

GLoBe 2022–2026

Working towards widely supported and robust
local policies

Lessons learnt 2025



1. Introduction

The VVSG's GLoBe programme will work towards good local governance in seven countries during the period 2022–2026: Belgium, Benin, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Rwanda, Senegal and South Africa. This will be achieved through town twinning schemes, collaboration with sister associations¹ and activities in Belgium focused on embedding the UN Sustainable Development Agenda into local authority policy. The programme in South Africa was discontinued at the end of 2023 in consultation with the donor, Belgium's Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DGD). The programme in Rwanda came to an end in early 2025 following diplomatic tensions between the Belgian and Rwandan governments.

The GLoBe programme focuses on the learning process to identify which elements contribute to good local governance. The theory of change helps to learn more systematically from practice by establishing links between actions, internal processes and results. Each year, GLoBe partners reflect on a specific learning question during a self-evaluation. In 2022, this focused on governance capacity. In 2023, the focus will be on financial sustainability. In 2024, on participation. For 2025, the learning question is as follows:

“What makes collaboration between civil servants and elected representatives within your governing body easy or difficult when implementing the GLoBe programme 2022–2026?”

The self-evaluations show that good cooperation between elected representatives and staff is not an automatic consequence of good project design. It must be consciously organised. Six elements in particular appear to be decisive:

- 1) shared ownership
- 2) clear roles
- 3) predictable information sharing
- 4) collaborative learning
- 5) collaboration that is embedded within teams and existing structures
- 6) ensuring continuity during staff and management changes.

These elements not only make a partnership more efficient during implementation, but also less dependent on individual people and therefore more sustainable.



¹ Umbrella organisations representing local authorities in the partner countries.

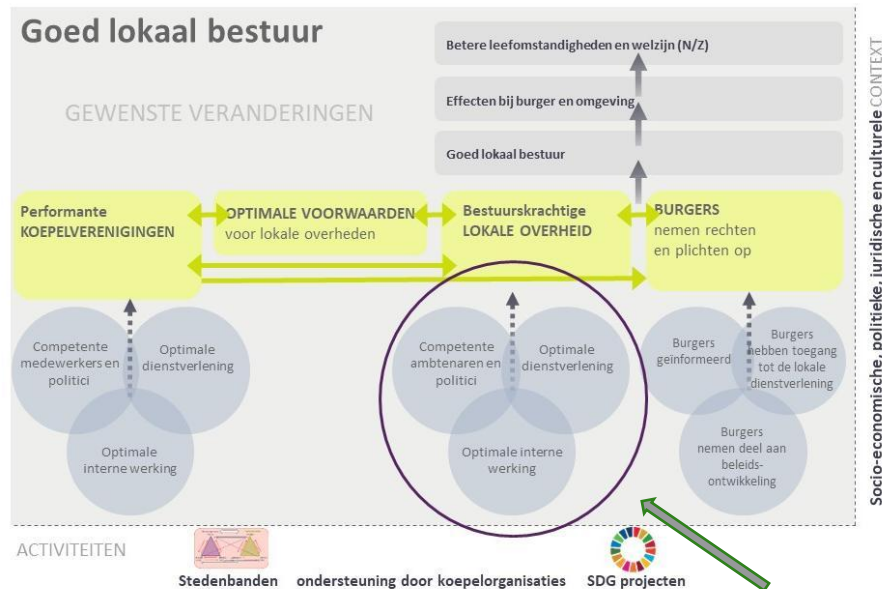


Figure – General version of the GLoBe 22–26 theory of change.

In the theory of change, the learning question directly concerns competent civil servants and politicians, as well as optimal internal functioning. Experiences from 2025 show that the two reinforce each other: expertise only yields its full potential in an environment characterised by clear agreements, consultation and shared responsibility.

This learning question also relates to other aspects of the theory of change, but these are also influenced by factors over which the programme has only limited control, such as civil service loyalty, political interests/priorities, party politics, etc.

2. Observations and recommendations:

Start with a shared understanding and sense of ownership

Cooperation is difficult when (new) civil servants or elected representatives are given a role in the programme but do not have a sufficient understanding of what GLoBe or other projects stand for, how the programme works, and who bears which responsibilities.

Bohicon, Zoersel's partner municipality in Benin, emphasises that cooperation becomes difficult when technical staff and elected representatives have different interpretations of objectives, activities, beneficiaries or service provision. A shared understanding of the objectives and challenges is therefore essential.

Recommendation. New and existing stakeholders must understand what the programme aims to achieve and what role they play in it. Set aside specific time for both civil servants and elected representatives to familiarise themselves with the programme. Experience in Toucountouna, Merelbeke-Melle's partner municipality in Benin, shows that a proper induction phase is necessary: new stakeholders first had to familiarise themselves with the programme and their own roles before they could take on responsibility.

Therefore, involve elected representatives and civil servants in the formulation of a programme. Once the implementation of the new programme gets underway, organise a joint orientation

session for elected representatives and civil servants to strengthen local support for what is planned, why it is planned that way, what results are being pursued and how roles are allocated. This is a best practice that can be applied during annual planning and should be repeated at the start of each new term of office or when a new team member joins.

Make roles and decision-making lines explicit

Effective collaboration requires clarity about who decides, implements, informs and follows up. Unclear responsibilities are a recurring source of friction. Dogbo, Roeselare's partner municipality in Benin, highlights communication problems arising from unclear responsibilities. Za-Kpota, Hoogstraten's partner municipality in Benin, notes that since the Beninese reforms in 2021, roles at political and administrative levels have been more clearly defined, meaning that elected representatives and staff have a better understanding of who is responsible for what. In Guaranda, Evergem's partner municipality in Ecuador, internal coordination has also improved since 2025 thanks to a single, clear point of contact for projects and international relations.

Recommendation. Set out decision-making processes, tasks and mandates in a brief programme document or link these to existing structures. At the same time, provide a clearly identifiable point of contact at both the political and administrative levels to bring colleagues and departments together.

Organise predictable and shared information exchange

More consultation is not the solution; rather, it is the right consultation at the right time and information that reaches more than one person. Effective cooperation does not require politicians and staff to hold constant meetings. However, it is important that everyone knows when consultations take place, where decisions are made and how information is shared and followed up. Predictable communication prevents information from getting stuck with just a few people and makes it easier to resolve problems together in a timely manner. Regular consultation therefore does more than simply facilitate the exchange of information. It also creates a space where politicians and the administration can compare their different perspectives.

Dogbo emphasises the importance of **fixed and transparent communication channels**. Information must be able to circulate continuously, and agreements on roles and responsibilities must be clear to everyone. Transparency means more than simply informing everyone: agreements reached must also be documented, and it must be clear who is responsible for the next step.

At the same time, the consultation structure must remain workable. ANCB, the umbrella organisation for cities and municipalities in Benin, points out that, due to their various political and administrative responsibilities, elected representatives are not always available for intensive follow-up. The partnership therefore recommends **adapting the arrangements and pace of the collaboration to their availability** and opting for flexible, efficient formats.

Different types of consultation and participants require different frequencies. In **Sokone**, Zemst's partner municipality in Senegal, the examples of this are particularly concrete. Follow-up meetings are held within the municipal steering committee, which, according to the report, improve decision-making on waste management. There are quarterly follow-up meetings with all the chairs of the municipal committees to discuss activities, issues and adjustments. In addition, there is a municipal forum to communicate with residents and gather recommendations, as well as weekly coordination meetings between the programme coordinators from Sokone and Zemst.

Recommendation. Wherever possible, build on existing structures for consultation and information-sharing and strengthen their effectiveness. Agree on a limited but fixed schedule for consultation and reporting, with clear responsibilities and follow-up.

Recommendation. Avoid information getting stuck with a single person. Effective communication takes place not only between the Flemish and partner municipalities, but also within both organisations. Therefore, ensure that the Flemish programme manager does not share information exclusively with a single contact person at the partner organisation. Involve several colleagues in important communications, agreements and follow-up, and ensure that relevant documents are accessible to more than one person. The same applies on the Flemish side. In this way, you build shared knowledge and responsibility and minimise the risk of a staff change or absence bringing the collaboration to a standstill.

Enable politicians and civil servants to learn together

Joint training and reflection reduce knowledge gaps and build a common frame of reference. In the reports, training does not merely serve a technical purpose. ANCB uses capacity-building in the areas of gender, local governance and strategic planning to better align the knowledge and commitment of elected representatives. Tambacounda, Sint Niklaas's partner municipality in Senegal, highlights training and awareness-raising on civic participation, transparency and good governance. Dogbo emphasises training in project management, conflict mediation and team-building. Exchange missions also help stakeholders to learn together and bring everyone to a shared level of understanding and knowledge.

Recommendation. Link training to concrete cooperation: work with mixed groups of elected representatives and staff, use practical case studies, organise exchanges and facilitate joint reflection in line with the programme.

Build on teams and existing structures, not on a single key figure

Sustainable cooperation must not depend on a single enthusiastic coordinator or a temporary project structure. A permanent point of contact is useful, but the programme must not depend entirely on it. ANCB works with thematic committees. Toucountouna strengthens the legally established Comité de Direction and the Commission for Economic and Financial Affairs. This fosters both technical and political engagement, ensuring that the structures remain in place even after the programme has ended. Guaranda also points in this direction. There, the Mesa de Agua already serves as a cantonal consultative body for water management. The problem is not that no consultative structure exists, but that the involvement of some bodies is too weak.

Recommendation. Build on existing consultative structures as much as possible. At the start of a programme, first ascertain which political, administrative or thematic consultative bodies already exist and what role they can play. It is better to invest in their functioning, capacity and involvement than to set up a separate steering or consultative committee for every new project. This avoids parallel structures, reduces the meeting burden and increases the likelihood that agreements, knowledge and cooperation will continue even after the programme has ended. Only establish a new structure when existing bodies are insufficiently suitable or inclusive.

Explicitly ensure continuity during staff and board changes

Onboarding and handover are not merely administrative details, but essential for retaining accumulated knowledge and relationships. This applies not only to staff changes. A joint reorientation is also necessary following elections, administrative reforms or changes in responsibilities. New politicians and civil servants must be provided not only with information about activities and budgets, but also about the partnership's objectives, the agreements made, the division of roles and the broader ambition to strengthen local governance.

Recommendation. Within the town twinning partnership, implement a concise and reusable onboarding programme for new elected representatives and staff: a starter pack, a joint induction session, clear information on roles and decision-making processes, access to key documents and, where possible, a handover with experienced colleagues. Organise this not only when there are staff changes, but also at the start of a new term of office.

