



UNIVERSITEIT
GENT

POLICY STUDY AT GHENT
UNIVERSITY: MOVING BEYOND
UNIVERSITY DEVELOPMENT
COOPERATION
RESEARCH TRAJECTORY AND WORKPLAN

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INTRODUCTION

Cooperation with universities, research centers and non-academic stakeholders that are based in the 'Global South' are inherently part of Ghent University's internationalization policy. In this respect, the concept of university development cooperation (UDC) requires a critical examination as well as a new orientation. Ghent University therefore seeks to create a scientific framework to bring the concept, facilitation and practice of such collaborations in research, education and societal impact up to date with current insights from international good practices and by fostering dialogue and discussion among the UGent-community and its (international) partners and stakeholders.

This working document is written in the context of a two-year project and policy study at Ghent University on international academic collaboration in a 'Global North-South' context (March 2021 – March 2023). It **outlines a one-year research trajectory and workplan** that connects to the roadmap of Ghent University's Integrated Policy Plan for Internationalization, and more specifically to priority 7: 'cooperation with universities and research centers in the Global South'.¹ This research trajectory, between February 2022 and March 2023, aims to create a scientific basis and **critically examine a number of key dimensions for international academic cooperation in a 'Global North-South' context**:

- 1) Research collaboration
- 2) Societal relevance & impact
- 3) International learning, or 'North-South @ Home'

These three identified key dimensions take a number of important issues into consideration. First, the need to include attention for the triple mission of Ghent University in respect to research, education and societal impact. Second, a critical analysis of important bottlenecks at the intersection of the current framework of UDC and each of these three university missions. Third, the ambition to explore the opportunities and implications of an innovative framework that values international collaborative academic work based on principles of equity, reciprocity and justice.

General workplan

The three dimensions will divide nine months into 3-month periods of in-depth inquiry (February – October 2022). By connecting and bridging these dimensions in a later stage, between November and December 2022, the eventual development of a new scientific framework beyond UDC carries the potential to transcend the particularities of these specific findings. Finally, the month of January 2023 is reserved to focus on a number of discussion rounds with stakeholders at UGent (e.g. COS, FCIs, etc.), at international partner institutions that were involved in the process, and elsewhere (to be identified, e.g. VLIR-UOS, DGD, etc.). These discussion rounds aim to gather feedback on the new scientific framework, and to facilitate stakeholders to meet, discuss and reach for the future of international 'North-South' collaboration.

Each of the in-depth inquiries are envisaged to follow a participative process of consultation and feedback. For each inquiry, the following activities will take place:

- 1) Start: discuss the 'key dimension' with the steering committee and the COS

¹ [Ghent University's Integrated Policy Plan Internationalization](#)

- 2) Desk work: literature study; mapping of policies, (best) practices, and (in)formal support structures
- 3) Consultation of specific identified stakeholders (incl. UGent-community, international and external partners, etc.)
- 4) Output: discussion note / presentation with key findings and recommendations
- 5) Finalization: discuss key findings with the involved stakeholders, steering committee, COS and the Council of Internationalization (INR)

1 RESEARCH COLLABORATION: PHD SCHOLARSHIP FRAMEWORKS FOR INTERNATIONAL RESEARCHERS

Ghent University engages in a wide variety of PhD scholarship programs for researchers from the Global South which provide opportunities for research as well as for international and inter-university collaboration. This concerns scholarships funded by Ghent University itself as well as those partly/fully financed by other parties but in which the university takes part through partnership agreements with foreign governments and universities, VLIR-UOS, international organizations, corporate foundations, etc.

Internationally, such scholarship programs and frameworks have **regained increased prominence** in international education policy domains – certainly since their inclusion in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under SDG Target 4.b (Campbell & Neff 2020: 825). Studying and doing research abroad provides a **wide variety of opportunities** for intercultural learning, the diversification of perspectives on the intersection of the local with the global, the strengthening of bilateral relations between countries and universities, and the international enrichment of education and research in general. In the context of 'North-South' cooperation, the relevance of such scholarship programs is moreover often, including at Ghent University, specifically sought in increasing global solidarity and social engagement with and capacity building of universities, researchers and students in the Global South.

Yet, international scholarship frameworks at Ghent University also entail a number of **challenges and bottlenecks**. PhD students involved in these programs, their promoters, and administrative and coordinating staff at Ghent University experience challenges relating to the academic quality of PhD researches, the different financial and contractual arrangements of (sandwich-type) scholarships, the establishment and administrative monitoring of partner agreements, etc. In this context, professors, promoters and administrative staff indicated **the need to develop a comprehensive vision around international scholarship frameworks**.

Workplan

- Map and analyze the existing types of scholarship and grant frameworks at Ghent University and related partner agreements
- Identify the challenges and bottlenecks of these scholarship frameworks for the students/researchers involved; promoters, administrative staff, and the involved institutions as a whole
- Map and assess the policies and visions behind these scholarship frameworks in order to develop entry-points for a more integrated, comprehensive guiding framework

2 SOCIETAL RELEVANCE & IMPACT

The framework of university development cooperation (**UDC**) is **characterized by its specific relation to the societal value of knowledge, to impact**. More specifically, North-South cooperation is currently oriented towards creating an impact on development issues in the Global South, including efforts for institutional strengthening and capacity building of 'South' partners. University policies and strategic

choices relating to education, research and societal impact are therefore informed and assessed by their 'development relevance'.

This indicator of 'development relevance' shapes funding structures, orients research practices and methodologies, evaluates the scientific value of academic work (incl. relevant study programs, research topics), the choice of partners and actors to collaborate with, the choice of countries and geographies relevant for research and university partnerships, etc.

In moving beyond the framework of 'development cooperation', the question arises as to what this would imply for the envisioned relationship between academic knowledge and society, and for the university policy frameworks and strategic choices that are informed by it. Discourses have for example increasingly moved away from 'problems of developing countries' towards 'global engagement', 'global challenges', and 'global development'. Underlying these discourses are also commitments towards more reciprocal, equitable and just collaborations, based on a 'partnership model'. Whose capacity building and development would be included in such a vision, in which ways, and what would be the indicators to measure and value them? On which levels should this inform university policies and strategic choices with respect to international partners, academic research, educational programs, and impact strategies?

Workplan

- Map and analyze the various university policy areas and strategic choices informed by 'development relevance'
- Identify the concrete implications and indicators of a partnership model based on reciprocity for these policies and strategic choices
- Identify the concrete implications and indicators of a partnership model based on equity and justice for these policies and strategic choices

3 NORTH-SOUTH @ HOME

In its integrated policy plan for internationalization, **Ghent University strives to maximize the range of international learning** opportunities for students, researchers and staff with the aim of creating committed global citizens with broad international and intercultural competences. This vision translates in policy frameworks around 'Internationalization @ Home', but also impacts on the recruitment of international researchers, staff and students, and a variety of other policy areas.

For the more specific dimension of 'North-South' cooperation, **the value attached to building such international and intercultural competences and promoting critical engagement with global challenges is growing**. Initiatives and policies at Ghent University have increasingly sought to sensitize students, academics and staff on global challenges in various ways: by including 'internationalization' into the strategic education objectives; via a new university-wide optional course on critical global engagement that is currently being prepared; ENLIGHT's new Global Engagement Module; the SDG-sessions, etc. Additionally, VLIR-UOS has increased attention for 'global citizenship education' in its policy and funding frameworks; and the VLIR-CRef interuniversity working group

'Belgium's Colonial Past' engaged in a comprehensive mapping of study programs and courses sensitive to colonial history and postcolonial perspectives.¹

Students, and teaching, research and administrative staff have also increasingly pointed at **specific needs and challenges** in building international and intercultural competences related to North-South dynamics. Prominent challenges for example exist in creating a supportive and ethical framework for international exchanges (internships, research for master thesis, studying abroad)² and for teaching and research staff to integrate global dimensions and North-South dynamics into study programs, academic disciplines and work fields. Also administrative staff sometimes struggle with a lack of background on specific international dynamics that impact on their work, and knowledge on who to turn to for tailored advice and support.

At the moment however, policy frameworks and visions on building international knowledge and competences specifically for North-South dynamics and cooperation seem to be **fragmented in different approaches and discourses**. 'Global citizenship education', sensitizing events and initiatives that raise awareness about the 'challenges of developing countries', the recent and increased calls by students for a 'decolonization of the curriculum', and the broader more established university-wide policy around 'Internationalization @ Home' all have relatively different starting points and priorities. Yet they all connect to the broader importance of Ghent University's policy plan that seeks to integrate international and intercultural competences in various institutional learning pathways.

Workplan

- Identify the needs and challenges to integrate international and intercultural competences in institutional learning, specifically for North-South dynamics and cooperation
- Map, analyze and integrate the different but often interacting visions and policies on such institutional learning
- Identify the levels on which such international and intercultural knowledge and competences can be strengthened and the indicators through which to measure them

¹ The working group also raised the request to discuss the option of organizing an interuniversity master program on decolonization.

² See also UCOS (2019). *Relevante stages voor het Globale Zuiden. Op weg naar een visie voor de 21^e eeuw*. Or in English: [UCOS \(2019\). *Meaningful North-South Student Mobility. A resource guide*](#).