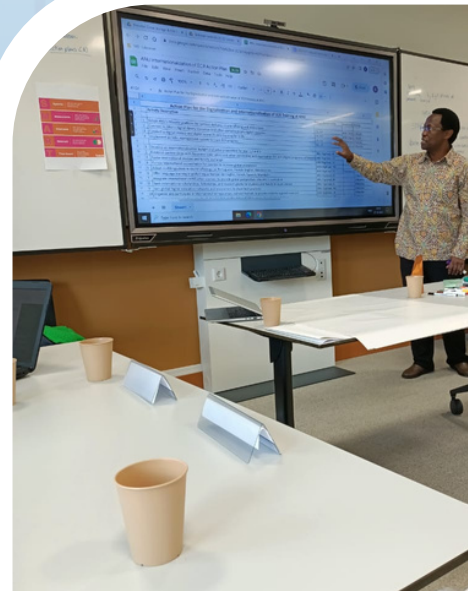




# Report of DigiGrad Project Maastricht Workshop

25-27 October 2023



# Highlights of the activities of the Benchmarking Meeting

25–27 October 2023 at Maastricht University

## Introduction:

The Internationalization and Digitalization of Graduate Training and Research for the Attainment of African Regional and Global Development (DigiGrad) project covers six work packages. In the following report that covers work package two (2) on Capacity building for digitalisation and internationalisation, we present information on activities that partner institution representatives participated in during a benchmarking visit to Europe at Maastricht University in October 2023.

African partner institutions were from Burundi, Ghana, Kenya, and South Sudan. The European host-partner institutions were the University of Maastricht (Netherlands), UCLL (Belgium), the Extra Madura (Spain), and Sapienza (Italy) universities. The three-day event was co-ordinated by Karin Hindrix (University College Leuven Limburg, Belgium), Deelman and Hans (University of Maastricht).

## 25th October 2023 – Wednesday – Inspiring and Learning

The first day, the 25th of October 2023, was packed with activities. It began with the registration of participants before a welcome address by Han Aarts and Karine Hindrix. Their presentations covered a contextualisation of the activities that led to the visit. These included a self-assessment questionnaire administered to each African partner institution in the project and the interview sessions conducted in line with the guidance of work package two.

Specific but focused presentations followed seamlessly after that. The first of these was by Karine Hendrix, who gave a synopsis of the results of the self-assessment analysis and terminology. This was followed by Han's and James Jowi's (ANIE) presentation on 'How to develop Policy and strategy for impact, a dialogue'. Notably, this presentation urged that policy ought to include a definition of internationalization that was directly aligned with an institution's mission and vision and from this focus, map out the scope and level of operation desired.

Before a session on reflections of the morning session presentations, an exemplification of an institution's internationalization programme was presented by Dr Alfonso Marzal Reynolds of the University of Extrema Dura in Spain. The focus of his presentation was on 'Internationalization and research'. This presentation clearly showed the centrality of internationalisation of education at the Spanish institution and the possible lessons the African partner universities in the DigiGrad project could learn from the example.

DIGIGRAD partners were asked to create a poster about their contexts: challenges and opportunities concerning internationalisation in general and for ECR training specifically. These posters will be the basis for learning from each other by sharing strengths and challenges in their institutional context.

Presentation Dr Mindel van de Laar (UNU Merit, Maastricht University) + Dr Kingsley Ofusu-Ampong (online) & possibly Dr Eyole (online)

The Community of Learning for Africa project (COLA) was developed to assess the needs for research and feedback support of researchers and PhD fellows in Africa. The project aims to create a network and platform with services to be offered to the African research communities interested in topics similar to those UNU-MERIT / MGSOG are working on.

In this presentation, Dr Mindel was able to take the participants through the details of the project and, in addition, invited a beneficiary from Africa, Dr Kingsley Ofusu-Ampong, who joined online to share his experiences.

Only two partner institutions presented posters in the last session of the day - Laweh University College and the University of Cape Coast. It was agreed that the remaining institutions would present their posters the following day.

## 26th 2023 Thursday – Inspiring & Learning

The morning session of this day saw four partner institutions: the University of Juba, Moi University, the University of Upper Nile, and Bujumbura International University



*DigiGrad Africa Project participants during the poster presentations*

After the coffee break, Dr Ingrid Leijts of Maastricht University presented the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences (FHML) hybrid international PhD student program. In addition, Dr Marlot Kruisbrink shared information on the obligatory online training for PhD students. She explained that three mandatory courses – Open Science, Ethics and Science Communication– had to be studied by all students in the Ph D programme.

Prof. Juma Shabani of the University of Burundi presented a poster piece for his institution after Dr Marlot's presentation.

Before Dr Tobias Frenssen, Head of the Research Center of Research and Expertise – Education and Development at the UCLL made a presentation on Internationalization and research, after the lunch break, Dr Elisa Gigliarelli of Università de Roma: La Sapienza made a presentation on Mapping Strategies for Internationalisation and Digitalisation. In her presentation, it was clear that at her institution the development of specific strategies on internationalization and digitalization were necessary. Strategies were both at the university-wide and operational levels. While internationalization strategies covered programmes, student management and research support, the digitalization strategy involved infrastructure, accessibility, and teaching levels.

At the UCLL, Dr. Frassen showed that staff expertise in applied sciences had enabled the Research Centre to innovate and create more opportunities for creativity in different fields. Among the points of interest at the Centre were the activities of the EUDRES project that encouraged entrepreneurial ventures.

Lyan Ploumen, Director of International Office SBE at the University of Maastricht, made a presentation on the approach adopted by the school – problem-based learning. The programme encourages groups of 15 students each, where interculturality is emphasized in practice.

Jan Hupkens, a senior policy advisor on Internationalisation at the University of Maastricht, concluded the day's presentations by focusing on developing internationalisation strategies using his institution's example. His presentation showed that when internationalisation is used as an instrument, quality is enhanced, the classroom is made internationalised, study abroad is encouraged, and there is access to complementary academic expertise. Jan also exemplified the structure of the internationalisation at UM, such as the SBI and OPI. While the former dealt with the discussion of policies, the latter dwelt on the operationalisation of the guidelines. He also gave an example of the Internationalization Plan at UM for 2022–2024. This plan had strategic goals and examples of priority actions, such as policies for engagement and partnership.

The third and final day for the benchmarking exercise started with a reflection on day two, the previous day's input, and the work on partner institutions' action plans. From the action plans by ANU, UUN, and UOJ, it was observed that there was a need to make the activities more specific – they needed to identify concrete actions to be taken.

The partners discussed what they had learned for their action plans and how to move further and finalise them. We decided to finalise them by 13th November. At the follow-up meeting on the 10th of November, partners will get together to discuss the follow-up in their institution and receive/give more peer feedback.

Together, we define training needs for the WP2.

The list of ideas and needs can be found here:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gW4ujHDzSIMDQjr1C75UEpwve7nydYZhy6ZEwHMTt3k/edit?usp=drive\\_web&oid=104834810396316303861n](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gW4ujHDzSIMDQjr1C75UEpwve7nydYZhy6ZEwHMTt3k/edit?usp=drive_web&oid=104834810396316303861n)



Participants pose for a group photo