



University of Antwerp

IOB | Institute of
Development Policy

POLICY PLAN 2021 – 2025

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In 2020, a renewed management agreement was concluded between the Flemish Community and the Institute of Development Policy and Management (IOB). As agreed, IOB drafted a new Policy Plan (in Dutch) in 2020.

*This document is the English translation of an excerpt of **IOB's Policy Plan 2021-2025**.*

In this extract, we focus on IOB's broader policy principles, but also on more concrete strategies in the fields of education, research, international collaboration and knowledge brokering.

1. Policy principles and objectives

In line with the previous policy plan, and in execution of its mission statement, IOB wants to maintain, renew and further expand its own niche in development studies¹.

As elaborated in our vision text and in the perspective of a critical contribution to Agenda 2030 of the Sustainable Development Goals, IOB wants to make a meaningful contribution to the realisation of a **just and sustainable world**. It wants to do this through **relevant and high-quality research and education**, innovative **global partnerships** and **strategic engagement in political decision-making processes** from the local to the global level.

The starting point remains that the realisation of a more just and sustainable world is subject to social debate and therefore requires socio-cultural-political-economic choices. The realisation of a more just and sustainable world is obviously a challenge for various actors, in the South and in the North, and a challenge that goes far beyond the traditional field of development actors. IOB joins this agenda from its own mandate and expertise. The academic challenge lies in providing insights and perspectives that can inform these choices and recognise and bridge or re-articulate possible contradictions. In this context, IOB is uniquely positioned as a bridge to and focus on the Global South; as an institute with a particular concern for the fair global distribution of 'costs' and 'benefits' from a South perspective and with a history of collaboration with academics in the Global South that allows for a concerted approach to current challenges.

In light of this, we cultivate '**mixed methods**' scientific approaches that attempt to involve "a plurality of philosophical paradigms, theoretical assumptions, methodological traditions, data collection and analysis techniques, personal understandings and value judgements..." (Green, 2007) in teaching, research and service delivery. As expressed in a Ghanaian (Ewe) proverb that states, "**Wisdom is like a baobab: no one individual is able to embrace it**".

Such an approach allows the development process to be understood as a relating and critical mutual questioning of different 'mental models' of relevant stakeholders in order to reach a deeper and more relevant (also mutual) understanding of challenges and solutions. This is also the right approach for IOB to take when it comes to the decolonisation of our ways of thinking, especially when these wrongly and mostly unconsciously pretend to represent universal rather than specific historical-cultural knowledge. Such thinking paradoxically undermines the productive potential of 'relating'.

IOB understands the development potential in a framework of **multi-level and multi-actor** governance that takes into account local, national and global dynamics. As an institute in the global North, we are well placed to map the connections between these different levels and also to actively function as a node within a global network and platform for academic cooperation and debate.

IOB intends to maintain a strong focus on the **less privileged, low-income countries (especially in Central Africa)**, where the agenda of equity and sustainability is a challenge all on its own and which suffer more than others do from the unequal balance of power in the world. With the expertise IOB has developed in these contexts in recent years, we believe we can add most value here.

¹ We are choosing to for now maintain the term 'development studies', but acknowledge that in the changing international context, it may be necessary to review this in the upcoming policy period (see below).

Given the increasingly global and connected nature of development challenges, IOB wants to use its expertise with academic activity and cooperation in the South to actively seek complementarity and cooperation with academics and actors with an agenda of justice and sustainability in the global **North**, if possible also with the participation of our Southern partners who are interested in this.

IOB also wants to remain the **learning organisation** that regularly questions the relevance and effectiveness of its own activities and renews its agendas and working methods when necessary. This is ensured by embedding university-wide mechanisms of monitoring and evaluation as well as regular external audits and by integrating these mechanisms into IOB's own policy processes.

Finally, we are also very much aware that the context in which our Institute operates – more than in the past decades – will change very rapidly and possibly radically. This means that we must continue to prepare ourselves, possibly in order to adapt our consolidated, positively appreciated practices and our current policy plans flexibly to the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. That is why, in the next policy period, we definitely want to take up the important recommendation of the audit committee to continue reflecting on **our role, our identity and our strategies in this changing and challenging context** and to do so by reflecting and updating the '**IOB DNA**' (core mission, competences, core values, ...).

This need is also motivated by the fact that a large part of the supporting staff of the institute was renewed fairly recently and should, in the next phase, be fully involved in policy implementation and renewal. (Note: The start of this exercise was planned as part of the preparation process of this policy plan, but could not take place because of the corona-related restrictions).

2. Education

As far as education is concerned, these are the policy principles for the period 2021-2024:

1. In line with the efforts made by IOB within the framework of the previous policy plan, the points for improvement resulting from the NVAO visit and positive evaluations, IOB wants to continue to expand our qualitative master's programmes and other educational initiatives based on research and service provision. IOB is a **learning organisation** that adjusts educational programmes based on internal processes of quality control set up by the University of Antwerp and external evaluations.
2. Given the positive evaluations by VLIR-UOS of the IOB Going Global (VLIR ICP/IF incremental funding) programmes and its own student surveys, IOB intends to continue the **IOB Going Global strategy** in which the **globalisation and decolonisation of our Master's programmes** play a central role. In the elaboration of IOB Going Global 2.0, IOB will further deepen the existing partnerships with partners in Nicaragua, Tanzania, DR Congo and the Philippines and possibly expand them to some other countries. In addition, the opportunity and desirability of jointly offering a broader educational portfolio, and in particular specific doctoral programmes, in the South will be investigated. The new phase of the VLIR UOS ICP/IF programme is expected to provide funding, but other sources will also be sought. In addition, it will be investigated whether **diversification of partnerships** is possible, both in terms of (lighter) forms of cooperation (e.g. platforms, internships) and in terms of type of

partners (e.g. with non-academic partners and via alumni). In the selection of new partnerships, opportunities will be actively sought to further institutionalise already existing collaborations of individual IOB staff members. In this way, the support for IOB Going Global within IOB is also increased, which contributes to sustainability. Platforms and 'Communities of Practice' (CoPs) can be a way to shape cooperation between the various South partners, something that will receive more attention within IOB Going Global 2.0. In order to create both academic and development impact, IOB will further valorise the **nexus between education - research - outreach**.

Central to all these education initiatives remains the connection with (joint) research and outreach. Synergies between the various instruments of cooperation within Going Global (mobility windows for students, joint research and 'twinning' with local students, co-creation of subjects, educational modules and summer/winter schools, Master's programmes, alumni working, etc.) will be strengthened.

3. IOB sees the challenges of the recent digitisation wave following the corona crisis as an opportunity to experiment further with **blended learning** and to think about **innovations in education**, both at IOB itself and with and among partners and IOB alumni. This can potentially also contribute to greater independence from existing VLIR-UOS grants (the VLIR-UOS grants and IF policy is currently being reworked), by attracting more self-funding students and actively applying for other grant channels (e.g. Erasmus Plus). The experiments with blended learning and other educational innovations will be closely monitored. Extra attention will be paid to safeguarding the **IOB DNA of intercultural exchange and networking** and to limiting possible exclusion mechanisms related to the already existing digital gap. Where necessary, IOB will take flanking measures, such as setting up a digital mentoring system. In order to more actively address the issue of 'widening access' in line with the SDG principle of '**leaving no one behind**', IOB will investigate the possibility of including additional criteria (e.g. social or ethnic origin, persons with disabilities, etc.) in grant selection.
4. IOB already developed an **extensive alumni cooperation**, organizing activities for alumni (and students) within eleven different alumni engagement domains (research, employability, recognition, outreach, professional development, ...) in the North, the South and online. In a next phase IOB aims to further **broaden** the alumni work – with the start-up of new alumni departments (departments in the North, DR Congo), a wider range of online activities and activities outside the core countries of IOB Going Global and involving alumni in IOB community building with students.
On the other hand, IOB aims to **deepen** alumni cooperation in which the valorisation of alumni expertise in strengthening IOB education and research (e.g. joint research, community of practice, ...) as well as supporting alumni in their role as 'change agents for development' is central. The alumni barometer research, a joint Global Minds research project with alumni as co-researchers, maps the contribution of IOB graduates to development in the different impact arenas.
5. The offer of a **high quality doctoral programme** in Development Studies will be continued, as well as the cooperation with the sister faculties Business and Economics (FBE) and Social Sciences (FSW) of the UAntwerpen. The possibilities of organising specific doctoral courses will be examined, possibly also in the framework of the renewed educational cooperation with partners in the South (see also point 2). Stimulating joint PhDs with universities in Belgium and abroad remains an important way to strengthen the IOB networks with (inter)national peers and partners and is in line with UAntwerpen's policy in this regard. Within these collaborations the quality and own identity of an IOB PhD in Development

Studies is preserved, among others by means of the recently explicated criteria in the **note "PhD in Development Studies at IOB"**. This note was added to the IOB doctoral regulations and the "IOB roadmap doctorate". The criteria will be monitored by the IOB doctoral committee when assessing a doctoral application, as well as by the doctoral jury when following the doctoral track.

6. IOB will continue to make efforts to strengthen the **international and South dimension within UAntwerpen** in order to reinforce our university as a global academic development actor and IOB as one of the active partners in this, in line with the current policy statement of the rector. This is achieved by, among other things, the broadening of the course Global Justice, the course Debating Development in cooperation with the University Foundation for Development Cooperation (USOS), the delivery of courses in various faculties and IOB engagement in USOS, but also through a policy of **inter-faculty research cooperation** (e.g. Methusalem Project AIPRIL). Methusalem project AIPRIL FSW-IOB-FLW, TT-ZAPBOF research professor FRECH/IOB, TT-ZAPBOF History/IOB 'Contemporary history of Central Africa', the Global Minds 'alumni barometer research', new BOF GOA projects on 'Green Bonds Urban Development',...) and through the active role that IOB takes in **the renewed internationalisation policy of the UAntwerpen**.

3. Research and Service Delivery

IOB wants to **further consolidate its position as an international player** in the field of development studies. In the coming policy period, this will be done by further developing and updating the current research plan, with one central research agenda elaborated within the three renewed research lines.

IOB also seeks to sustainably consolidate its research productivity by further pursuing a **'sustainable excellence' policy**, with more emphasis on quality, relevance and impact instead of the excessive pursuit of purely quantitative output. This is made concrete, among other things, by assigning different publication points to A, B and C publications in the publication evaluation matrix; by lowering the quantitative criteria for external funding; and by clarifying the evaluation criteria for internal and external services. The latter are now not only more explicitly mentioned, but also linked to institutional objectives of societal service delivery.

These institutional objectives of societal service delivery are, among others, aimed at the further development of **long-term co-operation with both North and South partners**, whereby the aim is to achieve an 'embedded IOB' in networks and/or platforms for research and service provision. For the partners in the South, the aim is to further deepen the already institutionally structured cooperation with existing long-term partners, but also to explore – in consultation with these partners – broadening. As far as the Northern partners are concerned, we are looking for added value through a more institutionally directed cooperation with a few priority partners, compared to the current decentralised and mainly ad-hoc process with a multitude of Northern partners. A strategic direction (in a rapidly evolving and competitive landscape) of the Northern partnerships would – according to the audit of the Flemish Community (October 2019) – increase the visibility of IOB, and lead to both a greater societal and academic impact.

The (institutional) networks with Southern partners allow for further reflection – and **in dialogue – on the necessary decolonisation** of institutions such as IOB in the changing global context, and also ties in with (but is not limited to) the debate on the colonial past and its repercussions. This reflection will be fed, among others, by the series of debates 'Debating Development', which in the academic year 2020-21 will be entirely devoted to the academic and societal debate on decolonisation. This will also be done in cooperation with the University Foundation for Development Cooperation (USOS) of UAntwerpen, which offers the possibility to connect to activities and reflections with the broader group of students and staff at the university. It is also a theme of the UAntwerpen expert group on 'Global Engagement'. In time, the aim is to achieve more far-reaching co-creation of research and services between IOB and its various partners in the South. Up to now, this co-creation has almost always been driven by IOB in bilateral relations with individual South partners and usually focused on specific South themes.

In the coming policy period, we will strive for a **multilateral network or platform approach** in both agenda-setting and joint implementation of research, as well as for broadening the cooperation beyond specific local themes to global, transversal or possibly even specific – for our Southern partners – Northern themes. Within GLAC, a platform dynamic is already in place, actively seeking to connect and put into dialogue Northern and Southern expertise in an equal manner. Involving our Southern partners in the development of the 2022-2026 research plan will be an additional step in this process.

Also nourished by its broader research agenda and specifically from these international partner dynamics, IOB continues to profile itself as an **'embedded knowledge broker' in the Flemish-Belgian and European context**, through the co-creation of knowledge with other relevant stakeholders on the (inter)national plane, as the knowledge centre *par excellence* for development issues in general, and more specifically as knowledge centre and knowledge broker towards the actors of Flemish, Belgian, and European development cooperation and of Belgian and European foreign policy.

In line with this, IOB also wants to profile itself more strongly within the University of Antwerp and actively participate in the new **'Global Minds programme'** (VLIR-UOS funding) that strives for a more active role of the University of Antwerp as a partly South-inspired and informed academic actor for innovative international cooperation for global justice and sustainability. IOB also actively participates in the university-wide expert group that advises the rector on the policy regarding 'Cooperation with the South and Global Engagement'. The research embedding in the University of Antwerp is further nourished by other trans-faculty research initiatives (e.g. Methusalem project, TT-ZAPBOF 'Sustainable Development' with the Faculty of Law and 'Contemporary History of Africa' with History, BOF GOA project proposals, etc.).

In order to fulfil its role as knowledge broker, IOB continues to work on **an active research communication strategy**. This will be determined with the help of the recently recruited additional ATP support, in order to increase the visibility of the research agenda and strengthen the generated output, outreach and impact, both at national and international level. The broad outlines of the communication strategy are set centrally, and translated into outreach evaluation criteria. In order to develop the strategy, we will opt for a pragmatic, bottom-up approach, within the framework of the generic outreach criteria. Existing communication channels will be analysed, reinforced where necessary and used as efficiently as possible. Synergy with other IOB communication (especially alumni and education) and with networks inside and outside UAntwerpen will be further pursued. In the short term, the generic communication and outreach strategy will be consolidated in an institutional policy document 'societal service delivery'.

Finally, IOB will continue to work on its own **branding as an institute**. The focus on justice and sustainable development on the one hand, and on the other a systematic emphasis on the added value of combining various disciplines, perspectives and points of departure in research (the so-called 'mixed methods' approach, Green, 2007), with the cultivation of specific attention and space for perspectives from the Global South, form the red thread for this branding. Our strong (non-exclusive) focus on and historical expertise in the countries of Central Africa also remains an important element of our profiling.

4. South policy and internationalisation

IOB has a long tradition of often structural long-term, but also more ad hoc, cooperation with academic (and sometimes non-academic) partners in the Global South. IOB will continue the incentive policy to stimulate South-South cooperation for academic staff. After all, we remain strongly convinced of the **importance of these collaborative relationships** for the relevance and continued added value of IOB, particularly in the changing international context in which challenges such as hunger, poverty, welfare, participation and citizenship, security, climate change and environmental sustainability are becoming more global and can no longer be considered a separate South issue. As explained elsewhere in this policy plan, our structural South cooperation in particular offers additional opportunities for co-creation in education, research and service delivery to tackle this agenda together in a truly global and decolonised way. The willingness to have our often historically-culturally situated academic principles and ways of thinking questioned is a necessary and productive condition for a North institute to continue to participate in a correct manner in the international debate in the future, based on our situated positions and convictions.

A specific focus of IOB in this respect is the **attention to Central Africa**. IOB has a unique concentration of expertise on the region and an excellent network of contacts at its disposal. That is why we continue to invest in long-term partnerships, for the time being with UCB-Bukavu and possibly with some new partners, and in the GLAC platform, which actively connects Northern and Southern expertise on the region and aims to further narrow the gap between Northern and Southern expertise in the field of Africa studies. The yearbooks "Annuaire des Grands Lacs" and "Conjonctures congolaises", merged since 2018 as "Conjonctures de l'Afrique centrale" and published in cooperation with the AfricaMuseum and the Université Catholique de Louvain, are strategic tools to further develop this platform. The cooperation with the international non-profit organisation E-CA-CRE-AC (Belgian Reference Centre for Expertise on Central Africa) also creates the possibility of establishing new contacts with policy makers, civil society organisations and private actors in Belgium and Central Africa by organising monthly "policy talks" in the Federal Parliament. IOB also wants to focus on the organisation of workshops and conferences in the region, whether or not in cooperation with other partners.

The continued relevance and sustainability of our South cooperation, especially in the perspective of the challenges mentioned above, requires a **further clarification and deepening of our partner relations**. We acknowledge that the notion of South partnerships in itself risks becoming a new buzz word of the development discourse (also at IOB) and that elaborating and consolidating equal, 'decolonial' academic partnerships in a context of historical and current inequalities is not an easy

task. Although there is room for further expansion of our South cooperation, the total IOB capacity for cooperation in the South is inevitably limited, and not all partners have sufficient available capacity or interest in the cooperation we are seeking. As indicated in the audit, choices have to be made.

Cooperation with the South is also inevitably a 'work in progress' – but one for which a real 'progress' towards equivalence is an essential condition for our credibility and lasting effectiveness in the cooperation process. For that reason, IOB will continue the reflection and consultation process already initiated, internally and with a selection of current partners in the South, in order to arrive at a **supported clarification of our cooperation with the South**. This will also allow this cooperation to be differentiated in terms of types of cooperation relationships – long-term partners, networks, platform, alumni operation, etc. – and in terms of the way in which it can be implemented. Inspired by similar codes of conduct (e.g., within the European Horizon 2020 programme), we will at the same time work on an **explicit code of conduct** for all our academic relations with – almost by definition – weaker partners in the South and on a mechanism to monitor and evaluate the application of this code.

A permanent point of attention, and an explicit point for improvement within the follow-up process of the audit and also mentioned in the audit of the Flemish Community, concerns the **internationalisation and diversification of the IOB staff**. For a long time, IOB has been making a serious effort to attract more foreign staff at all levels. This policy has been very successful on the AAP and BAP levels, but not on the ZAP and ATP. At the crucial ZAP level, the strict, objectified (but perhaps also too Western/Anglo-Saxon oriented) selection criteria and the internationally comparatively less interesting Flemish academic statute, among other things, did not allow us to internationalise the staff for the time being. For future ZAP vacancies, IOB will continue to look for good international candidates, but in the meantime it is strongly committed to deepening the **international South cooperation** as a partial alternative for the internationalisation of the staff 'at home'. Besides the many initiatives already described, the instrument of the **'Scholars in Residence'** (SIR), with priority for researchers from the South, will be consolidated. Given the specific language and other competences, the possibilities for internationalisation of the ATP are more limited anyway, but in the future it will be possible to recruit from the diversity of the city of Antwerp and its surroundings.

5. North policy and internationalisation

IOB already cooperates intensively with a multitude of universities and centres in the Global North. So far, these have largely been the result of individual initiatives and are usually not (yet) embedded in a broader institutional strategy, or not explicitly so. During the next policy period, we want to actively address the audit's recommendation that 'it seems desirable for IOB to make clear choices in this respect (in a rapidly evolving and competitive landscape) and determine to what extent a more strategic management of these Belgian and international networks can strengthen IOB's branding and outreach'. This means that it will be **further investigated** if and where more structural and explicit partnerships can contribute positively to the objectives of IOB. It will also be investigated where existing, stable partnerships can be made **more visible**. It is, however, not the intention to

trap all individual and more pragmatic cooperation initiatives within a collective, institutional straitjacket.

As indicated elsewhere in this policy plan, a first, nearby and priority North partner within social work is our home university, the **University of Antwerp**, where IOB wishes to play an important role in strengthening the role of the UA as a global development actor within the changing global society and within which IOB wishes to develop an important specific contribution as a bridge to the South (see also above). Also for other dimensions of our societal service delivery, we will examine where added value can be created by expanding or making more visible structural Northern collaborations, such as the collaboration with other Belgian universities within E-CA-CRE-AC or the interaction with the European Microfinance Platform (e-MFP) and the European Centre for Microfinance Research (CERMI).

Also within our IOB Going Global 2.0. education strategy, **additional or alternative opportunities** will be explored by deepening cooperation with like-minded European or other international 'North' universities (e.g. within an Erasmus Plus initiative or international doctoral cooperation). A similar exercise will be included in the elaboration of the new research plan 2022-2027.

6. Timing

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
General policy:					
Reflection DNA IOB & future strategy	X	X	X		
Reflection decolonisation IOB	X	X			
South policy: concept and strategy	X				
Code of conduct South relations		X			
North policy: concept and strategy	X	X	X		
Education:					
IOB Going Global 2.0	X	X	X	X	X
Digitisation/blended learning	X	X			
Alumni barometer survey	X				
South dimension UAntwerpen	X	X	X	X	X
Research:					
Drawing up a research policy plan 2022-2026	X				
Drawing up a research policy plan 2022-2026			X		
Expansion of platform or network approach	X	X	X	X	X
Service delivery/Outreach:					
Consolidate institutional outreach policy	X				
Investigate possibility of international benchmark for social work		X	X		