

Format for Annual Progress Report TEAM projects

1 General information

Project code:	Project title:
ET2022TEA513A103	Storytelling and Young People Coping with Crisis: Oral Narratives and Crisis Management in Kenya and Ethiopia
Summary of progress made:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strong continuation of research exchange at interuniversity level, involving all 4 partners > new knowledge + South-South-North-North co-operation - Successful people's capacity building: Postdoc coordinator and 2 Team PhDs. Further 3 PhDs are Core Team members, with another PhD joining in October 2025. In total a 4 further PhD-candidates as well as 4 MA-graduates benefitted from OL4D-Hubs (at Jimma as well as Nairobi). - Regular OL4D-hub meetings as well as Ph.D. seminar and frequent exchange visits to Ghent University of all members. - Annual Meeting: highly fruitful platform for contact and exchange. - Outreach to schools and theatre/musical organisations with storytelling and workshops (more than 10 activities this year: high school students, BA-students, teachers, elders, and the general public in Ghent, Jimma, Nekemte, Addis, Nairobi, Kwale). - Stakeholders' meetings with participation of primary & high schools, universities, community elders, NGOs, artists. - Media outreach and networking. 	

2 Project strategy

What have you achieved? Explain how your project is on its way to reach the outcomes that were described in your proposal.

For final year reporting: Elaborate to what extent the outcomes have been achieved. Describe how the project has contributed to the LNOB (incl. gender equality), environmental sustainability, and interconnectedness principles.

The overall aims of this project are:

1) (re-)valuing the potential of popular storytelling in preventing and dealing with current crisis situations, by 2) (re)connecting adolescent audiences with oral literatures, and 3) developing an educational tool for an Oral Literature for Development-approach in narrative genres.

The third year has contributed to all 3 aims. We focused on workshops and performances in 7 locations (Addis, Jimma, Nekemte, Nairobi, Kwale, Ghent, Freetown), bringing adolescents and elderly performers together. These occasions led to debates on gender relations, ecological crisis, class distinctions, and other important societally-relevant issues. Young people also started taking pride again in performing oral stories, and in 2 locations in Ethiopia the students took to organising a group to collect stories themselves and turn these in theatre plays. The Kwale Arts Troupe in Kenya already existent for 25 years, received new impetus and new tools from our project. The Team members are in the process of realising a book edition on narratives and visuals, which will greatly contribute to the third aim of developing educational tools for teachers/trainers.

Research progress of the students involved is fine, and our Annual Meeting, with 17 participants from the three countries, was a great success.

What have you done? Report on the progress you have made or setbacks you have encountered regarding the intermediate changes (and the anticipated results) set out in your proposal. Explain the key results of the past year, referring to the underlying deliverables.

For final year reporting: please include a retrospective on the entire project period.

- *We finished purchasing **project materials** (and now hope and pray nothing breaks down).*
- ***Postdoc tasks:** The postdoc is taking up the various tasks, especially functioning in the Nairobi context. He completed a research stay at UGent for a month in March 2025 as planned.*
- ***Research progress:** The trajectories of the PhDs are by no means easy, but the Team-funded as well as the externally-funded Team members pursuing their PhD (5 in total) are all doing very well. The PhDs were successful in applying for funding for research stays (4 Global Minds and Covid-extension bursaries) and attending international conferences (2 bursaries, CWO and FWO). We look forward to another PhD starting in October 2025.*

***Research supervision and exchange:** The visits of the PhDs and the postdoc proved beneficial for their projects as they spent time on literature review, and discussion with the UGent promotor. Coaching continued at their home institute with the South promoters. With shared reading and a PhD-seminar they are well-embedded.*
- ***OL4D-Hub meetings at JU and UoN:** The hub meetings for the 2 branches offered a platform for discussing ongoing research (Staff, Postdoc, PhDs and a new female MA-student). Furthermore there was the 3rd Annual Meeting in Diani/Kwale, Kenya (see doc x), during which we explored the relations between tangible and intangible heritage, exchanged on*

workshop experiences, held a Community Talk with VUir-Uos, received a visit of the Belgian consul, discussed all PhD-projects, and offered practical guidelines for the book edition.

- **Progress on databases on oral literatures:** For Oromo, Gikuyu and Digo we continue to develop the databases. These 3 databases take more time than anticipated and, given that we focused on the Team book edition, there was little time to complete them. We have continued, however, little by little, and hope to publish them online next year.
- **Managing our website and other media:** The website and Facebook page remain lively instruments to make announcements and offer info on project aims, Team membership, project activities, video's, web-publications and other output: <https://www.ol4d.ugent.be/> and <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61566228362688>. In various instances we participated in media outlets and other fora to talk about our experiences with the OL4D approach.
- **Methods and training:** An online course on visuals was offered by Gerti Wouters from Ho-West. During the Annual Meeting trainings were held on heritage and exhibition; photography; transcription/translation; workshop experiences. Methods were discussed individually with each PhD of the Team by the promotors, South as well as North.
- The Postdoc and several of the Jimma PhDs (who are all lecturers at their university) are **integrating the OL4D-approach into their teaching**, focusing on ecological crisis, gender, and inclusion in oral literary genres in BA- as well as MA-courses.
- **Exchange between the partner institutes:** Contact between the 4 participating HEI's was lively and fruitful. Apart from frequent online meetings, the UGent promotor visited Kenya in May 2025; The PhD-candidates visited UGent throughout the year; The Postdoc and JU-promotor Teshome Mossissa came to UGent in March 2025. And we all gathered during the Annual Meeting in May. Partnership between the universities is a reality by now.
- **Activities in all 5 domains:** We have been active during performances/workshops as well as in PhD-research (papers, publications) in all 5 domains:
 - 1) Gendered crisis; 2) Othering and exclusion; 3) Poverty; 4) Disease; 5) Ecological crisis.
- Our initiatives in terms of **outreach** are in full swing.
 - We organised storytelling **performances and workshops** involving of BA-students (and some MA-students) at UGent, Jimma and Nairobi, high schools in Addis Abeba, Jimma and Nekemte, market places and high schools in Kwale county, and with a student theatre group in Freetown, Sierra Leone (more than 10 activities). The performances reach a wide audience through our web-publications, and the experiences will also be processed in the book chapters for our planned edition. So far these initiatives are taking place at particular schools and universities, on particular market places. We notice that other schools and groups of young people in the region are inspired by this example and also start integrating oral literatures as a tool for reflection. North promotor Inge Brinkman visited Sierra Leone in January 2025, the home country of choreographer Harold George who has been involved in several workshops (at UGent). We have introduced the OL4D-approach in West-Africa, working with an already existing student theatre group (led by Dr. Fatou Taqui of the University of Sierra Leone). The take-up was promising and we are exploring the possibilities for furthering the contact through a MoU.
 - We also had meetings with various **stakeholders** at once, furthering interaction between the various actors. Especially in Jimma and Nekemte these were highly successful, as they were attended by a large number of people, as representatives of many different organisations: primary and secondary school management and teachers, community elders, NGO's working with adolescents, theatre groups, and staff and students of JU. In

Nekemte a committee comprising representatives from the university, secondary schools, artists, and elders was established to ensure sustainability. It was agreed that a follow-up meeting would be held in three months with JU OL4D Hub members to review and monitor progress.

- **Paper presentations and (web-)publications:**

- *This past third year we focused as a Team on the preparation of an **edited volume on oral narratives and visuals**. This will be crucial in our goal of preparing educational tools, as they book will contain 11 folktales and hands-on guidance for educational practitioners to organise workshops with youth. The book will be have some 50 strong and colourful illustrations, hence also rendering the stories attractive in new ways to a youthful audience. The book is about 75% ready and we are currently discussing the publication possibilities with Brill-De Gruyter Studium series for Open Access.*
- *Another 2 A-1 articles were co-authored by PhDs; A joint article by the promotor and postdoc is in print; Two more publications by the UGent promotor in a journal were accepted; 2 papers were presented by PhD at international conferences.*

In terms of publications and paper presentations we are hence ahead of schedule, and it is envisaged that research output will become a strong component of our project.

3 Organisation

In case of any changes in the project team, please report on these changes in the module 'learning and steering'. In the near future, VLIR-UOS will enable projects to update their team composition in the online project tool.

4 Stakeholder management and coherence

Describe how you have engaged with key stakeholders during the past year. What was the result?

- One female **MA-student** was involved in the OL4D-Hub branch at UoN, who indicated having benefited greatly from the input. While we aim to have 2 male and 2 female MA students per branch next year, this proves difficult as for example there were no MA-students at all at JU.
- 2 **PhD students** are financially supported by the project; Intellectual exchange and support extends to a total of 5 PhD students. Through the hubs we are currently reaching another 2 PhDs. We regard this as successful, especially as the PhD-candidates indicate benefitting enormously from the input, feedback, exchange, and networking.
- **University staff:** In the 2 OL4D-Hub branches, staff is exchanging on the subject of Oral Literature for Development. This concerns core Team members, but also other staff. Through the joint meetings and the Annual Meeting, the staff also exchanges at a interuniversity level.
- **Wider university environment:** We have moved the exchange beyond the OL4D Hub (e.g. public lectures, paper presentation, conference attendance, etc) and lecturers are integrating the OL4D-approach in their teaching. In courses in literature and performing Arts, the uptake of the OL4D approach is taking shape, especially in the planning for next year. Furthermore, Team members who are offering courses are **integrating the OL4D-approach into their teaching**, at BA- as well as MA-level.

- **NGOs:** Various NGOs both in Ethiopia and Kenya participated in stakeholders meetings. They show interest in working with the video's and oral artists.
- **Artists:** Also this year we attended a performance during our Annual Meeting, with Kwale Arts Troupe that revised their policy in important respect through our input: language policy, a stronger emphasis on reflection on societal crisis situations in the 5 domains are the result. The same holds for the Hachalu Hundessa Music School in Nekemte and students of the Performing Arts Department at Jimma University. They have sharply increased their societal outreach: firstly as they more strongly interact with elders who are known to be oral artists, and, secondly, as they reach out to young people for awareness creation, societal debate, and reflection. Interactions between Theatrical Arts Department of Jimma University and Hachalu Hundessa Music School of Wollega University have increased.
- **Teachers & trainers:** The visits of Teshome Mossissa to schools and organisations in Jimma, Addis Ababa and Nekemte resulted in media contact, various performances and workshops at high schools.
- **General audience:** This year, there were some activities that included members of the general public, especially the web-publications, the public performances of Kwale Arts Troupe on market squares and video-screening in schools in Ethiopia.
- **Adolescents:** BA-students and high school students benefitted from the programme and were enthusiastic. We are in the process of editing a book on our experiences with lively folktales that will speak to young people.
- **Media:** Contacts with the media and other fora continued. The stakeholders' meetings were reported on Jimma University's website. In Ethiopia the project was covered by regional and national radio stations Our website and Facebook are being updated and receive good stats in terms of visitors.

Explain how you have collaborated with other organisations? What was the result? Describe active linkages with other (Belgian) development actors, and other VLIR-UOS funded activities.

- 1) **BantUGent** (<https://www.bantugent.ugent.be/>): Most Team members have been engaged in various activities from the BantUGent research platform of the African Studies section at Ghent University. Many are (associate) members and have attended activities of this group as well as exchanging on transcription of data, linguistic aspects of our research and more theoretical issues such as language hierarchies and conceptual history. Some of the Team members presented their work during the BantUGent meetings.
- 2) **Narmesh** (<https://narmesh.ugent.be/>): The Narmesh group at Ghent University focuses on narrative and ecology, hence directly relating to one of the domains in our project. With one of the PhD student contacts are frequent.
- 3) **GAP** (<https://www.africapplatform.ugent.be/>): interaction with the UGent Africa-platform is frequent and fruitful.
- 4) **VLIR-UOS Nascere**: The synergy with the Nascere-funded PhD candidates is clear: both Megersa Regassa and Milkessa Edae are working on their Nascere-funded PhD projects while at the same time being active members of the OL4D-Team project.
- 5) The research projects led by Vicky Van Bockhaven, **AfriSurge** (<https://research.flw.ugent.be/en/projects/afrisurge-transformative-heritage-politics-peacebuilding->

[and-digital-restitution-cultural](#)) and **CongoLines** (<https://research.flw.ugent.be/en/projects/congolines-inscribing-lines-weaving-threads-congolese-colonial-paintings-images-and-objects>) at the African Studies section at Ghent University both deal with art history from the perspective of (re-)connection. The exchange on the intersections between tangible and intangible heritage is lively and all involved benefit from the co-operation between the members of these projects. Prof. Van Bockhaven joined our Annual Meeting in Kenya and we discussed the interactions between tangible and intangible heritage, exhibitions, etc.

- 6) **Université de l'Uélé, Isiro, DR-Congo**: The cooperation mentioned under 5) continues until today as we are in touch with PhD-candidates from this university.
- 7) **Université Notre Dame de Tshumbe, Tshumbe, Sankuru Province, DR-Congo** : In September 2024, the UGent promotor visited UniTshu, together with Maud Devos (UGent, AfricaMuseum) and Sarah O'Neill (ULB & AfricaMuseum). So far, the project envisaged by colleague Maud Devos has not secured funding, putting practical cooperation on hold.
- 8) Following the collaboration with Vicky Van Bockhaven mentioned under 5), we set up a Global Minds funded Short Training Programme, entitled: '**Narratives and Objects in a Museal Oral Ecolit-Lab: Ecological Sustainability in East-African Literary scholarship and UGent Curricula**'. In March 2025 both Teshome Mossissa and James Wachira offered activities in this realm. Colleague Van Bockhaven has been on sick-leave (for nearly a year) and so we received another year to realise our exhibition on narratives and objects.
- 9) **University of Sierra Leone, Freetown, Sierra Leone** : In January 2025 the UGent promotor visited USL where she offered a public lecture on the OL4D approach and held various workshops. There was widespread interest, also in the direction of a MoU (the USL vice-chancellor expressly supported this), but actions necessary to further the process have as yet not to be taken by the partner.

Please see our Facebookpage (<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61566228362688>) , and our website <https://www.ol4d.ugent.be/> .

Under the video/web-publication- and the project activities-section you will find project materials. And this is a nice reel on our Team members: [Members – Oral Literature for Development' \(OL4D\)](#)

Next year we look forward to sending you a link to our published book edition by the Team members.