

Final evaluation of DGD programme 'Municipal International Cooperation'

VVSG, members and their partner municipalities. Period 2017-2021.

THE PROGRAMME

Capacity strengthening (training, learning by doing, investments, pilot projects) of politicians, civil servants and civil society organisations in partner countries



SDG Communication and sensitization



SDG pilot projects and innovation



Networking

DGD (Directorate General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid) supported the VVSG with almost EUR 6 million for the implementation of its programme. Through this programme, 18 Flemish cities and municipalities invested in **strengthening good local governance** in municipalities in 9 partner countries, with a focus on local economy, water management, waste management and/or gender. In Flanders, the VVSG supported the municipal translation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into a coherent sustainable development policy at local level. In Guatemala, Benin and South Africa, the VVSG collaborated with local associations of municipalities. The VVSG shared good Flemish practices on City-links and SDGs in European and international networks.

City-links: politicians, civil servants and civil society organisations exchanged experiences and ideas, participated in trainings and built infrastructure. The VVSG strengthened the capacities of the municipalities involved in city-links and facilitated (regional) exchange.

SDGs: VVSG worked with a pilot group of 20 cities and municipalities to develop a range of tools, manuals and promotional materials to raise awareness in the municipality around the SDGs and to use the SDGs as a framework for coherent and sustainable local policies in the long term.

THE EVALUATION: accountability and learning

2 surveys: (i) survey on relevance, quality and management of the city-link programme and VVSG support: relevant civil servants and aldermen in Flanders and partner municipalities (n= 67, response 49 %), (ii) survey on relevance, quality and use of SDG materials and VVSG support (n= 120, response 68 %)

4 field visits: Benin (Merelbeke-Toucountouna, Roeselare-Dogbo, + visit to ANCB), Senegal (Sint-Niklaas-Tambacounda, Zemst-Sokone)

(virtual) visits to 9 Flemish municipalities: interviews with politicians, civil servants and/or civil society on SDG policy and -where relevant- city-link programme (Geel, Harelbeke, Heist-Op-Den-Berg, Huldenberg, Merelbeke, Roeselare, Sint-Niklaas, Turnhout, Zemst)

Interviews with 5 municipalities that will no longer participate in the 2022-2026 programme: Antwerp, Bornem, Brasschaat, Edegem, Herent

Outcome Harvesting workshop: in order to identify changes in partner municipalities together with city-link coordinators

Local governments as facilitators of local development (city-links)



Contribution to stronger and more efficient public services, increased participation and ownership of policies, transparency.

Most successful city-link projects focus on the facilitating role of local governments: strengthening technical expertise, mobilising local social capital, promoting multi-stakeholder approaches and working transversally.

The majority of twinning projects support projects with visible impacts, but this with limited impact on governance because of the difficult political and institutional context.



Numerous obstacles to good local governance challenge the programme: poor decentralisation processes, weak cooperation between authorities, limited autonomy of local governments, politicisation, questions of transparency, limited openness to cooperation with civil society and the private sector. Success dependent on capacity, position and time of city-link coordinators. Often focus on tangible projects with little spillover effect and limited political involvement. No leverage to mobilise off-budget financial resources.

Relevant and efficient strategies (city-links)



Local coordinator in partner country with strategic insight, well positioned internally and with legitimacy can drive processes of change, mobilise people and deal with the politicised context. Flemish coordinators strengthen programme management and assume role of reflective observer and inspirer.

Local associations are important partners for promoting and supporting exchanges, knowledge building and scaling up.



Exchanges (North-South, South-North and regional) inspire but make limited contributions to strengthening governance due to lack of systematic approach and support to processes of policy transfer and learning. However, reciprocal visits remain important for strengthening programme management, partner relations and political support.

Spillover and scaling up occurs only accidentally.

Localising the SDGs - VVSG gets title SDG Voice (ambassador)



SDGs included in more than 60 governance agreements and in 2 out of 3 multi-year municipal programmes (2020-2025). SDGs are a useful approach for raising awareness around sustainable development and have also strengthened local global policies. Some good examples of how SDG working can add innovative actions and approaches to existing policies.



In practice, SDGs are mostly associated with ecological and global dimensions, less with social and economic dimensions.

Influence on transversal working, multi-stakeholder approach, citizen participation and 'Leave No One Behind' (LNOB) less clear. Municipalities that focus on these succeed in translating the SDGs into innovative actions and new policies.

Good management and support by VVSG



Good programme management by the VVSG and the municipalities involved, with the necessary flexibility. Monitoring and evaluation capacity was further strengthened through trainings, tools, on-demand support and a successful experiment with self- and peer evaluations. The range of tasks exceeded the capacity of the VVSG team, leaving less time for vision development, knowledge management and support for learning processes. The theory of change did not become a living tool that supported reflection and adjustments to the programme. M&E mainly serving accountability to donor, less in function of learning. Challenge remains consolidation and analysis of M&E data.

RECOMMENDATIONS

City links

Reflection on how city links can strengthen the role of local governments in the governance system at local and national level

Refine context analyses including ex-ante sustainability analysis and risk analyses (from an SDG perspective)

Building expertise around multi-stakeholder processes

Strengthening strategies on exchanges, scaling up and learning

Continuing cooperation with sister associations

SDG

Develop tools for analysing interactions between policy domains (spill-overs) and for putting LNOB into practice

Expand SDG practice bank with examples of how working with the SDGs leads to innovative actions and sustainable policies

Launch learning network for civil servants that take the lead in SDG working groups

Programme management and strategy

Further professionalise the M&E system (i.f. learning) and automate some M&E processes.

Launch of learning trajectories (including interested stakeholders from partner countries), if possible flanked by financial incentives and aligned with GSK Sustainable Cities.