health, and stability is deemed essential in the further development of the narrative supporting the IUC fully fledged development. Here below in the table we tried to explain these themes a bit further, including some arguments related to the importance Higher Education and Science institutes can play in addressing related challenges.

Name	Short description
Climate and Biodiversity	The fight against climate change and the protection of the environment is a priority Global Public Good and a cross-cutting theme in Belgian international cooperation. The focus is on encouraging interventions that have a distinctly positive impact on climate and the environment, with particular attention to: • Climate adaptation and resilience: Supporting resilience against the effects of climate change. • Biodiversity and ecosystem protection: Preserving nature and ecosystems. • Sustainable food systems: Supporting resilient food systems in the Global South (and global citizenship education in Belgium). • Innovation and knowledge sharing: Focusing on innovative approaches and combining local expertise with international knowledge sharing. • Special attention to the link between climate, global health, and stability. HE&SIs are essential actors to help societies cope with the climate and biodiversity crisis. HE&SIs provides interdisciplinary knowledge and skills that will allow new generations to tackle the complex effects of economies and societies on climate change, biodiversity and environmental degradation and the ripple effects on public health, political stability and food security. Moreover, HE&SIs are key in building climate change mitigation and adaptation capacity and in fostering innovation within societies through capacity development, knowledge sharing and research stimulation.
Global Health	• Global Health is a priority global public good, based on universal and equitable access to quality health services and products. The focus is on: • Strengthening health systems: Making health systems structurally robust, efficient, and resilient.

	• Access and production: Improving access to affordable, high-quality medicines and products, including through the promotion of local and regional production and regulatory capacities (health sovereignty). • Preparedness and information: Collective preparedness for and responsiveness to health threats, supported by access to health data, sanitary standards, and independent scientific information. • Integration: Promoting sexual and reproductive rights and health (SRHR), gender equality, and youth inclusion within the health approach. • Alignment with national health priorities: Strengthening local and regional production and regulatory capacities. • Special attention to the link between climate, global health, and stability. Higher education and research are essential for advancing concepts of global health / health for all by educating healthcare professionals, generating knowledge, and developing innovative solutions. Academic institutions conduct research that informs new diagnostics, treatments, and preventive strategies, while also guiding evidence-based health policies that strengthen health systems. They equip future change agents (students or mid-career professionals that are re-engaging with research) with the skills needed to tackle current and emerging global health challenges. The experts also often serve their communities by providing health services, education, and public health information. Through partnerships with local organizations, these institutions help address health disparities and promote equity, improving the well-being of individuals and communities.
Stability	Stability, as a global public good, is based on inclusive and accountable governance (“responsible governance”) and a social contract (between citizens and the state) that respects human rights. Stability requires economic, social, and institutional resilience to withstand shocks, as well as resilience at the level of individuals, communities, and institutions, and is reinforced by conflict prevention and addressing the deeper causes of fragility (such as inequality, justice, governance, etc.). Given the pressure on human rights, equality and diversity, the impact of the causes of fragility, demographic developments, social and economic opportunities, individualization, and increased mobility options on stability worldwide, the promotion of Stability requires a focus on three sub-themes: • Inclusive governance and the rule of law: Strengthening the social contract. • Human mobility: Harnessing migration dynamics as a potential driver of sustainable development, within a controlled, balanced, and human-rights-respecting policy framework. • Local economic development: Promoting the local private sector and sustainable economic opportunities, with emphasis on strengthening human capital (skills, women and girls) and the local economic fabric. • Special attention to the link between climate, global health, and stability. • HE&SIs place stability, social justice and the right to a worthy life for all at the centre. In addition to direct research work on conflicts and conflict resolution at all levels, cooperation activities in themselves contribute to societies’ conflict management capacities.

Module 1: Context/ Problem analysis

ESSENCE

The objective is to develop a broad – and shared – understanding of the system in which the desired change is needed. This aspect describes the context and justifies the **importance / relevance** of the project, delimits the **scope** and contextualizes the **reasons** why the project is needed (i.e. interconnected **challenges** being faced).

KEY QUESTIONS

Sustainable development context:

- Scope & identification: Why is the project needed? What are key societal/developmental challenges in the region? Who is being left behind, from what and to what degree?
- Causes: What are the underlying causes / factors and actors shaping the problem?
- Interlinkages: How are sustainable development issues / problems linked to each other?

Partner institutional context:

- Elaborate on the **profile** of the partner university and its position in the national higher education landscape
- Highlight the **strengths and capacity constraints / needs** of the partner university in the domains relevant for the project, and in particular of the involved departments/units.
- What would be the added value of the project for the local institution/local team? Any previous experience between the project partners?
- Specific for IUC: Highlight the partner university's institutional strategy and its vision on its role as university and as a driver of change in society.

TOOLS / APPROACHES

- [SWOT analysis](#)
- [5C-model](#)
- [Rich Picture](#)
- [5 Why's?](#)
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Every project takes place in a context that determines the conditions and the opportunities for a successful project. That is why every project needs to have a good understanding of the context in order to make informed strategic choices when formulating the project, increasing the chances of success. This context analysis includes a thorough analysis of the sustainable development problem(s) the project wants to tackle and the added value for the local partner institution.

Sustainable development context

A context analysis identifies the challenges of an existing situation and analyses the 'cause and effect' relationships between the identified challenges. These 'challenges' occur in a context which is shaped by various **actors** and **factors** (e.g., historical, social, political, economic, cultural, ecological, geographical factors).

The context analysis involves three main steps:

- (i) **Scope and identification of challenges:** Define the scope and subject of the analysis. What are the main challenges faced by the target groups and beneficiaries in the context where the project will operate? Who is affected, by what, and where?

- (ii) **Analysis of causes:** Analyse the underlying causes and actors of the identified challenges. Why does the challenges exist? Are there structural, institutional, socio-economic, cultural, or environmental factors that contribute to or sustain the situation?
- (iii) **Interlinkages and broader context:** Examine how the identified challenges and their causes are interconnected and how they relate to the wider context. Do the challenges also effect other sectors or groups? What is the influence of e.g. relevant actors, power relations, vulnerabilities, and external factors such as governance, geography, discrimination, or exposure to shocks?

During project formulation, it is important to reflect on who is at risk, from what, why and by whom in the context you want to work. The context analysis should delve deeper into the factors and actors that make certain people vulnerable. These factors can include discrimination, geography, vulnerability to shocks, governance, socio-economic status.

The identified challenges also need to be framed within United Nation's Agenda 2030 and the [17 Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs). During the context analysis, it is desirable to start reflecting on how the challenges are interconnected, taking a holistic approach and acknowledging the complexity and global nature of the challenges under consideration.

Institutional context of the partner university

The institutional context analysis describes the key areas within the partner institution needing further development. In order to motivate the choice of the partner institution(s), the added value of the project for the local institution to become a driver of change for sustainable development in the region should be highlighted. Moreover, it should demonstrate local ownership of the project and be aligned with the local partner's priorities and long-term institutional strategy of the partner university or development plan of the department / research unit.



For IUC partnerships: Projects are required to use the available **institutional assessments** as the primary reference for this analysis, ensuring that the analysis of strengths and weaknesses of the partner university or department / research unit is firmly grounded in an evidence-based understanding of the institutional context. Projects should explicitly draw on the findings of the institutional assessments, that made use of the [5C-model](#), to assess the institutional capacity and maturity levels in five "capability" domains through a self-assessment questionnaire:

1. Capability to achieve coherence
2. Capability to deliver on development relevant objectives & commitments
3. Capability to relate to external stakeholders
4. Capability to act and commit
5. Capability to adapt and self-renew

Furthermore, a basic [SWOT analysis](#) can help to focus on the internal institutional capacity limitations that can be addressed through the project and collaboration with Flemish partners (Strengths & Weaknesses).

Checklist to integrate the SDG principles in Module 1

Leaving No One Behind 	✓ Have you identified which groups are (at risk of being) left behind within the intervention area (country, region) and from what they are excluded? ✓ Have you analysed why they are left behind (considering intersecting factors / underlying causes)?
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	✓ Have you formulated clear definitions or criteria for poverty, marginalization, exclusion, ...? ✓ Have you conducted a gender analysis which examines the differences in women's and men's needs, roles and responsibilities, daily routines and activities, and access to and control over resources, services and decision-making, including those that lead to social and economic inequalities? ♀♂
Interconnectedness & indivisibility 	✓ Have you gained a solid understanding of the important interlinkages in the system in which you are working? ✓ How are these issues linked? What are important co-benefits and trade-offs (e.g., what is the relationship between the main environmental and the main social, economic and institutional issues of the place of the intervention? How do the main environmental factors influence the socio-economic situation of the intervention area, and how does the socio-economic situation impact the environment?)
Multi- institutional (MIPs) and Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) 	✓ Do you have a solid understanding of the relevant actors and their relationships in the system in which you are working? ✓ Is the context-analysis co-created by the relevant (local) actors and does it include their perspectives?

Module 2: Project strategy (Impact statement and Theory of Change)

ESSENCE

Envision the desired long-term change (**dream**) to which the project wants to contribute, justifying **why the project is needed**.

Describe **change pathways** to develop an impact-oriented **strategy** for the partner university to drive change by identifying sub-themes in which concrete changes/results can be reached. Be clear on how these sub-themes, translated into sub-projects, connect with the overall ambitions in terms of strengthening the driver of change role of the partner university (=what at project level).

What do you want to achieve within these sub-projects, and **How** will change be realized?

KEY QUESTIONS

Describe your project strategy (Theory of Change) in 3 key questions. While these questions echo the key questions in Theory of Change (ToC) thinking process, a fully-fledged ToC is not requested. This ToC should reflect the alignment of your project with the general **VLIRUOS ToC**, and the **3 SDG principles**. Explain your project following the key questions below.

1. Envision the dream (Why?):

What is the long-term desired change / dream to which the project wishes to contribute and for whom? (= **impact in line with Agenda 2030**). Elaborate in a narrative text but start from a simple impact statement.

2. What do you want to achieve with your project? (What?):

- What are the key areas where change is needed to contribute to the desired change / dream? (review the standard VLIRUOS outcomes and align the project with those it can realistically influence)
- Convincingly explain how the envisaged changes align with the VLIRUOS outcomes.



For IUC partnerships (project-level): What is the central theme and identified subthemes (chosen domains where change can be driven, and that can be addressed via an IUC sub-project)

3. How do you want to do it? (How?):

Analyse the areas of change and reflect on the different underlying intermediate changes that need to occur and will be worked on through the overall project strategy by looking backwards from the long-term desired change (impact level) & prioritised change areas (outcome level): How can the project influence these envisaged change processes?



For IUC partnerships (sub-project-level): How will the sub-themes generate transformative change, what do you want to achieve within these themes (sub-projects)



Mostly the “how” is to be addressed at the sub-project level since it connects with specific sub-project approaches and methodologies, core activities, etc.

However, at project level a number of central questions were retained. Explain how you will go about the following issues:

- Describe your **operational and methodological approaches** (project level, to be complemented at sub-project level)
- How will the project realise **organizational and institutional change?** (project level)

- Describe how you will develop your **uptake strategy** (project level)
- Explain the priorities in terms of integration of **gender** in the project strategy by reflecting on the actual gender situation and the potential impact of the project strategy.
How can the project integrate **environment**? Explain the potential influence of the project on the environment and explain how the project will integrate environmental priorities in its strategy.
- The **sustainability** strategy (project level)

At sub-project level, further elaborate on “What do you want to achieve in the sub-project?” and “how will you realise this change?”. The sub-project level will also go further in identifying key deliverables and activities (in line with the project’s operational plan). In the operational plan, activities are to be organized according to the six standard VLIRUOS project domains, giving particular attention to the standard domain dissemination/uptake strategy.

TOOLS / APPROACHES

- [Force field analysis](#)
- [Three spheres model](#) (p. 106)
- [Theory of Change – Development Impact and You \(diytoolkit.org\)](#)
- [Outputs, outcomes and impact](#)

Envision the dream. Why?

Key question 1 - Identify areas of change to realise the dream (Why?)

VLIRUOS projects are expected to contribute to sustainable and equitable development in society. The first step is to concretise how your project will contribute to sustainable and equitable development, i.e. the change/ desired dream your project wants to contribute to. After having analysed the actors and factors in a particular context (Module 1), the stakeholders can start to reflect on the dream and identify the areas where important changes need to be made in order to realise the dream.

This fits under the impact statement to be developed as part of the proposal. The impact statement should briefly describe the **long-term change (=impact)** to which the project wishes to contribute (Figure 1).

What is impact?

***Impact** is the positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended (OECD-DAC).*



For IUC partnerships: What is the long-term change to which the IUC wants to contribute
Elaborate on the impact envisaged, why is it important and for whom?

Please take into account:

- the development and partner university’s institutional context,
- how the project aligns with the overall IUC concept/ VLIRUOS IUC programme Theory of Change
- and how the proposed change aligns with Agenda 2030 and the SDG’s, and for who it is crucial.

What are the ambition(s)/dream(s) of the proposed IUC partnership? Why is it important and for whom

The impact statement should refer to the envisioned (1) **developmental change in society** and (2) **institutional change within the partner institution** (for IUC partnerships). This cannot be modified once the project has started.

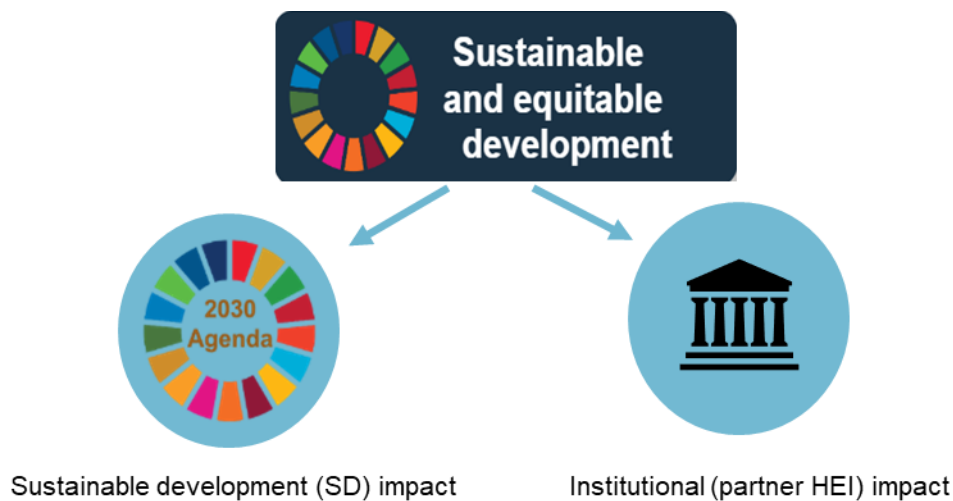


Figure 1: Impact statement visualisation

This first step builds further or runs in parallel with the context analysis and allows to brainstorm and envision what the dream of the proposed project is, in line with local priorities. The desired long-term change should be challenging and ambitious, but not impossible to achieve (reachable in 15 years' time; the project only *contributes* to this change). Identify if and how you can ensure synergy and complementarity with other (Belgian) actors as much as possible.

Visualise the ultimate desired change or '**dream**' in a time perspective of 10-15 years and make sure that the desired change is as concretely as possible:

- **Who** should benefit from the desired change / dream? Will the dream have different impacts on different groups (gender, age, ethnicity, etc.)?
- **What** will have changed?
- **Where** will the change happen?
- **How** this change can be realised forms part of the different pathways "theorizing" the change. Such a theory of change will be further developed throughout this module and translated into a project strategy with concrete deliverables / activities.



For IUC partnerships: In 10-20 years: what would we dream of? How would our university look like? What will have changed in the local sustainable development context and in the partner institution context? *This question is about your ultimate ambition, the "dream" behind the IUC partnership that will enable the university to act as a driver of change in local society and contribute to local, global challenges. It is not what you can achieve alone, as a project, but the transformation you want to contribute to.*

Summarise this in a short impact statement clarifying the long-term change to which the project wishes to make a meaningful contribution. An impact statement specifically for an IUC partnership describes both:

- (1) the institutional change, where the partner university itself wishes to transform (e.g., stronger research capacity, better governance, improved community engagement); and
- (2) the driver-of-change capacity, where the strengthened institution will enable broader long-term societal change beyond the university (e.g. through research, graduates, outreach, collaboration).

Example of an IUC impact statement:

“Establish university X as a higher education institution of postgraduate research excellence that influences policy implementation and service delivery aiming at building an equitable and dynamic society in country Y.” (Hypothetical IUC partnership)

Developing a project strategy (Theory of Change)

What is a Theory of Change?

A **Theory of Change** serves as a compass for the project strategy and invites to critically reflect upon the most appropriate interventions and their interaction with processes of change. It visually and narratively describes the envisaged change process: how pathways of change can lead to the realisation of the dream, which actors play a role in the change process and how they interact, with assumptions are assumed to go from one change to the other.

The importance of visualisation

A theory of change for a project should not be formulated from behind a desk. A good formulation process is participative and foresees space for collective reflection, discussion, etc. Various steps in the formulation process are specifically designed to be done in a participative way. When a ToC is formulated in a participative way, visualisation is often considered as meaningful. Working with visualisation tools for a ToC and project design (e.g. using cards on a flipchart, drawing a rich picture, force field analysis with restraining and helping factors for change) stimulates critical thinking, complements dialogue and helps in getting all participants on the same page. Discussing while drawing (or working with cards) engages stakeholders in the conversation, and provides the opportunity to actively share perspectives and question each other. Visualisation assists projects in developing causal pathways of change, prioritising, and identifying risks and assumptions.

Key question 2 - Prioritise the key areas of change which the project can realistically influence in order to contribute towards the ‘dream’ (What?)

The **second step** is to decide on the **strategic priorities (what area(s) will the project work on)** without forgetting the complexity of the process towards the long-term desired change.

What do you want to achieve with your project by the end of the project? This needs to refer to the changes you want to achieve/observe by the end of the project. Convincingly explain how these align with the VLIRUOS outcomes (cf. call document).



For IUC partnerships: What do you want to achieve by the end of the IUC project? And linked to this, what is the central theme of the IUC project?

- Describe **change pathways** to develop an impact-oriented **strategy** for the partner university to drive change by identifying areas of change or sub-themes in which concrete changes/results can be obtained.
 - *What are the key areas (=sub-themes) where change is needed to realise the desired change / dream?*
 - *What key areas will the IUC prioritise?* These prioritised area(s) of change should eventually be used to formulate a specific change pathway, under the form of a sub-project.
 - *Clarify how the different sub-projects will contribute to the broader change pathway for the IUC, and elaborate on the change pathway of each sub-project.*

- This section should also demonstrate the coherence of the project and its sub-projects, and how project and sub-project align with the VLIRUOS Theory of Change at impact and outcome level.

What is a *pathway of change*?

A **pathway of change** is mapped backwards from the long-term desired change and prioritised change area(s) (or sub-themes), questioning further what needs to change for the next change to occur. The pathways of change are projections of the envisaged change process identifying necessary intermediate changes, based on our ideas and theories about how we think change will happen and the causal relations between intermediate steps. Mapping out these pathways of change is central in developing your project strategy. The general recommendation is to look back, review and finetune after each step.

This reflection is crucial and acknowledges that, although the project cannot work on everything (and choices have to be made), it is still part of a bigger reality. It will further in the formulation process determine the project strategy. It should be realistic and feasible to contribute to the desired change by working on the prioritised area(s) for change. A project cannot work on all challenges. Therefore, it is recommended to limit the number of area(s) of change based on the available resources, capabilities, ambitions of the project. Moreover, as VLIRUOS supports partnerships between universities and universities of applied sciences and arts in Flanders and partner countries, a number of areas of change will automatically be excluded (*For example: a VLIRUOS project will never finance road construction*). The different possible strategies and areas of change should be examined and the most appropriate areas of change for the project are to be selected based on criteria such as:

- Available know-how, capacities and interest of the stakeholders
- Complementarity with other actions
- Priority
- Expected value for money
- Expected effect and expected leverage in terms of (gender) equity (Does the strategy respect the principles of inclusive development?)
- Environmental relevance (Does the strategy respect the principles of sustainable development?)



For IUC partnerships: What areas of change can a VLIRUOS-supported project realistically influence?

Is it realistic and feasible to contribute to the dream by working on these areas of change via sub-projects? (for IUC Phase 1, this was already elaborated in the IUC concept note and can be updated; in the case of IUC Phase 2, this builds on Phase 1 priority change areas (=subprojects) and lessons learned (LL) from the midterm-evaluation)

Attention points for identifying the sub-themes:

- The sub-themes to be identified along key challenges are not limited to sustainable development themes (translated into academic sub-projects).
- Linked to the institutional challenges, an IUC proposal needs (mandatory) to include one or more transversal institutional strengthening sub-projects.
 - Inspired by the institutional strategy and recommendations of the Institutional Assessment, this transversal project can focus on a variety of topics, such as institutional policy development (research, education, ...), university management, internal service delivery, uptake strategies, priority themes (gender & diversity, environmental sustainability, integrity).

- Typically IUC sub-projects deliver results along the VLIRUOS standard outcomes (This can be elaborated on in the sub-project section).
- When addressing the what question, please elaborate on how the project proposes to address the key challenges and needs, highlighted in the context analysis and strategy of the IUC partner university.
- *Make sure to highlight the project priorities in terms of the 3 SDG principles as presented by VLIRUOS⁷:*
 - *Interconnectedness with due attention for the integration of gender and environment*
 - *Coherence, multi-institutional partnerships and multi-stakeholder partnerships*
 - *Leave No One Behind (LNOB; with due attention for the integration of gender equality)*

Reflect on the challenges for the sustainability of the project results after VLIRUOS funding. Some examples are: capacity retention, continuation of improved research activities, maintenance of equipment, post-training activities, alumni-network, ...

Key question 3 - Operational and methodological approaches (How?)

The **third step** elaborates the operational and methodological approaches: How do you want to do it?



For IUC partnerships: How will the sub-themes generate transformative change, what do you want to achieve within these themes (sub-projects). Mostly the “how” is to be addressed in the sub-project level since it connects with specific sub-project approaches and methodologies, core activities, etc.

Project level

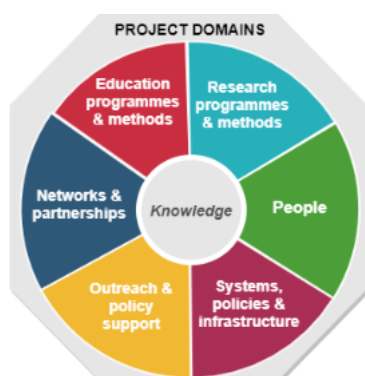
However, at project level a number of central questions are to be addressed. Explain how you will go about the following issues:

- Describe your **operational and methodological approaches** (project level, to be complemented at sub-project level)
- How will the project realise **organizational and institutional change**? (project level)
- Describe how you will develop your **uptake strategy** (project level)
- Explain the priorities in terms of integration of **gender** in the project strategy by reflecting on the actual gender situation and the potential impact of the project strategy.
How can the project integrate **environment**? Explain the potential influence of the project on the environment and explain how the project will integrate environmental priorities in its strategy.
- The **sustainability** strategy (project level)

Sub-project level

At sub-project level, further elaborate on “What do you want to achieve in the sub-project?” and “how will you realise this change?”. The sub-project level will go further in identifying key deliverables and activities (in line with the project’s operational plan). In the operational plan, activities are to be organized according to the six standard VLIRUOS project domains giving particular attention for the standard domain dissemination/uptake strategy. It is **not obligatory** to realize change in **all six domains**. The sub-project can choose the domains it wants to address and corresponding deliverables of your project need to be selected.

⁷ Fit with selection criterion 2 on the Quality of the design of the proposal (descriptor 2.1.)



Capacities of interdisciplinary research group have been strengthened through short-term trainings + the training of Msc and PhD students
Potential uses and benefits of invasive species x have been quantified by researchers
Invasive species x containment strategies have been developed by researchers
In the areas selected by the project, containment strategies have been tested in practice and infestation has been reduced
Research results have been extended in a suitable way to NGO's, local government and farmers

Figure 2: Example of fitting the intermediate changes into the VLIRUOS prescribed domains using colours

Table 2: General description of change in each domain

Domain	General description (VLIRUOS ToC)
Research programmes and methods	Improved (interdisciplinary) methodologies and strengthened quality and relevance of research to allow for better knowledge management and high-quality research results serving societal needs
Education programmes and methods	Improved, innovative and inclusive teaching methods, didactics, and digital approaches. Improved curriculum content to support knowledge co-creation and equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge ensuring their employability after graduation and ability to tackle global challenges from a holistic, interdisciplinary perspective
Outreach and policy support	Enhanced interaction with relevant public, private and academic stakeholders to share knowledge, create the conditions for uptake and provide policy advice/support
Systems, policies, and infrastructure	Better management, information systems, educational and research policies to improve functioning of HE&SIs, including policies on gender and diversity, research integrity and uptake. Improved equipment, laboratories and offices for education and research
People	Students, alumni, staff, researchers are trained/sensitised in a supportive learning environment to strengthen their knowledge, skills & attitudes in diverse domains (e.g., leadership, global citizenship).
Networks and partnerships	Strengthened interactions within reciprocal partnerships and engagements at local, regional and global levels between HE&SIs, researchers, staff, students and other stakeholders in society (public actors, private actors, other civil society organisations (CSOs), communities, etc.) for sustainable development

Step 4: A final check

Go through your project strategy/ Theory of Change again and ask yourself if the flow of subsequent steps is logical. Are there any steps missing? Is the overall strategy coherent? What else might each step lead to? Will the different changes be sufficient? Did we sufficiently take into account stakeholders' attitudes and interests? Do we have a sufficient understanding of the end users of the project results? What contextual factors are important?

- ✚ The final step is the identification of **risks and assumptions**, which can be touched upon within the project strategy. **For the IUC Fully Fledged proposal, this is to be further developed in Module 6: Risk management.**

Managing the change – special attention for uptake

A clear vision needs to exist about how the 'change' of a project will be managed. This is important to think about during the development of the Theory of Change, as it is often assumed that activities, simple deliverables or 'training' personnel and/or stakeholders is sufficient to create genuine change, while this is rarely the case.

What is uptake?

We define uptake as 'the use of research and education results of higher education institutions by non-academic actors (or society at large: policymakers, NGOs, private sector, farmers)' and creating the conditions for uptake as 'all activities that facilitate and contribute to the use of research evidence or other results emanating from the work of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) by policymakers, practitioners and other development actors'. (See Uptake Brochure [here](#)). In the context of IUC, and thinking about institutional change processes, this also includes the uptake of project results within the partner institution (e.g. changes in policy and practice)

What rarely leads to successful uptake?

- Assuming new knowledge will result in uptake by publishing in journals or by organising a one-off dissemination activity at the end of a project or programme.
- Assuming training a number of persons in a particular field (e.g., lab techniques, e-learning, etc.) will be sufficient to lead to an effective use of this new knowledge/skills in university's operations.
- Assuming writing a university policy on e-learning will as such lead to any structural changes

The projects also aim to have an **impact outside the academic context** (cf. the VLIRUOS motto "Sharing Minds, Changing Lives"), not only after the project but also during the project via **stakeholder involvement** and **by creating the conditions for uptake from the start**. Societal impact requires uptake of new knowledge created by projects, applications, products, services, etc. This 'uptake' does not happen automatically. It is important that projects develop the capacities and strategies to create the conditions for this uptake. Developing an **uptake strategy**, allows projects to make explicit how one thinks a project can go from **producing** knowledge, applications or services, to making an **actual societal impact**.

- ✚ In Module 4, Stakeholder management refers to the general management of the interactions with the most important stakeholders of a project (external to the project team), playing an important role for creating the conditions for uptake.

Checklist to integrate the SDG principles in Module 2

Leaving No One Behind 	Targeting approach: ✓ Does your theory of change clearly outline how your intervention expects to contribute to (sustained) positive change for the target groups? ✓ Have you reflected on whether design and implementation reinforce existing exclusion mechanisms, or disadvantages vulnerable groups within and/or beyond your target groups? Mainstreaming approach: ✓ Does your theory of change outline how your intervention expects to indirectly benefit (important) left behind groups? ✓ Have you adapted strategies or identified remedial action (by yourself, by partners, or by others) to address/mitigate any exclusion effects? ✓ Does the project create structural and organisational changes in the gender balance of the higher education institution (e.g., strategy and action plans on gender, appointing a focal point...)? 
Interconnectedness & indivisibility 	✓ Have you identified important positive and negative links between your intervention area and other SDGs (or targets)? ✓ Have you taken important (positive and negative) links into account in the design and implementation of your theory of change (e.g., in objectives, strategies)? ✓ What environmental elements need to be taken into account to achieve change (e.g., climate change affecting harvesting seasons)? ✓ Will the change process have a positive or negative impact on the environment (e.g., the introduction of soil conservation practices)? This can be on a direct (e.g., the introduction of exotic species) or indirect level (e.g., access to resource-efficient technologies).
Multi-institutional partnerships (MIPs) and Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) 	✓ Potential to establish a MIP or a MSP or not? Does a MIP or MSP offer opportunities to better (e.g., more systemically or sustainably) address the (complex) challenge(s) that your programme focuses on? ✓ Have you identified valuable partners and forms of collaboration? ✓ Have you identified an added value of your participation in the MSP?

Module 3: Project organisation

ESSENCE

Describe who is (internally) involved in the implementation of the project – and how.
Clarify the structure of the organisation and assigned roles and responsibilities of individuals working on the project.

KEY QUESTIONS

- Who is internally involved in the execution of the project?
- What are the assigned roles and responsibilities of individuals working on the project?
- How is the project structured / organised?
- Describe the Management quality / capacity and commitment of the local partner university and Flemish coordinating university
- Clarify how you the IUC Team Composition considered the internal procedures (local team) and VLIRUOS expectations in terms of minimal criteria as referred to in the Call documents

CORRESPONDING ANNEXES

- Annex 1: Team members
- Annex 3: Management Manual
- Annex 4: Letter of institutional commitment partner university with the IUC Fully Fledged proposal

TOOLS/APPROACHES

- [Project organogram / project organisation chart](#)
- [Five types of organizational structures](#)
- [IUC Management Structure and Team Composition document](#)

The implementation of a project depends on several people to make decisions, to provide information, to carry out activities and to monitor and report throughout the project. It is important to clarify and agree upon the structure of the project organisation and task division before the start of the project.

Who is involved?

Individuals who are involved in the execution of the project include: the partner institution / Flemish promoter, local / Flemish team members, other persons / staff involved in the project implementation (such as ICOS, local administrative and financial staff, etc.). General information (name, e-mail address, position / function, institution, CV link, etc.) should be provided in the excel sheet. In stage 3 of the IUC proposal (Fully Fledged) this is mostly about checking and updating the information provided in earlier stages of the IUC call.

How is the project structured / organised?

This section focuses on the project organisational structure and distribution of responsibilities with attention to balanced partnership structures and multi-institutional partnerships.

In case multiple partners are involved at Flemish or partner level, the roles of each partner in the implementation and management of the project need to be explained. How will the tasks be divided among the involved partners (Flemish and/or local) in a balanced way?

Specifically for IUC partnerships: we refer to the general [IUC Management Structure and Team](#)

[Composition document](#) and the expectation to elaborate an IUC Management Manual. (Annex 3 of the IUC FF proposal). During the IUC FF proposal stage, further elaboration is requested regarding the Commitment of the Flemish coordinating university and local partner university and the role of the



Project Support Unit (PSU) of the IUC partnership. More details are available in the IUC Stage 3 Call document annexes.

VLIRUOS also seeks to stimulate multi-institutional partnerships between the Flemish universities and universities of applied sciences and arts. The vision on how the project creates broad support of / collaborations between Flemish universities and universities of applied sciences and arts was already detailed in the earlier stages of the proposal, but can also be highlighted where relevant under the Key question related to the IUC Team Composition and how this was organised. For example, how expertise available at a particular university or university of applied sciences and arts enriches the team composition.

Checklist to integrate the SDG principles in Module 3

Leaving No One Behind 	<i>It is important to keep an eye on the diversity of a team.</i> ✓ Does your organisational set-up ensure the participation of left behind groups in decision-making? ✓ Are left behind groups involved in the decision-making processes (e.g., through an advisory board)? ✓ Does the project ensure gender balanced representation in the team? (cfr. VLIRUOS policy: 40-60% representation of both sexes) ✓ Does your project incorporate mechanisms to ensure gender-balanced participation in decision-making processes? ✓ Does the project team include a member with gender expertise, a gender focal point / task force / working group? 
Interconnectedness & indivisibility 	✓ Interdisciplinary approach? <i>Ideally teams are multi/inter/transdisciplinary (=approaching a particular challenge from different (scientific) disciplines).</i>
Multi-institutional (MIPs) and multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) 	✓ Did you identify opportunities to collaborate with other institutions and/or other actors, such as civil society, public and private stakeholders, during project design and implementation? ✓ Have you reflected on the optimal division of roles and responsibilities in the partnership? ✓ Can all partners participate in decision-making when they want to? Do they have voice?

Module 4: Stakeholders and coherence

ESSENCE

Identify and analyse the key stakeholders that will be involved in or will benefit from the project. Identify how the project will engage with these stakeholders. These include both internal (inside HEI, but external to project team) and external (outside HEI) stakeholders, and direct and indirect beneficiaries.

Elaborate on the potential coherence of the IUC with other projects/actors

KEY QUESTIONS

- Who are the key stakeholders? What is their role in the current context?
- What is their potential role, interest and influence in the project?
- How will the project involve / engage with stakeholders? (e.g. *community-based research, participatory research methods, multi-stakeholder partnership, value chain,...*)
- Think about **end users** of your project results. Who are they? What are potential barriers for them and how can we overcome them?
- How will the project ensure synergy & complementarity with Belgian actors and other VLIRUOS projects? ([check out the VLIRUOS Country Reference Frameworks](#))
- How will the project facilitate the collaboration between multiple stakeholders and, if applicable, turn it into an effective multi-stakeholder partnership?

CORRESPONDING ANNEXES

- Annex 5: Stakeholder Matrix

TOOLS / APPROACHES

- [Forced field analysis](#)
- [10 key principles of stakeholder engagement](#)
- [Seven principles for effective multi-stakeholder partnerships](#)
- [Tools for analysing power in MSPs](#)
- [Planning sheet for stakeholder engagement](#)
- [VLIRUOS Uptake brochure](#)

Stakeholder identification

Who are stakeholders?

Project **stakeholders** are groups of people or organisations who have an interest (a stake) in the (proposed) project and hence can (positively or negatively) influence or contribute to the project.



The identification of project stakeholders should focus on the key players. Defining and prioritising who are the key players, will help you formulate approaches to engage with them and/or involve them in the project (see engagement strategy later in this module).

During project formulation, you need to be pragmatic in the choice of target groups and prioritise what strategies are possible to involve/engage with them. The stakeholders include both **internal** (but external to project team like e.g., trainees, co-organisers of a training) and **external** (outside the higher education institution) stakeholders, such as employers of the trainees, local communities, private sector, (local) government, civil

society organisations, NGOs, etc. Stakeholders can consist of **direct beneficiaries** (the group that will be benefiting from the services of the project at the outcome level) or potential **indirect beneficiaries** (those who will be benefiting from the project in the long run, e.g., farmers, local governments, etc. (impact level)) and any other actor with a stake in the project. When identifying stakeholders, general terms should be avoided (e.g., not “government” but more specific government level and department). The stakeholders may be users of the research and those who can help or hamper the research uptake strategy (e.g., extension office).

Special attention should be paid to the end users of the project results. End users are those who are expected to ultimately use, apply, or benefit from the project results in practice. When identifying stakeholders, projects should explicitly reflect on:

- Who are the end users of the project results?
- What barriers do they face in accessing, understanding, or using the project results (e.g. lack of resources, language barriers, power relations, institutional constraints)
- How can we overcome these barriers (e.g. intermediaries, extension services)?

This reflection helps ensure that stakeholder identification is not only comprehensive, but also oriented towards uptake, usability, and impact.

Identifying stakeholders **before the start** of a project can be challenging, but this step should not remain static at one point in time. Stakeholder engagement is a dynamic process that evolves during project implementation. Therefore, it is recommended to regularly update the stakeholder analysis in annual reporting to keep track of stakeholder activities and communication (e.g., which stakeholder is no longer actively participating, which new stakeholders expressed interest, how are relationships and roles changing along the process, what positive and negative elements need to be dealt with, etc.).

The following aspects help to **identify different types of stakeholders**:

1. Internal and external stakeholders

Internal stakeholders are part of your institution and might influence your project or have a stake in it. They are however not part of the project team (Project team is part of Module 3). <i>For example: potential trainees who will follow a training that you aim to develop as part of your project or the management board of the university that is responsible for policies that affect the execution of your project.</i>	External stakeholders are not part of your institution but have an interest in or are impacted by your project. <i>For example: employers of trainees, farmers from nearby communities, policy makers, patient representative groups, local NGOs, etc.</i>
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2. Sectoral background of stakeholders

Depending on the scope of your project you can focus more specifically on one sector but it can be helpful to consider different ones to make sure you include all key stakeholders that can help you generate impact.

- Public sector
- Private sector
- Civil society
- Academic or research sector
- Other VLIRUOS projects

For example: national policymakers (public sector) might implement policy recommendations with regard to patient health care in law, but patient organisations (civil society) might be necessary to inform patients on new health care insights and practical implications.

3. Geographical level of stakeholders

Will the project collaborate with local, national, regional, Belgian or other international actors (EU, UN, etc.)?

✚ *For Belgian actors and other VLIRUOS projects, the engagement strategy should also address opportunities for synergy & complementarity. Synergy & complementarity is further specified in the section on coherence in Module 4.*

Stakeholder analysis

Once you have identified the key stakeholders, it is important to study their **role, interests and potential influence in the project**.



By studying this in a gender-sensitive way, the project can unravel possible gender inequalities and unbalanced power relations. Ideally, the perspectives of those left behind should be included in the stakeholder analysis.

1. What is the potential role of the stakeholder in the project / for the desired change?

A non-exhaustive list of potential roles is given below.

Roles	Definition
Supporter	Acts as a (potential) partner in favour of the project
Contractor	Is paid by the project to work on a particular activity
Funder	Provides money to pay for a project activity
Disseminator (e.g., extension office)	Makes information available by putting research results in the public domain and translates research evidence for non-specialist audiences
Advisor	Produces knowledge / information relevant for the project
Regulator	Checks whether the project is working according to official government rules or laws
Observer	Watches what happens but does not actively take part in the project
Broker	Engages in bridging, matching, connecting, convening, linking, networking, facilitating, building local capacity, negotiating, collaborating, managing relationships, changing incentive structures and context to to improve knowledge use and enable innovation
Opponent	Disagrees with, blocks, slows down, competes with the project activities
Direct beneficiary (e.g. users of research)	Will be benefiting from the services/products of the project at the outcome level
Indirect beneficiary (wider community)	Are not in direct contact with a project, but are affected by it, usually via direct beneficiaries. They will be benefiting from the project in the long run, at the impact level
Other	To be specified

2. What is their interest and influence in the project?

In order to analyse the interest and influence that stakeholders (can) have in your project, you can use a matrix that shows all stakeholders in four categories.

In **Annex 5 Stakeholder Matrix**, a dropdown menu is provided to select the appropriate **level of interest** that stakeholders have in your project. They might be interested in the whole project or in certain aspects (e.g., methods you use or specific research results):

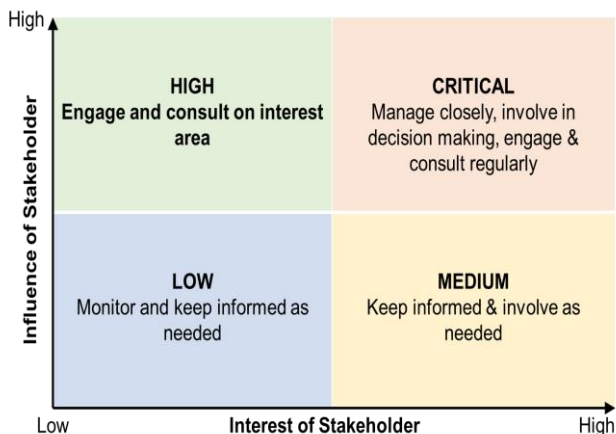
- 1 - Low interest
- 2 - Medium interest
- 3 - High interest

The same is applied to the **level of influence** that stakeholders might have in your project. Some guiding questions are: Can they for example facilitate the impact of your project because they focus on similar domains or because they work with groups you want to reach? Do they have certain resources that can be beneficial to your project? What can you gain from connecting with them? What is their potential contribution to the outcomes of the project, in terms of knowledge / expertise, money, time, labour, video material, training, access to information, services, network, help recruit participants, share experiences, dissemination / uptake support, infrastructure / equipment, etc.?

- 1 - Low influence
- 2 - Medium influence
- 3 - High influence

3. How will you engage with them?

Depending on how likely it is stakeholders have an interest in your project and depending on their level of influence, you can categorise stakeholders in four segments:



- **Critical:** High influence, highly interested people (Manage Closely)
- **High:** High influence, less interested people (Keep Satisfied)
- **Medium:** Low influence, highly interested people (Keep Informed)
- **Low:** Low influence, less interested people (Monitor)

Figure 3: Stakeholder influence – interest matrix

By classifying stakeholders in this way, one can determine cases where: 1) significant awareness-raising is required to turn a highly influential but low-interest stakeholder into an interested potential partner or 2) significant capacity development is required to turn a stakeholder with high interest but low influence into a stronger potential partner.

A well-developed **stakeholder engagement strategy** is critical for the success of the project in terms of potential impact, uptake, sustainability, efficiency, etc. Already having a good understanding of stakeholders, potential beneficiaries, end-users and/ or intermediaries helps projects create the conditions for uptake. It allows projects to identify actual needs, priorities, capacities, power relationships, etc. which can be taken into account when designing the project.

For example: If the project seeks to have an effect on policymakers, then the project needs to engage with local government during the whole duration of the project in order to raise interest and ensure that the project can

actually have a significant impact. The project can consult policymakers throughout the process or could even involve them in decision-making.

You will develop different approaches for the stakeholders who you consider as ‘critical’ (see stakeholder analysis - high interest and high influence) compared to those who are in the ‘low category’ for example. For some stakeholders, this can imply you foresee a limited number of information sessions throughout the project, for other (key) stakeholders it might mean you involve them in an advisory board that helps define the focus and implementation of the project and also follows up on results and how to use them. The questions to ask when developing an engagement strategy are:

- How will they be consulted / reached / approached / involved?
- How to secure their commitment / meaningful participation from the start?
- How will their interests be taken into account?
- How to counter, mitigate negative influence?



For IUC partnerships: You are asked to include a short description in Annex 5 on how you will engage with stakeholders. However, you can do a more detailed analysis or find inspiration [in this framework on stakeholder engagement in research](#).



Stakeholder engagement is key to enhancing the uptake of research results.⁸ The strategy for the uptake of results is to be described in Module 2. However, because of the crucial involvement of stakeholders for uptake, it is important to include this reflection in your stakeholder analysis.

It is important to seek alignment to the different stakeholders’ needs, mutually agree on engagement strategies and jointly (re)defining desired social change processes. Engaging with stakeholders, right from the start of a project (or better: before the start) is crucial to **create the conditions for uptake**. Implementing a project and holding a one-off dissemination workshop at the end of a project is not sufficient. Especially, for vulnerable groups time is needed to create safe spaces and adapt processes to include their voices and avoid unequal power relationships. Stakeholder engagement is ideally a continuous and active process, especially since interests and coalitions can change throughout the time. It is thus important to also follow up on your engagement strategy closely during project development, being in annual reporting and planning.

Coherence

External coherence

External coherence refers to the complementarity and/or synergy with initiatives taken in the same domain / context by other organisations (local, regional, Belgian actors, etc.). In the proposal, the match / link with other externally funded projects and actors from Belgian development actors already active in the targeted country should be described, including how they plan to engage with the other organisation.

For more information check the [VLIRUOS country reference frameworks](#) on the VLIRUOS website with more details on the geographical and thematic Joint Strategic Frameworks of Belgian Development Cooperation. The Belgian geographical and thematic Joint Strategic Frameworks (JSFs) provide information on “who is doing what, where” and contact details of different organisations. It is expected that projects identify the opportunities for synergy and complementarity with Belgian development actors in the region and engage with them (where relevant, possible).

⁸ For more information on uptake, please consult our recently published brochure [here](#).

Internal coherence

Internal coherence refers to the synergy and/or complementarity with other VLIRUOS funded activities, for example how the project matches with *other ITP, TEAM/SI, IUC, Global Minds, ICP projects, etc. working in the same region or on the same topic.*

➤ **Potential collaborations with other VLIRUOS projects are important here, previous experience between the projects partners fits under lessons learned in Module 8.**



For IUC partnerships: This refers also to synergies and complementarities between IUC sub-projects. The interlinkages between the sub-projects should be explained in a narrative or visualisation, building further on the developed *theory of change in Module 2*

Checklist to integrate the SDG principles in Module 4

Leaving No One Behind 	✓ Does your stakeholder analysis include the perspectives of those (at risk of being) left behind? ✓ Are left behind groups that might be affected by the intervention involved in planning & implementation in an active and meaningful way? ✓ Does your project consider representation and participation of women and disadvantaged groups in the identification and selection of project counterparts and/or advisors (e.g., women's groups, associations of persons with disability)? ♀
Interconnectedness & indivisibility 	✓ Was your stakeholder analysis co-created by the relevant (local) actors, including marginalised groups?
Multi-institutional (MIPs) and multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) 	✓ Have you analysed which actors can support or contribute, and which actors might present obstacles or risks, taking into account interest and power or influence? ✓ Are local actors (beyond institutional actors and including marginalised groups) involved in an active and meaningful way when relevant? ✓ Are partners involved in monitoring, evaluation and learning when relevant, including local actors and vulnerable groups?

Module 5: Planning & budgeting

ESSENCE

This aspect focusses on how the project will contribute to the set goals in the six project domains. It specifies what **activities** must be done to achieve a particular goal (or goals), when they need to be done and who is going to do them. It does not only include the outputs that need to be delivered, but also the financial & human resources attached to it.

KEY QUESTIONS

- What activities per project domain do we need to implement to deliver the results? (sub-project level)
- When do we need to implement them?
- Which means are needed? Who is responsible?
- What management activities are needed to guarantee a smooth implementation?
- Value for money: elaborate a narrative on your budget. Motivate the requested total amount. Elaborate on how much will be spent on the different activities and why you choose this repartition.

CORRESPONDING ANNEXES

- Annex 8: Sub-project budget
 - Annex 9: Operational plan per sub-project/PSU
- Annex 8b: Partnership budget



For IUC partnerships: As referred to under Module 2 when explaining the 3 Key questions approach in the project strategy, it is at sub-project level, identified as a separate section in the IUC Stage 3 FF format that we move further in identifying key deliverables and activities (in line with the project's operational plan). In the operational plan, activities are to be organized according to the six standard VLIRUOS project domains giving particular attention for the standard domain dissemination/uptake strategy. It is not obligatory to realize change in all six domains. The sub-project can choose the domains it wants to address and corresponding deliverables of your project need to be selected. 📎 Annex 9: Operational plan per sub-project/PSU.

Checklist to integrate the SDG principles in Module 5

Leaving No One Behind 	✓ Is the planning of activities informed by the context analysis with attention for left behind groups? ✓ Are (far) left behind groups that might be affected by the intervention involved in planning & implementation in an active and meaningful way? ✓ Does the project ensure gender balanced participation in project activities? (e.g., providing day care during training) ✓ Is sufficient budget foreseen for gender mainstreaming activities?
Interconnectedness & indivisibility 	✓ Have you taken important (positive and negative) links into account in the planning & implementation of your theory of change (e.g., in objectives / activities)?
Multi-institutional (MIPs) and multistakeholder	✓ Have the different partners reflected on whether the MIPs and/or MSP adds value (do the benefits exceed the costs)?

partnerships (MSPs) 	
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Module 6: Risk management

ESSENCE

Identify and manage the key risks the project will potentially face

KEY QUESTIONS

- What are the key risks (based on uncertainties and assumptions in Module 2)?
- What is the potential impact of the risk?
- What is the probability the risk will occur?
- How can we reduce the potential impact of the risk or reduce the probability of the risk occurring?
- Who is responsible for follow-up / risk monitoring?

CORRESPONDING ANNEXES

- Annex 6: Risk Matrix

What are *assumptions* and *risks*?

An **assumption** is a belief that something is true or that something will happen, an assertion about the world we do not always question or check. Assumptions stem from and represent values, beliefs, norms and ideological perspectives that inform our interpretation and understanding of reality, and our expectations of what will happen.

A **risk** is an event or set of related events that are likely to occur and would have a negative impact on executing a project activity or obtaining a goal / realizing change. Risks are diverse and can be internal and external to the project or organisation.

Through risk management projects systematically identify, analyse, and respond to potential risks in order to achieve the project objectives.

This process involves three main steps, explained in detail below:

- Risk identification:** To understand potential threats and risks for the project
- Risk assessment:** To evaluate the probability and potential impact
- Risk mitigation :** To respond with appropriate strategies to mitigate risks and monitor these risks

Identifying assumptions and risks matters for projects because of the following reasons:

1. More effective teams

Personal and group values are surfaced, collective energy is generated, and differences are named and sometimes resolved. If not, they are noted and can be taken into account to manage risks and uncertainties and help to choose the most critical pathways on which to focus planning efforts.

2. Basis for adaptive management and risk management

Monitoring outputs, assumptions/risks and processes together enables you to respond in a timely manner to new information and adapt planning and strategies, and to decide on the most strategic next steps to take in complex contexts/processes. Critical assumptions are a good basis for risk management.

3. More focused learning and evaluation

Critical assumptions for which little knowledge or evidence exists can become the focus for a learning or (action) research to inform the change process. Critical pathways and assumptions help guide analysis and judgements in evaluation and defining risks.

Risk identification

Different **types of risks** can be identified during project formulation, a non-exhaustive list of categories is provided below:

1. **Financial:** these risks imply potential extra costs or a loss of income (e.g. non digitalised/centralised accounting system)
2. **Operational:** potential negative effects on the project activities and the way there are being managed
3. **Political:** potential non-compliance with laws, government guidelines, unstable political, security, human rights situation, mobility restrictions (e.g. COVID-19, ebola outbreak), shrinking civic space, etc.
4. **Reputational:** potential factors that could have a negative effect on the reputation of the implementing organisations or VLIRUOS (ethical issues, integrity, fraud, human rights, discrimination, harassment, etc.)
5. **Sustainability:** potential factors that could have a negative effect on the continuation after the project ended (e.g. lack of contracts for graduated PhD students, insufficient funds for retainment of staff, laboratory equipment is not well maintained or no trainings are given to local staff on how to use it)
6. **Social / cultural:** potential factors that could have a negative effect on (mental) health, family-work balance, stakeholder interest, leadership, HR capabilities, gender equality, etc.
7. **Environmental:** potential environmental factors that could have a negative effect on the project

Examples of environmental factors that could impact the project and might pose a risk:

- **Soil:** fertility, pollution, erosion, desertification, land use
- **Water:** quality, pollution, availability, consumption, management
- **Air:** quality, unpleasant smell
- **Forest:** exploitation, species diversity, natural risks (wildfires, diseases, parasites), protected areas
- **Biodiversity:** fauna and flora (endangered or extirpated species), vegetation cover, hazards (invasive species, pests, pathogens)
- **Climate change and extreme events:** drought, flood, frost, hail, hurricane

Examples of actions to mitigate negative effects on the environment:

- Sustainable mobility and (international) travel: raising awareness (discouraging air travel and encouraging alternative compensation of CO2 emission)
- Integrating the principle of circular economy (e.g. purchasing second hand equipment)
- Reducing waste (e.g. introducing composting methods)
- Limiting the use of paper / other material (e.g. standard recto verso printing, focus on digitalisation)
- Sustainable food consumption (e.g. vegetarian catering at events)
- Using renewable energy sources (e.g. use of solar energy)

Identifying assumptions

To identify assumptions, following questions might help: If X changes, will Z really happen? Why? Under which conditions? What are we assuming? What evidence do we have that supports our assumptions about causality?

For example, in a project, it is assumed that by introducing new research methods, academics will actually start using those methods, which will lead to more and better research. This is based on the assumption that academics have sufficient incentives (time, interest) for doing research.

Across the VLIRUOS portfolio, following risks are most prevalent within projects and might spark the reflection within your project:

1. Stakeholder participation and interest
2. Commitment of team members and partners
3. Equipment delivery and timing
4. Dropout of staff and teachers
5. Finding suitable MsC, PhD, etc. candidates
6. Political instability
7. Budgetary constraints and issues

Risk assessment

Both during formulation and implementation, risks and assumptions need to be assessed and followed up. The expectations for risk assessment and monitoring differs between project types: a more in-depth assessment of the project context is required for longer-term projects compared to short-term projects, which should focus on high-level risks and report on exceptional circumstances in annual reporting.

Risks (and assumptions turned into risks) are assessed on the basis of (1) the *probability* that they will occur and (2) the potential *impact* the risk will have on the project. By assessing risks on the basis of these criteria, a risk level (or risk score) is attributed to each risk (probability x potential impact, Table 4).

In Annex 6 Risk Matrix, a dropdown menu is provided to select the appropriate probability level to assess how likely it is that the risk will occur:

- 1 - Unlikely
- 2 - Possible
- 3 - Probable
- 4 - Almost certain

You are also asked to select the appropriate level for the potential impact, to assess how severe the consequences would be if the risk occurs:

- 1 - Negligible: The risk will have little consequences if it occurs.
- 2 - Minor: The consequences of the risk will be easy to manage.
- 3 - Moderate: The consequences of the risk will take time to mitigate.
- 4 - Major: The consequences of the risks will be significant and may cause long-term damage.
- 5 - Severe: The consequences of the risk will be detrimental and may

This overall risk level will automatically be calculated in Annex 6 when the probability and potential impact level have been completed.

Table 4: Assessment of risk level based on probability and impact

Risk level		Impact				
		Negligible (1)	Minor (2)	Moderate (3)	Major (4)	Severe (5)
Probability	Almost certain (4)	Low	Medium	High	Extreme	Extreme
	Probable (3)	Low	Medium	Medium	High	Extreme
	Possible (2)	Low	Low	Medium	Medium	High
	Unlikely (1)	Low	Low	Low	Low	Medium

Risk mitigation

Depending on the overall risk level, the project needs to formulate measures in order to mitigate the risk (Table 5). When the risk level is low, no action is taken. Medium-level risks do not require immediate action but should

be properly monitored and measures should be formulated in case the risk materializes. High-level risks demand immediate action to avoid or weaken its impact. In case the risk level is deemed extreme, the continuation of the project should be questioned and appropriate measures (e.g. referral/escalation to desired levels) should be taken immediately.

Table 5: Risk level and associated response

Risk level	Response
Low	During formulation and implementation: risks are accepted and are considered as assumptions (we assume everything to go well).
Medium	During formulation and implementation: At this level, a project does not need to take immediate action, but it needs to assure a sound follow-up of the risk. A measure in case the risk occurs is already formulated in this stage.
High	During formulation and implementation: At this level, action to mitigate the risk is required. Accepting risks is no longer an option. After the risk has been mitigated, the overall risk level is lowered.
Extreme	When formulating a project, one needs to wonder whether it is still acceptable to start the project. The risk-level of a particular risk is extremely high (killer assumption) that this project should not start/be selected. A project (proposal) needs to be re-oriented to mitigate the risk before submitting the project proposal. During implementation, the project (1) needs to take appropriate measures as soon as possible and (2) communicate the risk to higher levels (Flemish institution and VLIRUOS).

The risk response determines to what extent risks can be mitigated, by *whom* (assigning responsibility), *how* and *when*. Updating the risk management matrix in the excel format involves both the follow up of *existing* risks (and the implementation of risk responses) and the *identification-analysis-response* of/to new risks during annual reporting. This should be regularly updated at project level (For IUC partnerships, this should be done for all sub-projects together at partnership level).

Checklist to integrate the SDG principles in Module 6

Special attention should also go to risks related to the inclusion of those left behind (LNOB), interconnectedness and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Leaving No One Behind 	<i>The risk analysis should discuss the pitfalls and added value to work with certain groups in a vulnerable position. What would happen if they were not included? How can you mitigate any exclusion effects of the project?</i> <u>Targeting approach:</u> ✓ Have you tailored remedial action (by yourself, by partners, or by others) to address/mitigate any exclusion effects (e.g. in the risk analysis)? <u>Mainstreaming approach:</u> ✓ Does your risk analysis include reflections on whether design and implementation might exclude women or vulnerable people from (the benefits of) the intervention within and/or beyond the target groups? ✓ 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) ♀
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Interconnectedness & indivisibility 	<i>Negative trade-offs should get a place in the risk analysis, where mitigation strategies can be proposed.</i> ✓ Have you taken important (positive and negative) interlinkages into account in the design and implementation in the risk analysis (e.g. agricultural intervention with potential trade-off for gender, health, climate change)? ✓ Does your risk management allow to follow-up on risks related to important interlinkages (co-benefits and trade-offs between environmental, socio-economic, institutional factors, etc.)?
Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) 	<i>The potential obstacles for working with different stakeholders can be part of the risk analysis and mitigation responses to deal with diverging interests or powerful actors in a partnership.</i> ✓ Have you analysed which actors might present obstacles or risks, taking into account interest and power or influence? ✓ Does your risk analysis consider potential obstacles or issues that the MSP or its members might create (e.g. conflicts of interest for private sector actors, inefficient use of resources, ...)? ✓ Have you reflected on strategies or remedial action to deal with such risks (possibly only internally)?

Module 7: Monitoring & reporting

ESSENCE

This aspect focuses on the performance and measures the progress towards realising the goals of the project. This is done on the basis of the planning (see Module 5.) and by collecting the relevant data and analysing indicators at the level of the project. It is relevant for accountability (reporting), but also for learning and steering purposes (see Module 8).

KEY QUESTIONS

- What information do we need to track and analyse the change process as it evolves?
- What information do we need to monitor assumptions or learn about the change process?
- What information do we need to demonstrate the realisations of the project?
- How will information be collected? Who will do this? When? What systems need to be in place?

CORRESPONDING ANNEXES

- Annex 7: Indicators

TOOLS/APPROACHES

- [Equal Access Participatory M&E toolkit - Module 2 \(setting objectives & indicators\)](#) & SPICED indicators
- [Introduction to indicators](#)
- [SMART Indicators in Monitoring & Evaluation](#)

Develop standard/ project-specific indicators

To facilitate the formulation of indicators and allow some aggregation of indicators at different levels (per country/region/programme), VLIRUOS provides a shortlist of **standard indicators** per change pathway (research, education, agents of change, uptake, science-society, institutional performance) that need to be reported upon (see Annex 7). Certain indicators require further **disaggregation** to be made upon reporting, e.g. by gender, stakeholder type.

What are indicators?

*An **indicator** provides a marker of whether a certain change has happened or whether certain conditions exist. Indicators can be quantitative or qualitative, direct or indirect.*

In addition to standard indicators, **project-specific indicators** can be put forward by each sub-project to measure progress towards the achievement of their results and to steer decision-making by the project management. Development and selection of the indicators should be guided by commonly used criteria to assess the quality of an indicator, such as the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timebound) or SPICED principles (Subjective, Participatory, Interpreted, Cross-checked/Comparable, Empowering, and Diverse/Disaggregated) (see suggested tools/approaches).

Use & reporting of indicators

Projects have to report on annual basis the progress made in **standard indicators** and, if applicable, **project-specific indicators**. During formulation, the baseline and target values should be provided in the excel sheet Annex 7. VLIRUOS asks projects to correctly include the standard indicators (as to allow future aggregation) and not to alter the formulation. How this will be integrated in the annual reporting will be further developed in the course of 2026-2027 prior to the reporting exercise 2026-2027.

These data will be aggregated at VLIRUOS level to monitor progress and impact of all VLIRUOS projects.



For IUC partnerships: In addition, you may formulate and follow-up on **project-specific indicators** on the level of sub-projects, which might support you in keeping track of the projects' progress. Consider whether variables already included in your research design can also be used to monitor progress, uptake, or early impact of the project and include them as an indicator.

For example, research on improved livestock feed and milk production, is following up whether SMEs are experiencing an impact on production – Project-specific indicator: Change in average milk production among SMEs participating in the livestock feed research

Failing to plan is planning to fail

Projects need to plan the measuring of indicators and need to take into account the feasibility (cost/benefit) of measuring indicators. Next to identifying the source of information, projects need to think about:

1. How will we measure the indicator?
2. Frequency of data collection: annually, during reporting
3. Who in the team is responsible for the data collection?

Definitions of the VLIRUOS standard indicators

Research pathway
Number of co-authored / joint peer reviewed scientific international publications based on data collected/analysed through the support of the VLIRUOS project
Each peer-reviewed scientific international publication based on data collected / analysed through the support of the project and resulting from work carried out with the help of financial means of the project. The publication should be the result of a collaboration between the team members involved in the project from Belgium and partner countries, either as first author or co-author. Upon reporting, disaggregation should be made for (1) male first authors (2) female first authors (3) X first authors
Number of new or enhanced research methodologies developed (e.g. lab techniques optimised, data collection methods)
The total count of research methods, techniques, or approaches that were newly created or significantly improved with the support of the VLIRUOS project. This includes, for example, the optimisation of laboratory techniques, the development or refinement of data collection methods, analytical procedures, or research protocols that strengthen the quality, efficiency, or reliability of research outcomes.
Education pathway
Number and type of new or substantially updated programmes developed (curriculum) through the support of the VLIRUOS project
Each educational programme that has been created or substantially updated with the direct support of VLIRUOS project funding and within the context of the project.

Disaggregation should be made for (1) Bachelor programmes (2) Master programmes (3) PhD programmes/ Doctoral schools (4) Course modules/ Trainings
Number of new or improved teaching and learning resources developed (e.g. e-learning materials, manuals, toolkits, digital platforms)
The total count of teaching and learning materials or tools that were newly created or substantially improved during the project period to support teaching and learning processes. This includes, for example, e-learning materials, manuals, toolkits, and digital platforms that improve the quality, accessibility, or effectiveness of education and training activities.
Agents of Change pathway
Number of Bachelor students directly supported by the VLIRUOS project (through a scholarship or project budget) during the reporting year, contributing to the objectives of the project
Disaggregation should be made for (1) enrolled students during the reporting year (2) graduated students during the reporting year Each student from the Global South who is enrolled in – or has graduated from an accredited bachelor and has received funding (either direct through a VLIRUOS scholarship, or indirect through project funding) from VLIRUOS and within the context of the project.
Number of Master students directly supported by the VLIRUOS project (through a scholarship or project budget) during the reporting year, contributing to the objectives of the project
Disaggregation should be made for (1) enrolled students during the reporting year (2) graduated students during the reporting year Each student from the Global South who is enrolled in – or has graduated from an accredited master and has received funding (either direct through a VLIRUOS scholarship, or indirect through project funding) from VLIRUOS and within the context of the project.
Number of PhD students directly supported by the VLIRUOS project (through a scholarship or project budget) during the reporting year, contributing to the objectives of the project
Disaggregation should be made for (1) enrolled students during the reporting year (2) graduated students during the reporting year Each student from the Global South who is enrolled in – or has graduated from an accredited PhD programme and has received funding (either direct through a VLIRUOS scholarship, or indirect through project funding) from VLIRUOS and within the context of the project.
Number of staff trained during the reporting year to strengthen capacities contributing to the project objectives

Each staff member who received training in the course of the project to strengthen capacities contributing to the project objectives. Disaggregation should be made for staff trained on (1) Institutional management (e.g. quality assurance, HR management, financial management) (2) Research methods (e.g. scientific writing, data management, ethics, research design, methodology, data analysis, lab techniques) (3) Teaching and learning methods (e.g. curriculum design, student assessment, digital learning tools, classroom management) (4) Uptake (e.g. proposal writing, science communication, stakeholder management)
Uptake pathway
Number of non-academic outreach or capacity-strengthening activities delivered through the support of the project (e.g. presentations, trainings, sensitisation activities, policy dialogues; targeting communities, governments, civil society or private sector actors)
Each <i>non-academic</i> extension/outreach/capacity-building activity that has been organised with the direct support of VLIRUOS project funding and within the context of the project. For clarity, academic conferences in the strict sense should not be listed here. If stakeholder groups from society at large are present as discussants, conferences are considered relevant.
Number of persons reached through non-academic outreach or capacity-strengthening activities delivered through the support of the project (e.g. presentations, trainings, sensitisation activities, policy dialogues; targeting communities, governments, civil society or private sector actors)
The total count of <i>non-academic</i> individuals who participated in outreach, awareness-raising, training, or capacity-strengthening activities supported by the project outside formal academic settings. This includes, for example, presentations, trainings, sensitisation activities, and policy dialogues targeting communities, government representatives, civil society organisations, or private sector actors.
Uptake / influence of project-supported research in policy and/or practice (e.g. citations in policy documents, integration into guidelines, adoption by communities) (measured through a self-assessment scale)
The research activities that have been organised with the direct support of VLIRUOS project funding and within the context of the project which have reached policy or communities of practice. This is measured using a score scale based on self-assessment: 0 - no dissemination yet / too early 1 - knowledge has been disseminated 2 - first exchanges and request for support from target groups after dissemination 3 - first signs of uptake: smaller groups are applying our knowledge in practice 4 - new knowledge is being applied in practice at scale
Number and type of outreach materials produced and shared (e.g. toolkits, videos, policy briefs, guidelines, fact sheets, etc.)
The total count of materials produced in the framework of the VLIRUOS funded project <i>and</i> shared with a non-academic public. Disaggregation to be made for: type of material

Science-Society Interface pathway
Number and type of new or strengthened formal academic partnerships established through project support (education, research and uptake) (e.g. through MoUs, MoAs, research contracts, co-supervision agreements)
The total count and type of formalised academic collaborations that were newly created or significantly reinforced as a result of the project. This includes partnerships in education, research, and knowledge uptake, formalised through instruments such as Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), Memoranda of Agreement (MoAs), research contracts, or co-supervision agreements.
Number and type of new or strengthened formal multi-stakeholder partnerships (non-academic partners) established through project support (education, research and uptake) (e.g. through MoUs, MoAs, research contracts, co-supervision agreements)
The total count and type of formalised collaborations with non-academic actors that were newly established or significantly reinforced as a result of the project. This includes partnerships supporting education, research, and knowledge uptake with stakeholders such as government bodies, civil society organisations, communities, or private sector actors, and formalised through instruments such as Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), Memoranda of Agreement (MoAs), research contracts, or co-supervision agreements.
Quantity (budget) and source (donor) of additional funding acquired through (direct or indirect) support of the project
The total amount of additional funding obtained and the corresponding funding sources that were mobilised as a direct or indirect result of the project. This includes additional grants, co-funding, or external financing secured from public, private, or international donors, where the project contributed to proposal development, partnerships, evidence generation, or institutional credibility.
Institutional performance pathway
Number and type of new or revised policies, rules, regulations or frameworks validated and in use
Each newly established or revised institutional policy, rule, regulation or framework (e.g. development of a new research/ accreditation/ integrity policy, policies regarding to mainstreaming/integration of gender and inclusion perspectives, HR policies to reduce staff turnover and facilitate skills and knowledge transfer within institutions) that is a result of VLIRUOS funding received by the project or the activities resulting thereof, validated and in use .
Disaggregation to be made for (1) Institutional (e.g. research integrity policies, accreditation frameworks, gender and inclusion policies, HR and retention policies) (2) Research (e.g. research protocols, data repositories, data management, lab safety procedures) (3) Education (e.g. teaching quality frameworks, assessment policies, mentoring guidelines)
Number of (small-scale) infrastructure and equipment for education/ research provided by the VLIRUOS project (e.g. laboratories equipped with new technologies, libraries, etc.) being actively used
The total count of infrastructure facilities and equipment items supplied through the VLIRUOS funded project that are operational and in use for educational or research purposes. This includes, for example, laboratories equipped with new technologies, library facilities, or research equipment that are effectively integrated into teaching, learning, or research activities at the time of reporting.

Checklist to integrate the SDG principles in Module 7

Leaving No One Behind 	✓ Does the M&E system provide sufficient information about change at the level of the target groups and the (in)direct contribution of the project towards those changes? ✓ Does the project require disaggregated indicators for follow-up? ✓ Are relevant gender-specific indicators and/or indicators that are disaggregated by sex selected? ✓ SMART or SPICED ⁹ use/collection of specific indicators?
Interconnectedness & indivisibility 	✓ Have you taken important (positive and negative) links into account in the design and implementation of your indicators?
Multi-institutional (MIPs) and multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) 	✓ Have relevant stakeholders been involved in the identification of the indicators that most meaningfully indicate anticipated (intermediate) change? ✓ Is another entity or actor already collecting the data we need? Do we have access to that information, can we use it?

⁹ The SPICED approach puts more emphasis on developing indicators that stakeholders can define and use for their own purposes of interpreting and learning about change, rather than simply measuring or attempting to demonstrate impact to meet donor requirements.

Module 8: Learning & steering

ESSENCE

This aspect involves following-up on changes, adaptations and lessons learned from (previous) experiences in order to improve the quality of the project.

KEY QUESTIONS

- During project formulation: How will the recommendations of the selection commission and Institutional Assessment / lessons learned from previous experiences be taken on board? What will you do differently?
- What have we learned from previous projects, in particular in the case of follow-up projects? In the case of follow-up projects, what is the added value of this project?
- During project implementation: How do you plan to systematically follow-up on your theory of change / identify good practices / learn (e.g., peer-to-peer between similar VLIRUOS projects, sharing lessons learned in progress reports)?

TOOLS/APPROACHES

- Feedback selection commission on extended concept notes (IUC projects Phase 1)
- Institutional Assessment reports (IUC projects Phase 1)
- Mid-term evaluation (IUC projects Phase 2)
- Regular project evaluation meetings (JSCM, progress reports, etc.)
- Exchanges and peer-to-peer learning opportunities in the VLIRUOS community

Formulating lessons learned and learning from experience

VLIRUOS wants to stimulate peer-to-peer learning between projects and exchange good practices with the community.

The following questions can help to capture interesting lessons learned, good practices and steer projects in the right direction (at formulation stage, during and after implementation) to have greater results:

- What were the main success factors? What worked well?
- What is useful to share with others? What recommendations do you have for other similar projects?
- What went wrong, what were the key challenge areas, what did not turn out as expected and why?
- How did the project overcome certain difficulties?
- What needs improvement / at what level (VLIRUOS, institution, project team, technical, etc.)?
- How can this be improved in the future?
- If you would do the project again, what would you do differently?



For IUC partnerships: How will you guarantee that there is an exchange of lessons learned at level of the IUC? Between sub-projects, between sub-project and project level, etc.

Please describe how you took into account the comments of the Stage 2 Selection commission, and of the Institutional Assessment throughout the proposal, and highlight elements you were not able to address, and the reasons for this.

Checklist to integrate the SDG principles in Module 8

Leaving No One	✓ Are there explicit mechanisms for participation of the target groups in the project M&E system?
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Behind 	✓ Does the project M&E system include systematic reflections on the implications of the intervention for any vulnerable groups who (according to the ToC) may benefit indirectly? (e.g., through existing secondary data sources without you having to collect data on groups that are not direct target groups) ✓ Does the project M&E system include systematic reflections about potential negative effects for vulnerable groups (e.g., as identified through risk analysis)? And if any negative effects are observed, does this inform remedial action?
Interconnectedness & indivisibility 	✓ Have you reflected on the extent to which the intervention maximized pre-identified co-benefits and mitigated pre-identified trade-offs? Was a good balance struck? ✓ Have you reflected on unforeseen co-benefits and trade-offs, or limiting and enforcing links? ✓ Does your M&E system provide sufficient space for learning about important interlinkages (co-benefits and trade-offs)?
Multi-institutional (MIPs) and multistakeholder partnerships (MSPs) 	✓ Have you adjusted partnerships based on lessons learned? ✓ Have the different partners reflected on whether the positive impact of the MSP can be improved (e.g., via new partners, other collaboration forms, contribution of the partnership to specific outcomes)?

