



# Community of Learning for Africa (CoLA)

Africa-Europe Conference on Higher Education Collaboration, 25 October 2019, Brussels

„Investing in people, by investing in higher education and skills in Africa“

Mindel van de Laar<sup>A</sup>, Cristina Mancigotti<sup>B</sup>

<sup>A, B</sup> Maastricht University, Maastricht Graduate School of Governance/UNU-MERIT

## Description

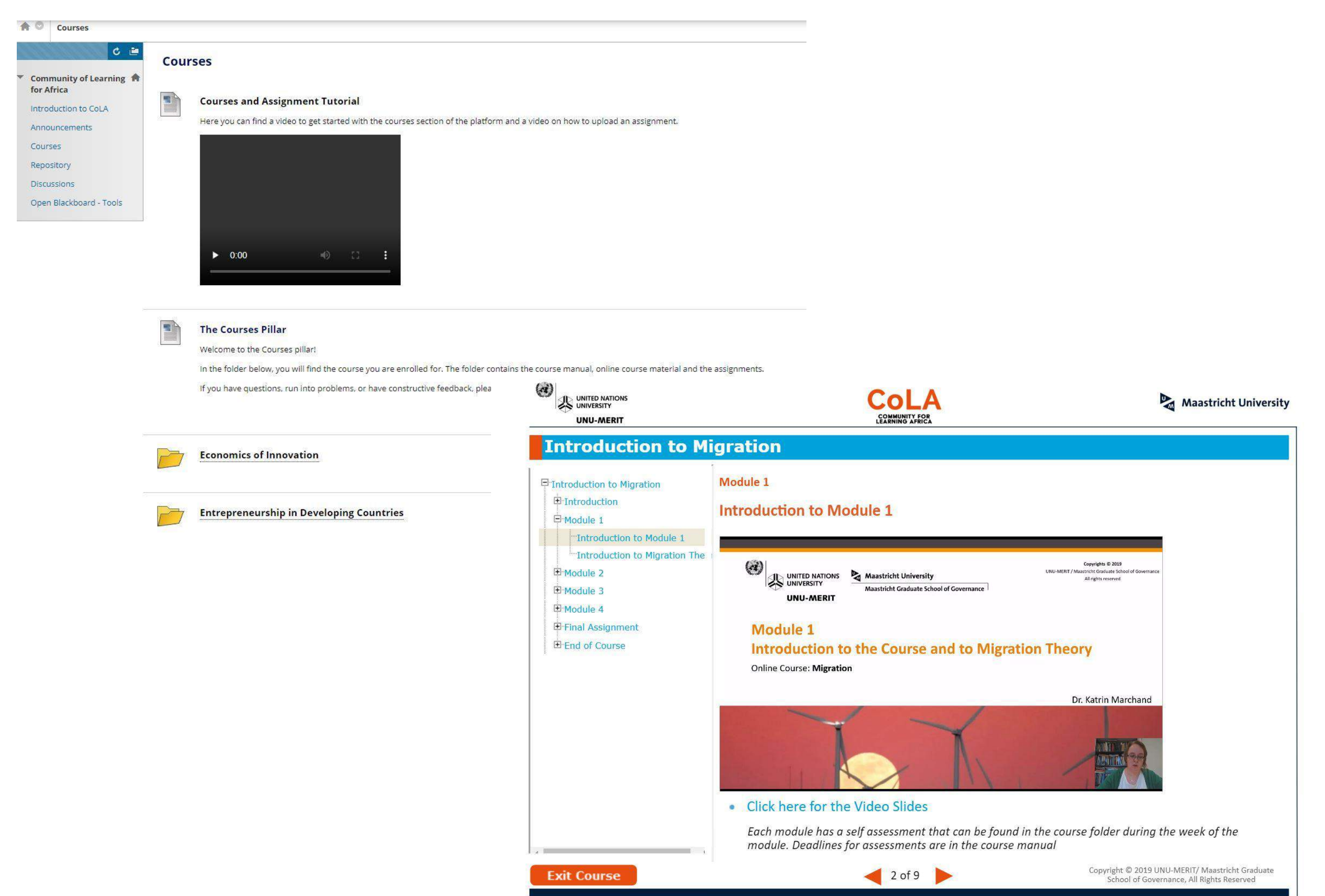
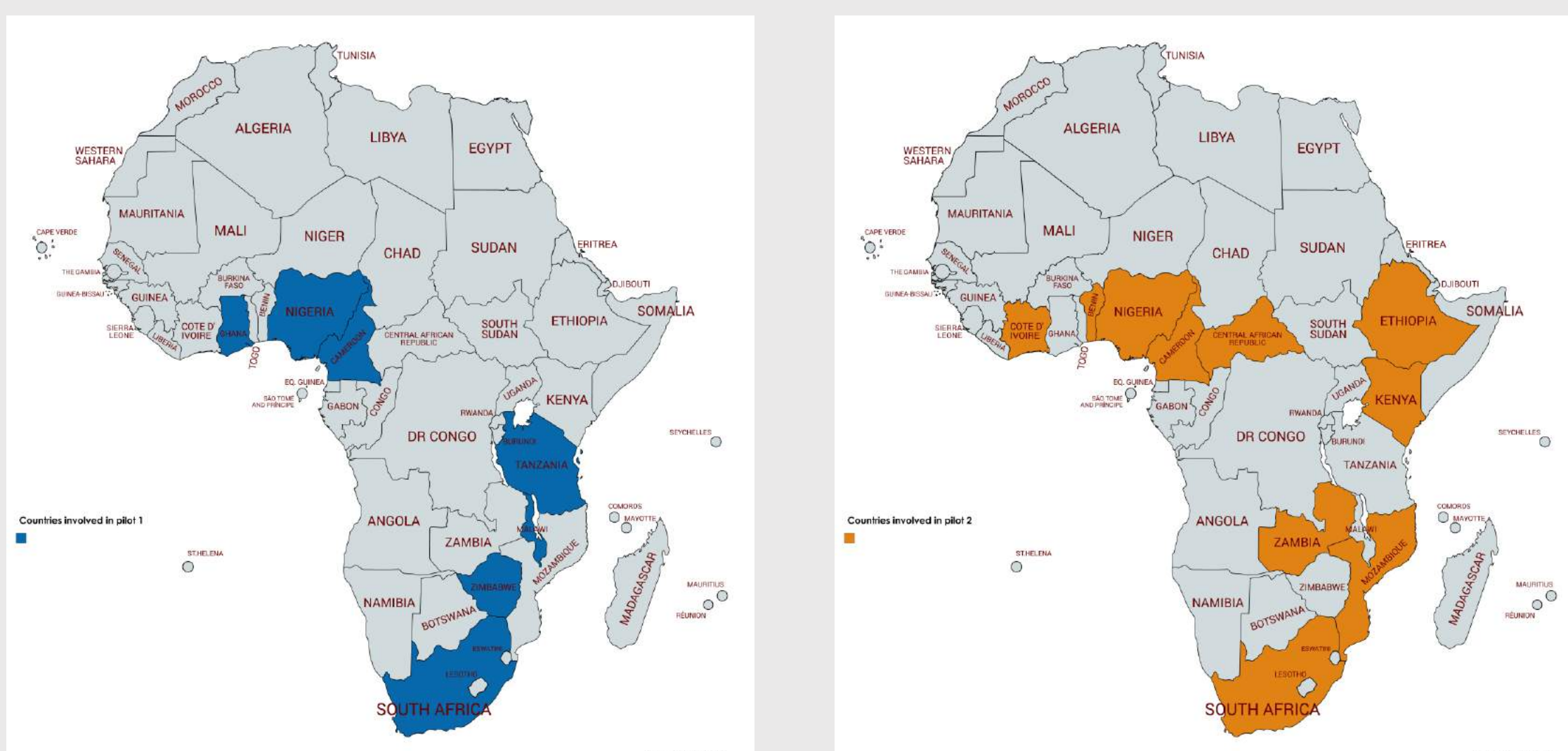
CoLA is designed to increase access to knowledge and resources for PhD students working on their dissertations through African universities. CoLA is an online learning network developed by UNU-MERIT / MGSOG (UM) which aims to offer support for PhD fellows in Africa to conduct research and write high quality academic papers. This support is facilitated by offering content courses around the research themes of UNU-MERIT. In addition, the community offers a repository of useful open educational resources, and the option to obtain research feedback and platforms for discussion with other researchers.

## Aim

The main aim of CoLA is to **build research capacity in Africa by assisting African PhD fellows and create a PhD community locally**, instead of educating a selected group of students in The Netherlands. All participants on the platform (African PhD fellows and their supervisors) remain affiliated at their home universities, obtain their degrees from their own institution, and participate from abroad. Our platform aims to offer an additional service to both PhD student and supervisor, on top of locally provided education. Participants are invited to stay on the platform after graduation.

## What we have done so far

- Needs Assessment (funded by Universiteitsfonds Limburg (SWOL))
- First Pilot of the CoLA platform, involving five universities (funded by WUN)
- Implementing feedback: Moving from Moodle to Open Blackboard (funded by MGSOG)
- Conferences: eLearning Africa 2015 (Ethiopia) and 2018 (Rwanda), EdMedia 2016 (Canada)
- Second Pilot with Online Educational badges (funded by UM sustainability funds)



## Next Steps

- **Consolidation of the network**, by having a network of partners interested in contributing to the platform and supporting their PhDs in taking advantage of the platform
- **Create solid and sustainable offering**, by updating the platform and offering tutored courses on a regular basis
- **Support**, both financially and technical
- **Expand the platform** with new courses and resources, designed and through by African partners

## Resources and Links

<https://www.merit.unu.edu/training/online-courses/community-of-learning-for-africa-cola/>

<https://www.merit.unu.edu/community-of-learning-for-africa-cola-new-online-platform/>

### Publications:

van de Laar, Mindel, Martin Rehm & Shivani Achrekar, 2017, "Community of Learning" for African PhD students: Changing the scene of doctoral education?, Transformation in Higher Education 2(0), a17.

<https://doi.org/10.4102/the.v2i0.17>

van de Laar, Mindel, Shivani Achrekar, Lucy L. Larbi & Friederike Rühmann, 2016, Capacity building using PhD education in Africa, UNU-MERIT Working Paper 2016-068

