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Learning about impact

Results of a learning process on monitoring and evaluation within 8 city-to-city link projects



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WORD OF THANKS

The results of the learning process on monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are entirely the merit of the project coordinators and their colleagues who worked on the city-to-city link projects that were part of this process and the employees of the international service of the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten, VVSG). This learning process was useful and interesting precisely because of their efforts and their willingness to experiment with new M&E methods. Our special thanks go out to: Van Slambrouck Peter (Banjul-Ostend), De Baets Koen (Guaranda-Evergem), Van Laer Tine (San-Jerónimo-Edegem), Bernaerts Kathy (Nquthu-Bornem), Vanhooydonck Kirsten (Witzenberg-Essen), De Wachter Anja (Tambacounda-Sint-Niklaas), Lerouge Delphine (Dogbo-Roeselare), Rigouts Hilt (Za-kpota-Hoogstraten), Janssens Bert (VVSG), Hennekam Ashley (VVSG), Gorissen Karlien (VVSG), De Wachter Betty (VVSG).

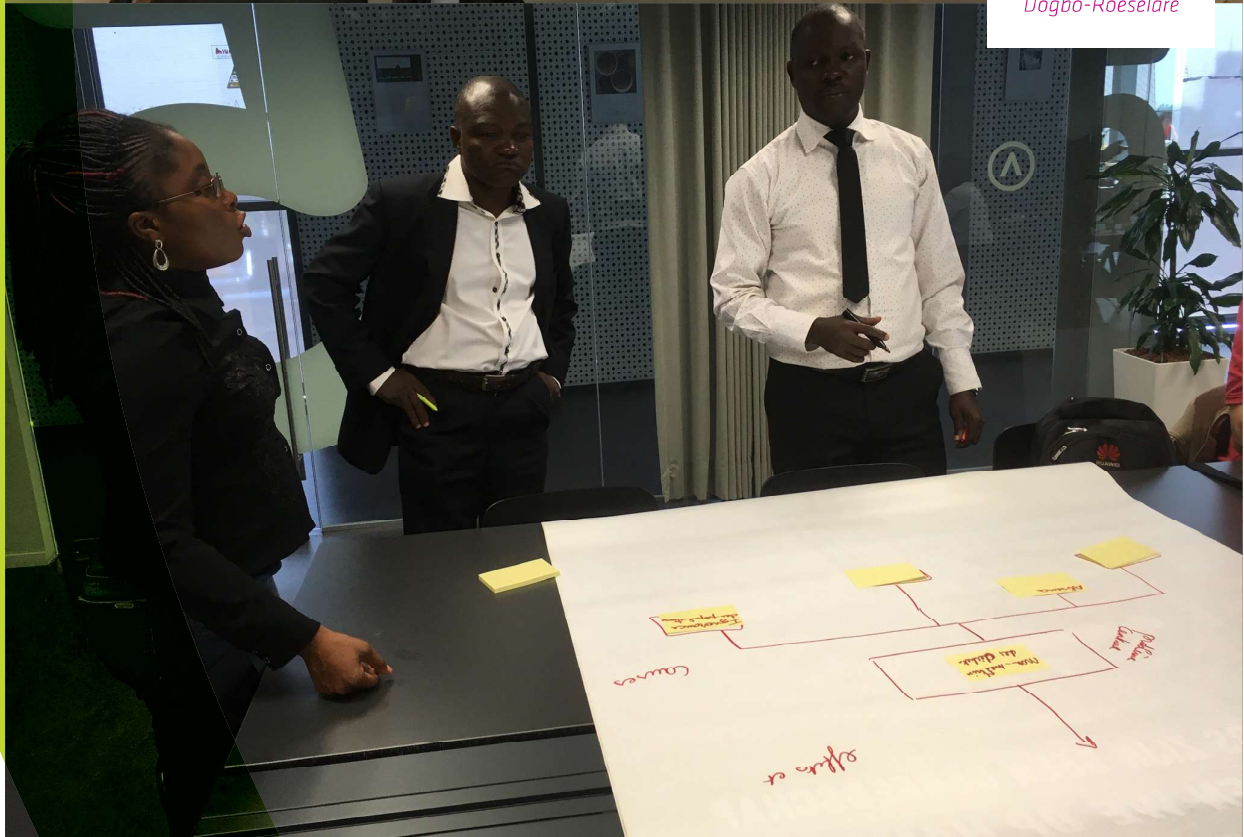
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Dogbo-Roeselare



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1. Introduction

The Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten, VVSG) is the member association of all 300 Flemish cities and municipalities. The VVSG assists members with international cooperation, providing advice, training and defending the interests of its members.

This publication describes the results of a learning process (2014-2016) on monitoring and evaluation, which 8 Flemish municipalities contributed to. During this project, they experimented with various methods for monitoring and evaluating the results of international city-to-city link projects. This was done during consecutive “action and reflection” cycles. Each cycle consisted of practical fieldwork as well as collective learning opportunities, with the responsible Belgian global (or North-South) officials participating in a one-day meeting to exchange experiences and advise each other. The learning opportunities were also used to plan and follow up on individual learning processes and to organise short training sessions on specific M&E methods, such as Most Significant Change, Outcome Mapping, Five Capability Model, ROMA for M&E of policy influencing, actor-oriented change theory... A total of 7 learning opportunities, of one day each, were organised over a period of 1.5 years (from early September 2014 until end May 2016). The entire process was overseen by the VVSG’s international service, in collaboration with HIVA-KULEUVEN. There were several reasons for organising the learning process. In the past, the VVSG has already organised punctual ad-hoc training sessions on outcome mapping, strategic planning, the formulation of indicators and Most Significant Change for the global officials of the Flemish municipalities. The VVSG also published a manual, titled “M&Eting the need for results Introduction to Monitoring and Evaluation for Municipal International Cooperation”¹. However, all too often implementing these initiatives proved problematic. At the same time, those Flemish municipalities that undertake international cooperation are often confronted with specific planning and reporting requirements, which are formulated by the authorities that provide a subsidy (since the Flemish decree on the reduction of the reporting burden took effect, it is mainly the federal government that imposes parallel planning and motivation requirements, in addition to the own municipal instruments). Often these additional requirements are neither coordinated nor applicable to the reality of a municipal context. Instead they are primarily rooted in the sectoral world of development cooperation.

As a result, the objective of this learning process was twofold: on the one hand, examine to which extent new (alternative) methods for planning, monitoring and evaluation, which are used in the development cooperation sector, can be applied within the municipal reality by experimenting with them and examine whether these methods, which were specifically developed in the margin of development cooperation, can also be applied to other municipal sectors and policy themes.

¹ Corina Dhaene en Bert Janssens, M&Eting the need for results Introduction to Monitoring and Evaluation for Municipal International Cooperation, North-South Series for Local Authorities, Politeia, 2013. The translations of this publication are published on the VVSG website: [M&Eting the need for results](#), [M&Enos es mas](#), [Le M&E expliqué](#)

The first part was the main objective which was formulated as follows (while the second was a “love to see” side-effect): “Develop a portfolio for the municipalities, that is easy to apply while being modular, for the monitoring and evaluation (both in the sense of following up and learning) of programmes or sub-aspects of programmes for municipal international cooperation.” This M&E learning process primarily focused on the international operations of a municipality, and more specifically on the monitoring and evaluation of a city-to-city link. A city-to-city link is an international partnership between a Flemish municipality and a municipality from the South. The mutual objective is to strengthen administrative power through capacity building processes. To date, 35 Flemish municipalities are twinned with a municipality in Africa, Asia or Latin America. The Flemish municipality can rely on various co-financing sources for this city-to-city link, which is part of the municipality’s local global policy. In 2014, 88 municipalities received subsidies from the Government of Flanders to boost their local global policy (from 2016, this subsidy became part of the broader municipal fund). Between 2014 and 2016, 14 city-to-city links received a subsidy from the federal government to work on strengthening their administrative power (this group was extended to 18 city-to-city links from 2017).

How to measure their impact has been a question for quite some time. It is motivated on the one hand by the authorities that provide subsidies. At the same time, and more importantly, the municipalities must also explain how they spend public funds to their inhabitants. Impact measurements within a local government context also often depend on external factors and are therefore very difficult to express in pre-defined results or SMART indicators. Ultimately the impact of many municipal programmes is to strengthen the administrative power of the municipalities in the South according to the principles of good local governance. That is why these city-to-city link projects often select a theme (integrated waste policy, youth policy...) to help build and strengthen municipal administrative power.

This M&E process was also implemented in other activities that the international service of the VVSG organised in the course of 2015-2016. As such, Monitoring and Evaluation played an important role in the content of the four regional encounters with the Southern municipal partners in Ecuador, Senegal, South Africa and Guatemala in 2015. In addition to a theoretical overview, practical exercises were also conducted on how to measure the capacity of local governments. In 2016, 18 municipal partnerships were planning their programmes in order to submit an application for subsidies to the Belgian federal government. This process was an excellent opportunity to apply a number of the learnings from this learning process. The results of the M&E learning process were presented during the joint planning week in May 2016 to all the participating city-to-city links.●

2 Motivation for participation in the learning process

In the spring of 2014, VVSG-International launched a general call in its electronic newsletter to all the municipalities for candidates wishing to participate in a learning process on monitoring and evaluation. Following this call, the learning process commenced in September, with 9 participating municipalities. Middelkerke dropped out after a few months due to changes in personnel. (During the learning process), the participating municipalities had the following characteristics:

- Bornem, twinned with Nquthu in South-Africa, received a Flemish impulse subsidy as well as a federal subsidy
- Edegem, twinned with San Jerónimo in Peru, received a Flemish and a federal subsidy
- Essen, twinned with Witzenberg in South Africa, received a Flemish and a federal subsidy
- Evergem, twinned with Guaranda in Ecuador, received a Flemish and a federal subsidy
- Hoogstraten, twinned with Za-Kpota in Benin, received a Flemish subsidy only
- Ostend, twinned with Banjul in Gambia, received a Flemish subsidy only
- Roeselare, twinned with Dogbo in Benin, received a Flemish and a federal subsidy
- Sint-Niklaas, twinned with Tambacounda in Senegal, received a Flemish and a federal subsidy

The emphasis on the participation in the various subsidy programmes is worth mentioning in this context, as the administrative requirements for the federal subsidy especially were quite stringent, in terms of planning, reporting and monitoring.

The city-to-city links were mainly motivated to participate in the learning process to gain a better idea of the impact of the city-to-city link, using adequate M&E methods to measure this impact. The municipalities regarded this as an opportunity to enhance their own monitoring and evaluation practices and promote a results-oriented approach. Every participating case also had additional learning questions, which they hoped to answer with this learning process. Table 1 gives an overview of these questions.

“At the time of writing, effective evaluation and measurement is still too ad hoc and random. Often it consists of nothing more than an enumeration of past and planned activities. Which is why we needed proper evaluation techniques and monitoring tools. All the more so because it is not far from easy to go evaluate the impact of activities as part of a city-to-city link in the field. We mainly communicate remotely, by e-mail, through Skype and by phone. Monitoring matters is quite difficult as a result.”

San Jerónimo - Edegem

“Monitoring is often done hastily or overlooked due to other administrative requirements. The learning process forces the twinned towns to conduct exercises and set aside the time for the extensive monitoring of a well-defined project.”

Witzenberg - Essen

Table 1: overview of the specific learning questions for every city-to-city link

City-to-city link project	Learning question
Nquthu-Bornem <i>playgrounds</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the impact of the Learn & Play youth project in the districts of Nquthu? • What is the view of Nquthu's youth council on the project? (The initiative for the project was mainly taken by Bornem)
San Jerónimo-Edegem <i>waste policy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the impact of these awareness campaigns and working visits, how do they foster support for the city-to-city link project among the colleagues in both of these local governments?
Witzenberg-Essen <i>youth centre-youth work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How durable are the project's results? • Are there lessons to be learnt from the youth centre (Tulbagh) which are useful for the community centre and for local economic development in Op Die Bergh? • How can you involve other colleagues and stakeholders in the monitoring and evaluation processes?
Banjul-Oostende <i>digitisation of Banjul City Council</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can planning, monitoring and evaluation (PME) methods be used in the most optimal manner in the city-to-city link project?
Tambacounda-Sint-Niklaas <i>waste policy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After several years of cooperation in terms of waste policy: Are we booking results? • What is the view of the residents of these neighbourhoods, what do they think of the changes in terms of waste management? • How can participation be strengthened and better overseen on the community level?
Dogbo-Roeselare <i>strengthening the local economy by redeveloping the market</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can you formulate SMART indicators? • Which M&E methods are suited to city-to-city link projects? • How are other city-to-city link projects monitored and evaluated?
Guaranda-Evergem <i>waste policy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What motivates the local promoters to focus on waste management? • What is the opinion of the environmental department of Guaranda's local government on waste collection and the processing of organic waste?
Za-Kpota-Hoogstraten <i>registration of births</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To which extent does the city-to-city link project contribute to the capacity building of officials, elected officials and health workers in terms of the registration of births? • To which extent does the strengthened capacity of officials, elected officials and health workers and the awareness campaign about the registration of births contribute to the participation of children and teenagers in primary and secondary education?

3 Structure of the learning process

The learning process comprises four important steps (see figure 1).

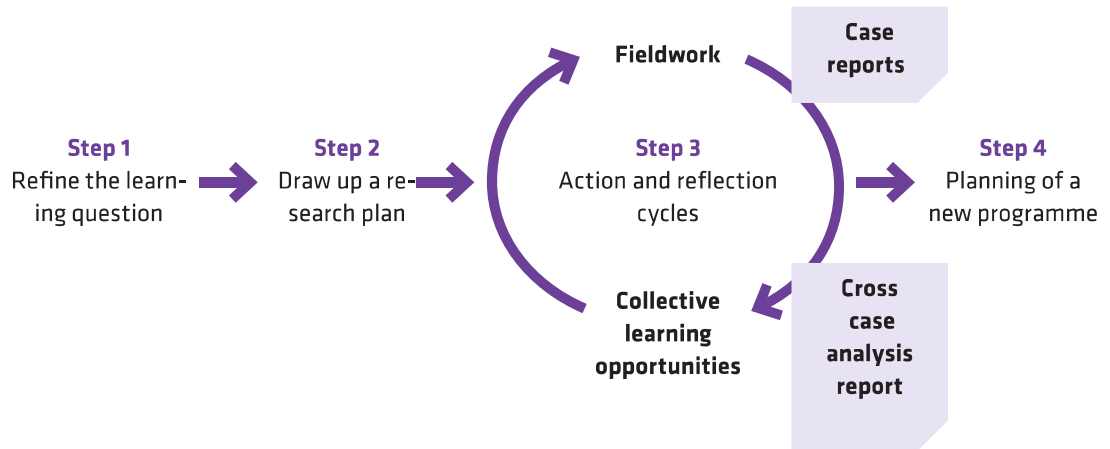


Fig. 1: overview of important steps in the learning process

During a **first step**, the participants of every city-to-city link project identified its strengths and weaknesses in terms of monitoring and evaluation. Based on this, the participants formulated specific learning questions, which could be studied in depth as part of the learning process.

The research plan was developed during the **second step**. Based on the specific learning questions and the change theory of the city-to-city link project, the participants then indicated which M&E method would be applied and how. The research plan also explained the data collection/ data analysis methods. Annex 2 contains an example of a research plan from the Witzenberg-Essen case.

Step three consisted of consecutive ‘action and reflection’ cycles. Every cycle included practical fieldwork and collective learning opportunities. During the fieldwork, specific M&E methods were applied in practice in the various city-to-city link projects. The collective learning opportunities gave the responsible officials an opportunity to share their M&E experiences with each other and

advise each other. They were also used to organise short training sessions on specific M&E methods and to plan and monitor the individual learning processes. Seven of the eight city-to-city link projects in the learning process also drew up a case report, documenting their experiences and insights in terms of M&E. We established this cross-case analysis report based on their case reports.

In **Step four**, finally, we gave feedback about the M&E findings and conclusions of the learning process to the wider group of city-to-city link projects, which took them into account for the planning of the new federal subsidy programme.

Table 2: overview of the collective learning opportunities during the M&E learning process

Date	Thematic focus
11/09/2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic elements of M&E and analysis of strengths and challenges in current M&E practices within the city-to-city link projects • Identify learning questions
09/10/2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of potential M&E methods • Training session on Most Significant Change • Elements of a research plan: learning questions, theory of change, choose and adapt an M&E method, planning of M&E activities...
06/01/2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refining of the research questions and research plan • Training session on outcome mapping
05/05/2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training session on M&E for policy influencing (ROMA method)
10/12/2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training session on the “Five Capability” model for monitoring capacity building • Planning for the development of the case report
10/03/2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of the initial results based on the cross-analysis of the case reports • Training session on the incorporation of outcome mapping and a logical framework
14/04/2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training session on the new approach for the planning of the new project cycle (2017-2021) based on the logical framework, outcome mapping and the Five Capability model
22-26/05/2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participatory 5-day planning session in the margin of the new programme (2017-2021) with all the city-to-city link projects, based on insights and conclusions from the M&E learning process



Nquthu-Bornem

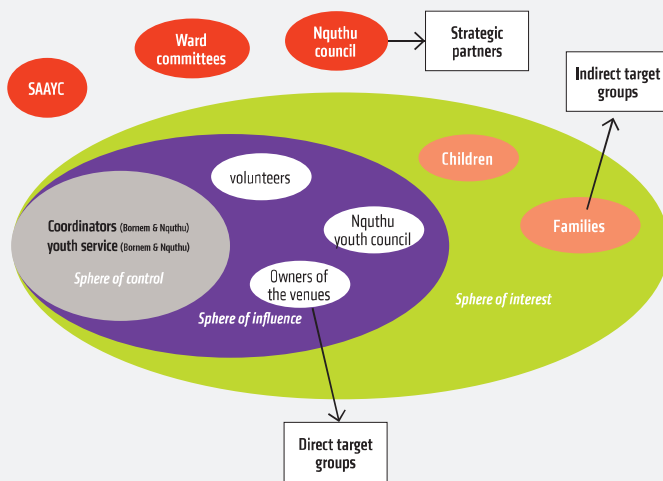


4 Impact monitoring through a stakeholder-oriented approach

4.1 Clarify a stakeholder-oriented change theory

As already indicated, the cases determined the learning questions, to which they hoped to find answers during the learning process, themselves. This was done based on a stakeholder mapping of their city-to-city link and the challenges in terms of monitoring and evaluation that were associated with this. They were both clarified during step one and step two of the learning process (see fig. 1). The change theory in this learning process consists of a mapping of the various targets groups that a city-to-city link project tries to influence, both directly or indirectly, and of a description of the specific changes the project hopes to bring about among these target groups. This mapping was done based on a project's various spheres of influence (i.e., sphere of control, sphere of direct influence and sphere of indirect influence, as used in the outcome mapping method)². An example of a stakeholder mapping, taken from the Nquthu-Bornem city-to-city link (South Africa) is provided in box 1. This stakeholder mapping is valuable because it helps clarify the roles of the various stakeholders that are involved in the project and explains how the project hopes to bring about enduring change among the target groups. This transparency is vital to determine which sphere of the stakeholder mapping the organisers want to monitor and evaluate. Results are more easily observed among the stakeholders in the sphere of direct influence. Changes on this level are sometimes also called outcomes in development cooperation speak. Enduring change among the stakeholders in the sphere of indirect influence will only often come much later. Changes on this level are often also called impact.

Box 1: Stakeholder mapping of the 'Learn & Play' playground project within the Nquthu-Bornem city-to-city link.



The figure shows how the city-to-city link project is implemented by the coordinators and the youth services of both municipalities. They belong to the project's sphere of control as they control the project activities to a certain extent. The volunteers, the youth council in Nquthu and the owners of the playgrounds belong to the sphere of direct influence as they are directly influenced or supported by the project. Children and their families are the indirect target groups and belong to the sphere of indirect influence. They are indirectly influenced by the project through the stakeholders in the sphere of direct influence. There are also other important stakeholders such as the Ward Committees and the Nquthu Council which also stand to benefit from the project and can also cooperate with it. However the project does not aspire to bring about change on this level. These are the strategic partners which are outside of the project's spheres of influence. Based on the stakeholder mapping, the Nquthu-Bornem city-to-city link decided to mainly focus on measuring change on the level of the sphere of direct influence within the learning process, i.e., on the playground volunteers and the members of the youth council. They also enquired about change with the two employees of the youth service to gain a better insight into their perception of the project's effects.

² Outcome Mapping is a stakeholder-oriented planning, monitoring and evaluation method that aims to monitor changes among local stakeholders, providing support for the project and which can contribute to the project's development cooperation objective in an enduring manner (Earl et al., 2001).

4.2 Monitoring and evaluation through Most Significant Change

The majority of the cases (6 out of the 7 cases) used elements of the Most Significant Change (MSC) technique* in their M&E approach.

The MSC technique (Davies & Dart 2005³) was regarded as an accessible method, that could give rise to insights about a city-to-city link's impact in a practical, feasible and participatory manner.

The following strengths of the MSC approach emerged in the majority of the cases that tested this method:

- **A fun and “simple” way of performing M&E:** The MSC method was seen as an accessible and practical method, that was easy to apply without too much preliminary knowledge and without having to rely on external consultants. This seemed important given the limited experience that people had working with M&E in general, both among Belgian officials and among their colleagues in the partner municipalities. In the majority of the cases, they worked together very well during the M&E learning process.

“Listening to the stories was also very interesting, for all the parties involved. The activity in itself also created a sense of community among the group of volunteers. The officials in Nquthu also took advantage of the opportunity to congratulate the volunteers on their work. Sometimes it is difficult to see the results for what they are and refrain from immediately drawing conclusions or establishing an action plan.”
Nquthu-Bornem case report

“A personal discussion is a simple way of discussing a number of matters one-on-one both during and after a working visit. It is important that you approach this discussion in an open and unbiased manner. You should not discuss or judge your colleagues' statements. The discussion offered insights into the views and perceptions of the delegation members. You can then use the information you collected to develop specific actions in response to questions about the project or to counter/motivate concerns with information and data.”
San-Jerónimo-Edegem case report

“One vital thing we learned is the fact that MSC is a relatively simple technique to measure impact or change. Everyone can use it as long as they do some preliminary work. You obtain results in a short time frame and gain a better insight in the local issues... You can arrive at insights in a short time frame even though you are not in the field. Although this is not a useless exercise for the south partners and certain things did emerge, they were not phased by many of the things they heard, i.e., this was not new information.”
Tamabounda-Sint-Niklaas case report

- **Active participation and dialogue:** Collecting and discussing change/impact stories creates opportunities for the active participation of the various stakeholders that are involved in the project (e.g., fellow officials, young people who are involved in the youth work, neighbourhood residents...) as well as fosters dialogue among these stakeholders. It also allows you to hear various perspectives. It may be difficult for stakeholders with different hierarchical positions to share their MSC story in a group setting. This was the case in the Guaranda-Evergem case, for example, where the department head refused to attend an MSC exercise in the presence of his employees. In this situation, an individual meeting proved more conducive.

“Testing the MSC method was a good exercise and a nice opportunity to work with our colleagues in Tambaounda. We started by discussing the intent, the process and together we determined the central questions. The participatory approach allows you to create a sense of solidarity and equality, as colleagues who are pursuing the same objective. It also provided our colleagues in Tamba with an instrument, a ‘reason’ to engage in a direct dialogue with various neighbourhood residents and not just with a specific group (e.g., the administrators of the neighbourhood). Our colleagues in Tamba also learnt how to easily evaluate the operations. They are not inclined to take the initiative themselves to perform such

'Most Significant Change' is a technique that gauges the most significant change that people experience, on a personal or professional level, as a result of their involvement in a development project. The technique allows you to collect stories about your project's impact. In addition to collecting impact stories, the method also offers a number of practical steps for analysing these stories, through a discussion and selection of the stories and feedback about the most significant impact story, while actively involving the project workers and the people from whom these stories were collected. You can find more information about this technique in Annex 1.

³ Davies, R. and J. Dart (2005). The Most Significant Change (MSC) Technique: A Guide to Its Use: www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf.

an exercise however. Possibly they may have learnt about a lot of things on this occasion, of which they were already aware, but which were never shared with us.” Tambacounda – Sint-Niklaas case report

“While the results of the monitoring exercise were not exhaustive, the many stories were a good indicator of young people’s perception, whether positive or negative, of the youth centre.” Witzenberg – Essen case report

“The learning process definitely contributed to creating more margin for a dialogue about M&E and to delve deeper into Outcome Mapping and MSC. The circle exercise about the Ice Plant was conducted with our partners of the Banjul City Council (politicians and officials) and the aldermen for international cooperation, which undoubtedly contributed to a better understanding of the project’s potential.”
Banjul – Ostend case report

- **Gaining an insight in the local context:** The majority of the cases also explicitly referred to the fact that the MSC stories yield a lot of information about the local context. This contextual information is featured much less often in the standard progress reports. This local context is complex in the case of municipal international cooperation. The local political level plays an important role, especially in combination with the official level, in the cooperation between local governments. The MSC exercise helps gain a better insight in the complexity of political and human relationships, and is therefore conducive to a better assessment of certain decisions or activities.

“During the debriefing (Bornem officials + officials from Nquthu, who were involved in the exercise), we also discussed certain societal aspects in Nquthu, which sometimes (often) influence how officials work, in more detail. Although it was apparent that Nquthu has to contend with challenges that are very different from those that Bornem faces, this was also illustrated during the interviews. The Bornem officials especially gained a better understanding of these challenges and of certain choices that follow from them.”
Nquthu-Bornem case report

- **Gaining an insight in the expected or unintended effects and challenges:** In all the cases where MSC was applied, the M&E exercise led to insights about the unintended and expected effects. A number of examples of these effects are listed in table 3 in Chapter 5 for each of the cases. Although most of the stories primarily indicated that a positive change took place, the majority of the cases also included stories that point to major challenges within the city-to-city link project. The Witzenberg-Essen case discussed the difficulty of securing the engagement of the volunteers and also highlighted that young people do not easily find their way to the youth centre. Challenges were also raised during the group discussion of the stories. During one of the group reflections in the Tambacounda-Sint-Niklaas case, the participants felt the strong urge to discuss a number of issues, in addition to the success story (e.g., insufficient wells and the need to better fence the gardens, as well as the risk of corruption, the overhead costs and the annual turnover of personnel). The measure in which information about the project’s impact was used to adapt or plan the project is discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

4.3 Tailor-made Most Significant Change

An important learning from the learning process is the conclusion that the M&E methods must be adapted to the specific needs and circumstances of each city-to-city link project. In all six cases that applied this method, MSC was always adapted to the specific context and learning questions, and combined with other methods. As a result, a number of interesting adaptations were observed, which may possibly also inspire other city-to-city link projects that want to use this method.

- **Strive for broad qualitative representation:** in view of the often limited resources, i.e., budget and availability of personnel, it is often unrealistic to conduct a survey among a statistically representative

sample of the end beneficiaries. In such cases, we recommend striving for qualitative representation, which covers variation where possible, meaning that the relevant differences in the population of end beneficiaries are taken into account when selecting respondents for the impact stories. Examples of such differences include sex, age, social-economic background, responsibilities within the project... In various cases, an attempt was made to promote such qualitative representation.

In the Nquthu-Bornem case, the 23 playground volunteers as well as 7 members of the youth council and 2 employees of the youth department were interviewed.

In the Witzenberg-Essen case, the challenges in terms of representation were partly compensated for by talking to young people who were involved/not involved in the MSC process.

In the Tambacounda-Sint-Niklaas case, two groups of 20 neighbourhood residents were interviewed. The first group came from a pilot neighbourhood, where the project was launched four years ago. The second group of respondents came from neighbourhoods where the project was launched much more recently. In both groups, the interviewers strived to achieve a broad variation of personal characteristics (age, sex) and economic status (housewife, guard, retired railway worker, retired housewife, student...).

It is worth noting that this qualitative representation was not really factored in in the analysis of the stories. The analysts did not systematically check whether there were interesting differences in the stories of the respondents with a different personal or economic background.

- **A before and after measurement:** Such measurements were organised in the San Jerónimo - Edegem case. The two Belgian delegations were interviewed before their visit to San Jerónimo and a few weeks later, upon their return. They were asked similar questions. In the case of the first delegation, the after measurement did not take into account the answers of the pre-measurement, which posed a challenge. As a result, the interviewers missed opportunities to ask further questions and the interview was not very far-reaching. During the second after measurement, a number of specific questions were asked based on the replies of the before measurement. As a result, respondents were confronted with previous concerns, ideas or expectations, allowing them to reflect more in depth on the effects of the working visit on their own attitude to the city-to-city link project.
- **Audio and video recordings of the MSC interviews:** In three of the city-to-city links, videos were recorded of the MSC interviews (Witzenberg-Essen⁴, partly in Nquthu-Bornem and Tambacounda-Sint-Niklaas). The recorded interviews could thus be shown to other stakeholders and could also be discussed in more detail on the one hand. On the other hand, the video recordings also provided the municipality with a communication tool, allowing them to communicate about the effects of the city-to-city link in a visually appealing way. The idea of recording the stories arose from the conclusion that participants tended to change the original stories during the discussion, tell them in a different way, embellishing them with elements from other stories and so on...

"By choosing the Most Significant Change approach with video imagery, the target group (young people) were given a voice and we had plenty of material to show to the people back home."
Witzenberg-Essen case report

- **Focus on specific information needs through areas of change:** In the Tambacounda-Sint-Niklaas case, the questions during the MSC process were tailored towards three areas of change: 1) change because of the waste policy, 2) change because of the management of the 'conseil de développement des quartiers' and 3) change because of the involvement in the composting programme. The respondents were also selected in line with these areas of change. The advantage of this approach is that you receive more targeted feedback about the themes on which the project concentrates.
- **A rather traditional interview method without selecting the most meaningful story:** In the Banjul-Ostend case, they elected to restrict their application of the MSC method. Five employees of the

⁴ This online video shows what the young people in Tulbagh think of their own youth centre: <http://www.essen.be/nieuwsdetail/802/jongeren-in-tulbagh-evalueren-eigen-jeugdcentrum>.

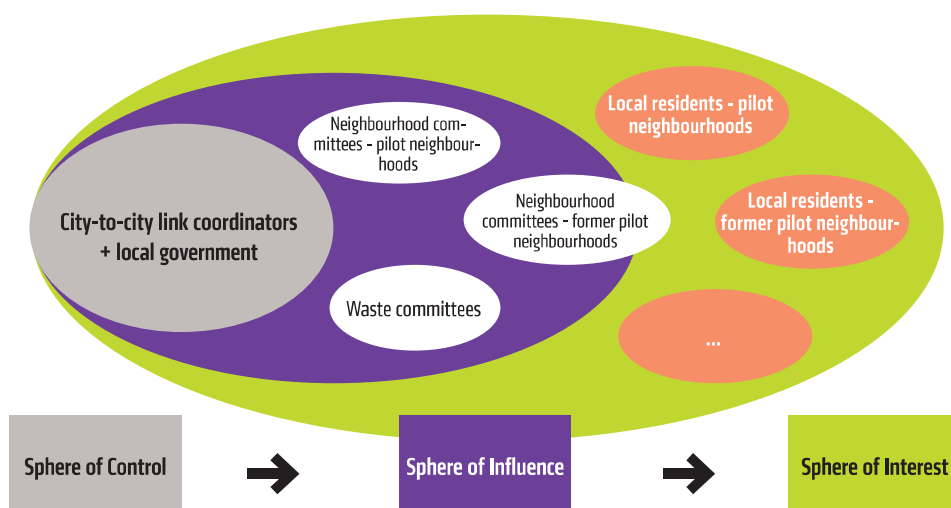


Fig. 2: Tambacounda-Sint-Niklaas stakeholder mapping. MSC stories were recorded during interviews with stakeholders in the sphere of influence (outcome level) and sphere of interest (impact level)

Banjul City Council were interviewed by the City of Ostend’s city-to-city link project coordinator. The basic question was as follows: “What are the most significant changes brought about by the digitisation of the Banjul City Council?” The coordinator asked supplementary questions here and there to obtain additional information. The analysis step in the MSC process, during which the stories are discussed and the most significant story is selected, was not executed however. Feedback about the results of the individual interviews was given during a group meeting with the respondents.

- **Combinable with other methods:** An important step in the MSC method is the selection of the respondents. You need a good idea of the groups of stakeholders that the city-to-city link project is trying to influence to ensure a proper selection. If change occurs among these stakeholders, and it can be (partly) attributed to the city-to-city link project, then these are important results or possible indications of impactful change. The MSC method does not provide tools for mapping these stakeholder groups. That is why the various cases used the ‘spheres of influence’ concept, starting from the outcome mapping method (see figure 2). This tool allows you to visually map the various stakeholders that the project wants to directly and indirectly influence. Based on this, you can make choices for the selection of the respondents for the MSC interviews. This tool allows a project to clearly distinguish between the project activities that are executed by stakeholders who control the project’s budget and planning (i.e., sphere of control or output level) and the project results, which may occur on the level of the stakeholders who are directly influenced by the project (stakeholders in the sphere of influence or on the outcome level) and those who are indirectly influenced (stakeholders in the sphere of interest or on the impact level).

The Guaranda-Evergem case also failed to select the most significant change story. In addition to collecting MSC stories, this case also experimented with the outcome challenge tool of the outcome mapping method (Earl et al. 2002)⁵. This tool allows people to reflect on the ideal change among the target group, which the project hopes to contribute to achieving (in this case the target group was Guaranda’s environmental department). The outcome challenge tool proved useful for discussing which obstacles needed to be eliminated and which changes could be achieved in the short or medium to long term.



An ‘Outcome Challenge’ is a tool of the outcome mapping method and describes the ideal change within a stakeholder, who is directly influenced or supported by a project. ‘Outcome Challenge’ means exactly that. A challenge that describes how the stakeholder in the sphere of influence would behave in an ideal world. What should this partner be able to do ideally, both ideally and realistically speaking? In essence, this means writing out a brief vision for every social stakeholder/every stakeholder in the sphere of influence.

⁵ Earl, S., F. Carden, and T. Smutylo (2001) Outcome Mapping: Building learning and reflection into development programs, Ottawa: International Development Research Centre (IDRC): <http://www.outcomemapping.ca/resource/om-manual>



The Dogbo-Roeselare case also attempted to develop an M&E system for a project for sanitation in Dogbo's market based on an outcome mapping. Although a number of progress markers were developed for monitoring the changes (see text box above), they were formulated rather vaguely and were insufficiently linked to the specific stakeholders who are deemed responsible for these changes. Ultimately the exercise did not give rise to a workable M&E system. The lack of success in this case was mainly due to the fact that the M&E exercise came too early, i.e., during the project's planning phase, that the right people did not participate in the exercise and that the project coordinator lacked the confidence to facilitate the outcome mapping workshop. Ultimately this experiment yielded a number of useful practical recommendations, which may prove useful for other city-to-city link projects wishing to experiment with new M&E methods (see text box below):

- Practical recommendations from the Dogbo-Roeselare case based on experiences with outcome mapping:**
- 1) Take the time to properly prepare your outcome mapping and ask other people to help you prepare this exercise. Prepare this with one or more people who belong in the programme's sphere of control and select the most adequate method together.
 - 2) Make sure that the partners who contribute to the monitoring or evaluation are sufficiently convinced of the exercise's added value. Make sure to explain how the exercise will be used in the future.
 - 3) Assign the tasks: moderator – reporter. A neutral moderator is also helpful.

4.4 Challenges associated with the Most Significant Change approach

- **Analysis of the stories:** In most cases, a lot of attention was paid to the collection and selection of the most significant story. The cases paid less attention to the discussion of the stories and the insights following from this. The insights from these stories were therefore insufficiently linked to a critical reflection on the project activities (e.g., which insights do the stories provide about the project's progress? To which extent are the project's effects desirable effects? What are the challenges? How to tackle them? ...). The selection of the most significant story is a technique to facilitate and structure the discussion and reflection about the stories but in each case the selected story is

just a by-product. The insights that emerge during the discussion and selection process are actually more important than the learning process. Facilitating a group reflection about these stories was regarded as a major challenge however. The limited capacity for facilitating such group reflections and the positions of power of the storytellers as well as cultural sensitivities also seemed to play a role in this. Seeking a consensus and avoiding the polarising effect of stories that represented opposing opinions proved an obstacle, for example, during the selection process in the Tambacounda-Sint-Niklaas case. In that same case, it also became apparent that people with better verbal skills determine the choices that are made. Many of the cases did not set aside a sufficient amount of time for the selection process and did not develop any follow-up actions (Tambacounda-Sint-Niklaas, Nquthu-Bornem, Witzenberg-Essen).

“During the group reflection on the MSC stories, focussing on the actual “change” was very difficult, with people digressing and elaborating on facts, problems and shortcomings in the neighbourhood. During the discussion, it also became apparent that language was a problem. By interrupting each other and using the local vernacular, the participants needed a lot of concentration to keep up with the discussion. One recommendation could be to “schedule a follow-up phase for the results of this exercise, especially regarding the bottlenecks/difficulties that were cited, e.g. references in some cases to conflicts in the neighbourhoods with private collectors. You must set aside time after the sessions to reflect on this and to be able to apply this.”

Tambacounda-Sint-Niklaas case report

- **Preserving the details and nuances of the MSC stories:** Recording the original content of the stories is an important principle in the MSC method, but proved quite a challenge in a number of cases. In the Nquthu-Bornem case, several of the nuances and details of the MSC stories were partly lost when the stories were translated from the local language. On the other hand, there was a tendency to collate the stories that were shared in smaller groups, creating a collage of different story elements to create one ideal story, that contained all the elements of the observed changes, in the Tambacounda-Sint-Niklaas case. As a result, many of the details of the authentic stories were lost, which was not conducive to an in-depth reflection on the individual stories. The use of video (e.g., in the Witzenberg-Essen case) seemed to offer a solution to this quandary, i.e., by recording the authentic story. In the Tambacounda-Sint-Niklaas case, the second MSC round included sufficient time to record the individual stories. As a result, the full stories could be read out during the feedback round with a larger group.
- **Promoting active participation:** The participatory nature of the MSC method also has a number of practical implications. It is vital that the respondents can share their stories in a safe setting in their own language. When the stories are discussed in a group setting, it is also important that people can express themselves in their own language to prevent exclusion from the discussion for linguistic or cultural reasons. As the officials from the Belgian municipality also participated in the MSC activities, the local language became a significant obstacle for the Belgian officials, preventing them from being able to properly follow the stories and the discussions. Providing sufficient time and the expertise of interpreters to overcome this language barrier is an important practical implication, to be taken into account if you want to successfully apply the MSC technique.

“As a result of the language barrier, you sometimes find yourself excluded from the process at certain times, which prevents you from influencing decisions about the method.”

Tambacounda-Sint-Niklaas case report



Essen-Witzenberg

Oostende-Banjul



5 Learning about the effects or the impact of the city-to-city link

The M&E process contributed to insights into the expected effects of the city-to-city link projects in all the participating cases. In those cases, in which MSC was applied in one way or another, this also yielded learnings about the unintended effects. In the Dogbo-Roeselare case, where the MSC method was not used, no information was obtained about the unexpected effects, which is noteworthy. Table 3 illustrates a number of the expected and unintended effects that emerged during the learning process. The table also indicates which M&E method was used.

Table 3: Insights about the expected and unintended effects of the city-to-city link projects

	M&E-method	Insight in expected effects	Insight in unintended effects
Nquthu-Bornem playgrounds	MSC	Confirmation that the project helps young people spend their time usefully and helps teach them skills which may be of use to them in their further (professional) career.	Children build self-confidence by discovering talents that would not have been discovered in a school setting
San Jerónimo-Edegem waste policy	MSC	More support and personal willingness to participate and commit to the city-to-city link project due to official and political participation in the working visit	Discussion about various opinions about the strategic approach within the city-to-city link project: structural vs. ad-hoc support
Witzenberg-Essen youth work	MSC	Confirmation that the project contributes to young people's personal development, with a view to their future employment and also difficult to ensure a lasting engagement among volunteers	Positive influence of the youth centre, reconciling different cultures
Banjul-Oostende digitisation	MSC	Faster payroll and update of the land registry	Fewer human errors in the financial department
Tambacounda-Sint-Niklaas waste policy	MSC	Less waste in the project neighbourhoods and improved vegetable production thanks to composting. Increased participation of the neighbourhood residents in the municipal policy.	Fewer flies and mosquitoes, and less malaria thanks to rubbish bins with lids.
Dogbo-Roeselare redesign of the market	Group discussion with targeted questions	Confirmation of existing results and challenges, e.g., greater visibility of the city-to-city link project in Dogbo, but rather limited in Roeselare; strong indications of the enduring nature of the birth registration project	The evaluation during a group discussion, which was based on a number of targeted questions, did not give rise to a very critical discussion. As a result, there were no surprising new insights.
Guaranda-Evergem waste policy	MSC + outcome challenge	Considerable dissatisfaction about the atmosphere at work among the promoters that were supervised by the city council. The promoters, who were managed by the local NGO, were more satisfied.	The project planning did not sufficiently factor in the city council's priorities, which led to a limited engagement in the project.



San-Jeronimo-Edegem



6 Usefulness of impact monitoring for managing or adapting the project

Based on the case reports, we concluded that the M&E activities and the M&E information they yielded influenced the city-to-city link projects in various ways. The majority of the case reports showed that the learning process could help strengthen relationships and build trust between the project's various stakeholders (city councils, responsible officials, target groups...) and was conducive to strengthening the shared vision on the project. Finally, the M&E learning process also resulted in recommendations for the potential adaptation of the city-to-city link project.

6.1 Building relationships and trust between project stakeholders

As already indicated above, the use of MSC gave rise to better opportunities for dialogue and active participation during the M&E activities. The case reports reveal that such a dialogue and participation could also help strengthen the mutual relations between the various project stakeholders (city councils, responsible officials, project coordinators, target audiences...). A stronger and broader involvement in the monitoring activities ensured for example that the results of the city-to-city link project were also shared more widely and actively during workshops or missions. In the majority of the cases, this helped highlight the added value of the city-to-city link, increasing support on both of the city councils of the city-to-city link project. In the Nquthu and Witzenberg cases, there were also indications that the city-to-city link project could have brought about a change in mindset on the city councils about the importance of investing in youth services. The M&E learning process also proved to be a strong motivator for the project coordinators, who had a better idea about the results of their work.

"Listening to the stories was also very interesting, for all the parties involved. The activity in itself also created a sense of community among the group of volunteers. The results of the exercise were also a useful tool for convincing politicians in Nquthu about the relevance of meaningful leisure activities for young people and the potential of playground activities for promoting such leisure activities and providing a framework for them. The exercise also motivated the volunteers and the employees of the youth services to continue the programme. The various testimonials clearly indicated that there were many intended and unintended positive effects. The employees of the city council's youth service also found it interesting to see how they could contribute to national challenges with this project (including on the safety of children). It may be worth looking how else they can contribute to this (e.g., by raising awareness during the playground activities...)"

Case report Nquthu-Bornem

"Using an M&E approach automatically encourages critical thinking. Ideally, this MSC exercise should be conducted regularly, because it can lead to adaptations and above all because it gives you a clear idea of the situation in the field. Performing an MSC exercise also helps inspire a sense of appreciation among the target group, it makes them feel that someone is listening to them. The direct contact with the people in the field fosters a better understanding of the city-to-city link project (for the partner in the North). You learn many new things, about which you are never informed. MSC provides a framework for the interviews with the locals. This also allows you to better understand the situation and the problems the locals face."

Tambacounda-Sint-Niklaas case report

Three of the case reports (Witzenberg, Nquthu, Guaranda) also indicated that the MSC technique facilitated a discussion about sensitive topics. Mutual understanding and trust was strengthened as a result. In the Witzenberg-Essen case, for example, the youth worker's limited time in the youth centre

was discussed more thoroughly and more critically based on the MSC stories. In the Guaranda-Evergem case, the M&E learning process also promoted better mutual understanding about the contradiction between the objective of the city-to-city link project in terms of waste policy and the city council's priorities. As a result, it became clear that any future waste separation project had to be more accessible and less ambitious.

6.2 Recommendations for adapting the project

The extent to which the insights from the M&E processes are useful for managing and even adapting a project is an important aspect of result-oriented work. In the majority of the cases, the monitoring exercises also yields insights about specific challenges, in addition to information about unintended and expected effects. In those cases where M&E was applied, these challenges were explained from different perspectives, thanks to the stories of the various representatives of the target groups. Based on this, recommendations could be filtered and identified, for the potential adaptation of the project. The below quotes, which are taken from the case reports, illustrate a number of specific recommendations for the possible adaptation of the city-to-city link projects.

In the Banjul-Ostend case, the interviews about the impact of the digitisation of the city council offered insights about practical challenges that the city-to-city link project might take into account in the future when planning other IT-related initiatives. Additional information was obtained, for example, about problems with the Internet connection, the server which needed to be replaced, power cuts, lack of furniture and courses for employees.

The MSC exercise also identified a number of important challenges in the Tambacounda-Sint-Niklaas case. The annual report revealed that while the employees received training about the procedural handbook about waste policy, the MSC exercise proved that the handbook had not yet been put into practice. The use of this procedural handbook will be an important point for attention in the continuation of this project.

In the Guaranda-Evergem case, measures were taken, based on the results of the MSC - + outcome challenge exercise, to move the theme of waste management with a separate waste collection higher up on the list of the city council's priorities. To this end, the project managers decided, in consultation with the city council and the external NGO partner, that henceforth the project resources would be managed in part (and in the future in full) by Guaranda and no longer exclusively by the external NGO partner.

The actual adaptation of this project, based on the learnings and recommendations from the monitoring exercise, continue to be a major challenge in the majority of the cases. As already indicated in Chapter 4.4, some cases mainly concentrated on collecting and selecting MSC stories rather than on discussing the way forward or the follow-up of the recommendations from the M&E process. This is often due to a lack of time to follow up on these matters or the complexity of intervening in administrative matters, such as the costing and deployment of officials.

“In Essen and in Witzenberg, far too little has been done to date with the results of the MSC exercise. While the intention was to incorporate these new insights in the Op Die Berg action plan, this was not the case... Recommendations have been made to the youth worker however. An e-mail was sent to enquire whether the youth worker took these recommendations on board, but to date no feedback has been received. Information was provided about the installation of an e-centre in the centre but it remains unclear whether it fulfils young people’s needs in terms of the material provided. It is too difficult to request feedback about this at the time of writing, as the follow-up of the federal programme takes up too much time.”

Witzenberg - Essen case report

“After the first working visit in 2015, various delegation members indicated that such an evaluation was important. As a service we missed an opportunity because we did not follow up on this. We can increase the involvement and engagement of colleagues by explicitly asking them questions and by enquiring about their role within the city-to-city link.”

San Jerónimo - Edegem case report



Tambacounda-Sint-Niklaas



7 Planning new 2017-2021 city-to-city link programme

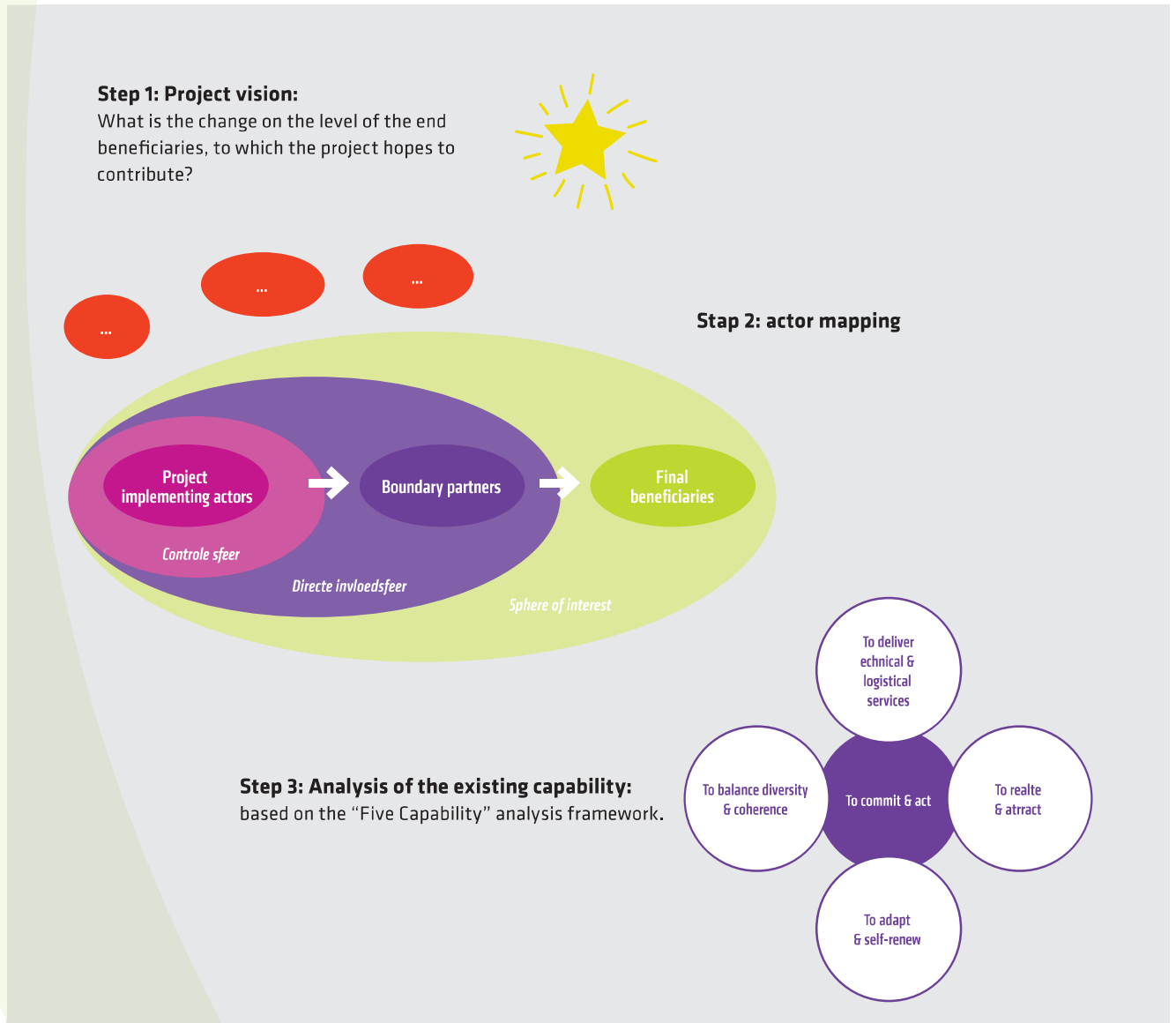
Along with planning, monitoring and evaluation are the three cornerstones of a project cycle, that is geared towards a results-oriented approach. In this learning process, we experimented with a stakeholder-oriented M&E approach to gain a better insight in the results of the city-to-city link projects and to adapt these projects based on these insights. On the other hand, the experiences and learnings from the M&E project were also used to develop and plan the approach for the new city-to-city link programme for 2017-2021, which was submitted to the federal government. The planning was heavily oriented towards stakeholders and comprised the following steps:

- **Step 1: Vision on the desired change on the level of the end beneficiaries (impact level):** A vision exercise was used to determine which changes the project hoped to bring about on the level of the end beneficiaries (e.g., local population) within the work theme (e.g., waste policy) on which the project would focus.
- **Step 2: Stakeholder mapping:** The “spheres of influence” tool of the outcome mapping method was used to map the various local stakeholders with which a project can directly collaborate (i.e., intermediary stakeholders or boundary partners) to contribute to a positive change among the end beneficiaries. The “spheres of influence” tool was also used during the learning process to explain the change theory of the city-to-city link projects in a stakeholder-oriented way.
- **Step 3: Capacity analysis of the intermediary stakeholders (i.e. boundary partners):** An analysis was conducted to better understand the current capacity of these stakeholders in preparation for the planning of the change project on the level of the intermediary stakeholders. This was done based on the “Five Capability” (5C) analysis framework (see Annex 4), which was specifically adapted to the content of the city-to-city link programme (see Annex 5). Such an analysis facilitates a participatory discussion of the strengths and challenges and requirements in terms of capability building.
- **Step 4: Definition of the desired change on the level of the intermediary stakeholders (i.e., boundary partners):** They then discussed which changes needed to be brought about among the intermediary stakeholders so they could contribute in the best way possible to the desired change in the end beneficiaries. An outcome challenge was defined for every intermediary stakeholder, setting out the stakeholder’s ideal change. A number of progress markers were also formulated to check whether the intermediary stakeholder evolved in the direction of the outcome challenge. Progress markers are indicators that help monitor the behavioural change. They describe a set of observable behaviours that can contribute to the outcome challenge in a gradual manner.
- **Step 5: Formulation of results areas and SMART indicators:** several overarching results areas were formulated based on the sets of progress markers for the various city-to-city link projects (e.g., policy-making, raising awareness, capacity building, ...). A set of SMART⁶ indicators was formulated and a risk analysis carried out on the city-to-city link level, for every results area that had been defined. A logical framework was then developed based on this, on the city-to-city link level.

⁶ The OECD-DAC defines the SMART principle as Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely (OECD 2010).

- **Step 6: Development of the monitoring and evaluation plan:** Every city-to-city link project developed an M&E plan using a planning matrix, which indicates on which results level monitoring must take place, why this information is required, how this information will be collected and analysed, who will do this and when and how the reporting will be done.
- **Step 7: Creation of one integrated logical framework on the country level:** In a last step, the logical frameworks of the individual city-to-city link projects in one and the same country were incorporated in one logical framework on the country level. The VVSG will base itself on this integrated logical framework for all its reports to the DG Development Cooperation. Individual city-to-city link projects will however continue to report to the VVSG based on the logical framework for their own city-to-city link project. ●

Fig. 3: Overview of important steps in the planning schedule for the 2017-2021 city-to-city link programme





Step 4: Planning of a change process among intermediary stakeholders:
 formulation of an outcome challenge and process markers for every intermediary stakeholder to whom the project provides support

Step 5: Development of a logical framework on the city-to-city link level:
 results areas, smart indicators and risk analysis

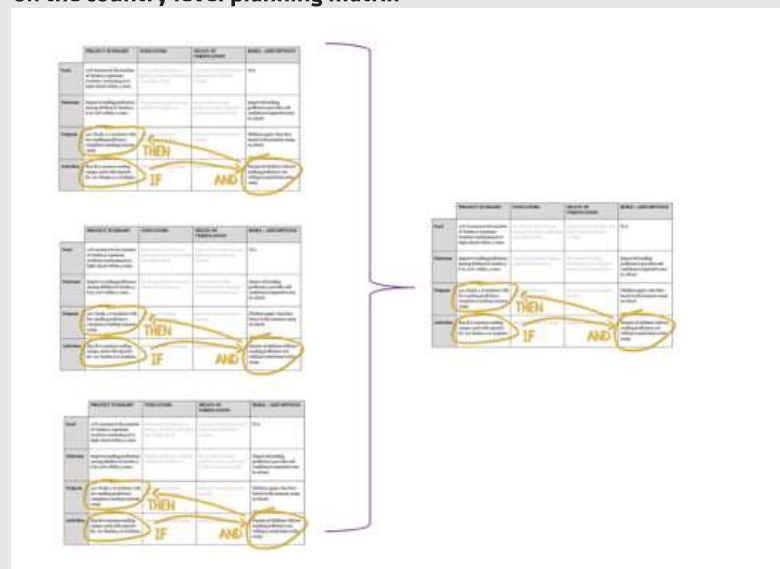
RESULT AREA	INDICATORS	MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS	RISKS AND MITIGATIONS
Goal	Full delivery of the number of cities in a project that are working well in their own right.	Number of cities in a project that are working well in their own right.	None
Outcome	Improved working conditions among business operators in the city-to-city link.	Number of cities in a project that are working well in their own right.	Improved working conditions among business operators in the city-to-city link.
Output	Number of cities in a project that are working well in their own right.	Number of cities in a project that are working well in their own right.	Number of cities in a project that are working well in their own right.
Activity	Number of cities in a project that are working well in their own right.	Number of cities in a project that are working well in their own right.	Number of cities in a project that are working well in their own right.

Handwritten annotations in yellow highlight the 'THEN', 'IF', and 'AND' relationships between the rows.

Step 6: Development of a M&E planning matrix

Monitoring information	Who needs this information?	For what purpose?	When needed?	How collected? By who?	How analysed?	How to do reporting?
Progress markers						
Smart Indicators of the logical framework						

Step 7: Development of one logical framework on the country level planning matrix





Dogbo-Roeselare

Essen-Witzenberg



8 Conclusions and recommendations

By way of conclusion, we provide a brief overview of the most important insights from the learning process and examine to which extent the learning process was able to provide answers to the research questions of the different cases. Finally, we also formulate a number of recommendations in terms of the monitoring and evaluation of city-to-city link projects and the development of future M&E learning processes.

8.1 Conclusions

- An important finding is that the M&E activities in all the cases provided useful information about the **expected effects** of the city-to-city link project. Moreover, insights were also obtained about the **unintended effects** as well as more nuanced insights in the local context in the 6 cases that experimented with elements of the MSC method. Thanks to the open questions (i.e., “what do you think is the most important change you noticed in yourself or in your surroundings as a result of this project?”), a margin was created that allowed the respondents to determine which changes they found important, and discuss them. In the majority of the cases, this also gave rise to useful recommendations for the possible adaptation of the projects. This demonstrates that impact monitoring is effectively possible within the project, subject to an explicit commitment to M&E and practically feasible M&E methods, that are adapted to the specific context in which the city-to-city link project is implemented.
- The **analysis of the monitoring information** proved a challenge in the majority of the cases. The participants often mainly invested time in collecting the monitoring information. As a result, they did not have the time to discuss this information in a group setting. In the majority of the cases, the participants felt that they could have done more with the monitoring information. There was also very little information to demonstrate that the recommendations from the M&E project were implemented during the rest of the project. The follow-up of these recommendations is important however to prevent these M&E activities from being considered as “separate” from the project and therefore not very relevant. This is also a crucial aspect of a results-oriented approach. So this definitely is a point for attention in the future.
- The **stakeholder-oriented M&E focus** on the changes in stakeholders that attempt to directly and indirectly influence the project has a number of important advantages: 1) it promotes the lasting impact of the results as the local intermediary stakeholders (e.g., an environmental service) must continue to provide their service even after the project in ordinary circumstances; 2) it also helps to clarify the different roles, responsibilities and expectations of the various stakeholders who are involved (e.g., project coordinators, local governments, technical services, inhabitants, ...) as this may contribute to a more shared vision about the project; 3) finally this approach also helps to clearly distinguish between the project activities and the project results to which these activities attempt to contribute. Such transparency is conducive to a better insight in the project’s change theory (Van Es et al. 2015⁷, Van Ongevalle et al. 2012⁸) and is important for a results-oriented approach.

7 Van Es, M., Guijtn, I., Vogel, I. (2015) Hivos Theory of Change Guidelines: THEORY OF CHANGE THINKING IN PRACTICE – A stepwise approach: http://www.theoryofchange.nl/sites/default/files/resource/hivos_toc_guidelines_final_nov_2015.pdf

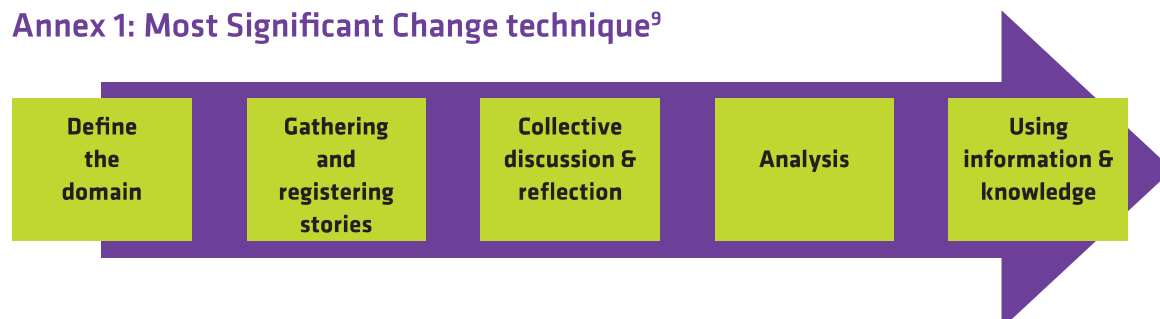
8 Van Ongevalle, J., Maarse, J., Temmink, C., Boutyilkova, E., Huyse, H. (2012), Dealing with complexity through actor-focused Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation (PM&E), PSO & HIVA, Den Haag, The Netherlands. <http://www.outcomemapping.ca/resource/resource.php?id=404>.

8.2 Recommendations

- According to the feedback from the different cases, the learning process contributed to capacity building in terms of planning, monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) within the city-to-city link projects (see annex 3 for a number of reflections on the learning process, starting from the cases). On the one hand, the use of certain aspects of the outcome mapping method helped fine-tune the change theory of the city-to-city link projects. Consequently the planning is now more focused on the development results, i.e., changes in work methods, or the policy of stakeholders who influence the projects directly or indirectly. On the other hand, most of the cases succeeded in acquiring insights about their project results in a feasible and participatory manner, by using the MSC method. The results and the experiences of the learning process were also integrated in the methodological approach for the planning of the new city-to-city link programme (2017-2021). Elements of outcome mapping, the Five Capability Framework and the logical framework were successfully incorporated in this. At the same time, there are still a number of planning, monitoring and evaluation challenges on which future collective learning processes could focus. The analysis of the monitoring information in a participatory manner and the effective use of the results of the monitoring cycles for adapting projects could be an interesting working point for a follow-up project on PM&E.
- The sharing of experiences between the cases and learning from each other during the collective learning opportunities was one of the most important stimulating factors in the learning process. While written manuals and training sessions on specific methods continue to be relevant, they are probably insufficient. A framework is also needed, e.g., some form of active exchange among colleagues, so project coordinators feel they have support and are more self-assured when it comes to using new ideas or methods. The same applies to the sharing of the results of this learning process. Developing active learning processes, which allow the participants in this learning process to actively share their experiences with other city-to-city link coordinators, e.g., through international seminars or exchanges between city-to-city link projects, will also help ensure that the learnings of this learning process are picked up and used by other city-to-city link projects. A successful example of this approach is the planning seminar of 22-26 May in Vaalbeek, where the learnings and experiences of the learning process were incorporated in the planning of the new city-to-city link programme (2017-2021). The participants in this learning process acted as resource persons during this planning seminar.
- One of the important learnings from the learning process, which could also become a recommendation for city-to-city link in general, is the importance of always adapting the existing planning, monitoring and evaluation methods to the local context and needs of a city-to-city link project. Only those sub-elements that were useful for the project were fully implemented for example, but not outcome mapping and MSC. The PM&E methods were always flexibly adapted to the project's specific reality. Examples include the categorisation of progress markers during the planning seminar in Vaalbeek as well as the adaptations to the MSC methods, which were described above in 3.2 and the municipal transposition of the Five Capability Framework as illustrated in Annex 5. The learning process also taught us that such a custom approach required a certain measure of ownership and a strong involvement of the city-to-city link coordinators during the PM&E process. It is vital that VVSG continues to provide support for the PM&E activities with assistance, training, exchanges and the organisation of specific collective learning processes, with the strong participation of the project coordinators, in order to ensure that the current positive PM&E dynamic becomes embedded and is extended to include the various city-to-city link projects. ●

9 Annexes

Annex 1: Most Significant Change technique⁹



The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) technique assesses **the most significant change** in the lives of individual people and as it is experienced by them. With this method you gather stories from individual people whom you select and present the same question to.

The objective is to understand what type of change is possible because of your project. You do not want to know the common denominator, but you do want to understand what is possible and how your project contributes to change. You want to go beyond the direct results of your activities in the short term. You are more interested in the long-term change.

The method consists of several stages, which we have summarised below.

- **Proper definition of the project:** Both the domain (what will you ask questions about) and the respondents must be well defined by the project owner and the other stakeholders of the project.
- **Gathering and registering stories:** The respondents are asked one question and then the interviewer continues with some questions that were planned in advance. The questions are: (i) Which changes did you see (in the domain specified by the interviewer)? (ii) Why is that in your opinion? (iii) What do you think is the most meaningful change? (iv) Why is this the most important change for you at this time?
- **Discussion and reflection:** The aim is that you bring together the people who told the stories in order to listen to each other's story and possibly ask each other to explain things. The MSC procedure states that afterwards you ask people to choose an 'ultimate' story in the group (or in smaller groups first), a story that everybody feels reflects the most meaningful change. This stage can be adjusted. You may not want to select just one story, but instead ask the participants which story in particular touched them and why. If this question is answered by everyone, this also provides an indirect indication of what is seen as the most significant by the group.
- **Story analysis:** This analysis is important in order to move from an individual story to possible mechanisms of change or lessons learned. The aim is to dig deeper into the collected stories and to ask questions about the material that was gathered. What stands out in the answers (per domain)? What kind of change is mentioned most? Which negative changes are there? Do men provide different answers than women? Do the stories offer answers to other questions we have? Can we explain certain findings?
- **Using information and knowledge:** Then you need to use the information in order to take action. It is important to share insights with others and to use the main conclusions of internal communication about the project with the broader target group (not just the selected respondents) and the donors and partners. The main objective is to examine which action is required in order to improve the project.

⁹ Further information about the MSC method: Corina Dhaene and Bert Janssens, *Mag het wat M&Er zijn? Introduction to Monitoring and Evaluation for Municipal International Cooperation*, North-South Series for Local Authorities, Politeia, 2013. The translations of this publication are published on the VVSG website: [M&Eting the need for results](#), [M&Enos.es.mas](#), [Le.M&E.explique](#)

Annex 2: Research plan M&E project Witzenberg-Essen

RESEARCH QUESTION

How are the operations of the Tulbagh youth centre optimally safeguarded and further developed, for the long term, after the “municipal international collaboration” programme for 2009-2012 ended? Which learnings from this programme are useful for the local economic development (LED) programme in Op-Die-Berg?

- Which effects were achieved and with whom?
- How to measure community support?
- Did other related activities take place?
- How was capacity strengthened through the Manco?

RESEARCH PLAN

Target group in which we want to bring about a noticeable change	Purpose of the monitoring	Data collection			Analyse and reflect on the data that were collected during the monitoring (When? With whom? How?)
		By whom?	When?	Method	
Service Local Economic Development + manager Socio-Economic Development (SED)	Better insight and knowledge about the approach for developing a youth centre with a view to improving the approach in Op-die-Berg; provide budgets; training programme as well as attention for the leisure programme...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation between LED Witzenberg and the Essen steering committee • Director community services 	Working visit autumn 2015? 18/9/2015	Exercise Outcome mapping during the actual conference	Annual reports FP GIS? As a starting point
Community development workers (CDWs)	Pursue good involvement in new processes and changes in their district/relationship in new project and community, as involvement was very limited	Director community services, LED officials Invitation for MSC among young people on 11/9/2015	Working visit autumn 2015?		Were they relevant? Were they further involved? Relationship between their job/neighbourhood and Tulbagh youth centre and LED programme in Op-die-Berg? Director does not manage them, district does.
volunteers/MANCO youth centre	Sufficient support for doing their job and improving capacity for establishing programmes, training programmes and information and support to young people Provide sufficient margin to organise leisure programmes	LED / youth worker/ SED manager Essen delegation	Working visit 11-12/9/2015	MSC Case study in Witzenberg (invite group/ select stories/) during conference	Also annual reports. -Which training sessions did they follow? -Which programmes/leisure programme did they organise? -How are the administration and finances of the youth centre organised?
Participating youth/ Youth ambassadors (only conducted the survey in 2009, were not involved in the long term)	Do they know the centre? Do they know the training programme? What did they participate in? How did the training have an impact on them? Or on the leisure programme?	LED / youth worker/ SED manager Essen delegation	Working visit 11-12/9/2015	MSC Case study in Witzenberg (invite group/ select stories/) during conference	Attendance certificates -> what did they participate in?
Ward committee / local politicians	Do they back the centre? Are they also promoting it?	LED / youth worker/ SED manager Essen delegation	Working visit 12/9/2015	MSC processing	

Annex 3: Reflections on the learning process, starting from the cases

Nquthu-Bornem

- *Participation proved very useful. The learning process encouraged us to test things. I had already heard about the MSC concept but I would have never dared to test this of my own volition without this learning process.*
- *The fact that the learning process provided so much time to exchange information about our experiences and learn from each other provided a lot of added value. I definitely was inspired by the experiences of other municipalities (e.g., to conduct a survey about the expectations of delegations who are visiting the partner municipality for the first time).*
- *I did regret the fact that only a small number of different methods were applied (that said, they proved very useful and interesting).*

San Jerónimo-Edegem

- *Participating in the learning process proved really worthwhile. Not just to learn more about evaluation techniques and monitoring tools. We mainly gained an insight in the added value of monitoring and evaluation. This is not an automatism in our operations at the moment. This learning process helps us make the “click” and use M&E as a standard method, as an automatism throughout the process and not just at the end of the year when we submit an annual report.*

Witzenberg-Essen

- *The feedback during the sessions of the learning process proved invaluable during the execution. As we were not the first ones to make the exercise, the others were able to provide a lot of input. The monitoring exercise was a positive learning process on several levels. We spent a lot of time on it, but there also was a clear output. It feels as if this is the way to go for such a research question. The learning process also provided us with the incentive to explicitly focus on monitoring. Repeating such an exercise during every multiannual programme definitely has added value.*

Banjul-Oostende

- *We felt the learning process was useful and instructive. Discussing opportunities and potential pitfalls and exchanging (good and less successful) experiences with colleagues from other municipalities was especially interesting. The main challenge now is to effectively embed various M&E aspects in the general operations of our city-to-city link project and the city's global policy.*

Tambacounda-Sint-Niklaas

- *The participation in this learning process was a positive experience. It gave us the time and space to work with this M&E technique and share experiences with others. The downside is that you mainly focus on one technique. As a result, any knowledge about other methods is limited to what is shared during the sessions.*
- *We wouldn't go as far as to say that we have become real M&E specialists. We do however see MSC as an accessible method for working with a diverse population and getting a more accurate idea about the effects of the intervention.*
- *Perhaps the process lasted too long or the meetings were too spread out at one point? In any event, the dynamic waned. In some cases, there was a downtime of one year between two exercises, meaning we did not develop a routine and a practice.*

Dogbo-Roeselare

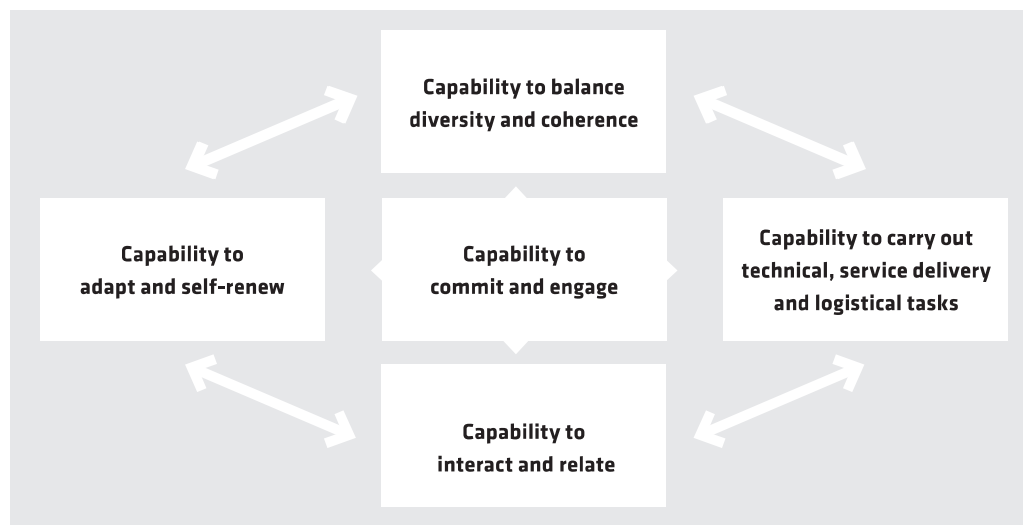
- *Experiencing this learning process with colleagues has more added value. You learn a lot from the specific experiences of other colleagues.*
- *I hoped to learn more about several evaluation/monitoring methods.*
- *I hoped to gain a better insight in how to draw up good indicators for project monitoring.*

Guaranda-Evergem

- *The project monitoring process gave us an opportunity to engage in discussions with our partners and helped us explore new paths, albeit through trial and error.*

Annex 4: Five Capabilities Framework¹⁰

Morgan H. & P. (2008) made a distinction between individual competences and collective capabilities at the level of the organisation (or the system). On the basis of empirical studies, the researchers gathered evidence that five collective capabilities occur in any organisation (or system) with different degrees of importance (figure 1.2). These five core capabilities enable any organisation to develop capacities to realise their mission in a sustainable way. No single core capability is sufficient by itself. You need an adequate combination of the five core capabilities in order for an organisation (or a system) to survive and created value. The most adequate combination depends on the type of organisation, its mission, its context, its history, etc.



The meaning and ideas behind each of the core capabilities as well as their linkages are explained below.

1. Core capability to commit and engage: Describes the awareness of the organisation or system of its place in the world and its capability to organise itself and to develop its own motivation and commitment of its staff and members to act towards common goals. The organisation and its members are aware of its legitimacy, keep a clear focus and have confidence to address challenges.
2. Core capability to carry out technical, service delivery and logistical tasks: Describes the knowledge, expertise and experience required to carry out actions and achieve the development results aimed for. This includes technical and logistical skills, managerial capacity (such as programme analysis, financial management, project management,...), lobby and advocacy, etc.
3. Core capability to interact and relate: Is the ability to craft, manage and sustain key relationships for the organisation's autonomy, functioning and existence.
4. Core capability to adapt and self-renew: Is about the ability to adapt to changing circumstances. This is a key requirement for organisational survival and is central to its ability to continue to be relevant, effective and efficient within a changing environment and towards changing needs.
5. Core capability to balance diversity and coherence: All organisations need a broad variety of skills, interests, perspectives and ways of thinking which helps them to build their resilience. Diversity however needs to be balanced against coherence in order to avoid the risk of fragmentation, of losing focus and ending up disintegrated.

The five core capabilities are part of a system which evolved in time, gets disrupted and finds a new balance at a given time and in a given context. Analysing linkages between core capabilities and their context and time helps to identify patterns of change, factors of leverage and constraint and ultimately identify priorities in the change process.

¹⁰ Tekst uit 'Training Document: Introduction to the '5 Core Capabilities' model for capacity building' van Birgit De Clerck uit 2015

Annex 5: Five Capabilities Framework adapted to the context of the City-to-city link programme

Self-analysis tool of municipal capacity regarding a (sub-)theme

NAME OF MUNICIPALITY:	DEFINITION/ DESCRIPTION OF THEME/SUB-THEME OF THE PROGRAMME:			
5 Core Capabilities of Capacity Scores for question 1 in terms of relevance: 1: not very relevant, 2: little relevant; 3: moderately relevant, 4: quite relevant, 5: very relevant	Is this relevant for the theme?	Give a positive example of the current situation in the theme	Give one or several course(s) of action to strengthen and improve the theme (list in bullets)	Will the programme prioritize this?
1. Capability to act and remain				
1.1. the politically elected listen to the population and are able to effectively meet their real and pressing needs concerning the theme				
1.2. the local government shows political will and engagement to make changes in the theme				
1.3. the local government has capable, responsible and educated political leaders (local government members, councilors) concerning the theme				
1.4. the local government has a good and shared vision of the theme both in the short and long term				
1.5. the municipal administration carries out its policy concerning the theme through a result-based approach				
1.6. the municipal administration has a continuous and stable staffing structure in its entire administration and the specific thematic department				
1.7. the local government has attention for gender equality in the field of the theme				
1.8. the local government will earmark the required time and resources to obtain the thematic change				
2. Capability to deliver technical services				
2.1. the municipal administration connects political priorities into thematic policy plans				
2.2. the local government carries out a gender analysis (measuring the effect of actions on men and women) when prioritizing its thematic priorities				
2.3. the municipal administration is able to perform efficient thematic services				
2.4. the municipal government (within the thematic department) has the right technical capacities and skills				
2.5. the local government monitors a regular and correct performance of the municipal thematic policy plan				
2.6. the municipal administration has sufficient and motivated staff to execute the policy				
2.7. the local government makes the population aware of the thematic situation, challenges and solutions				
3. Capability to adapt and self-assess				
3.1. the local government includes the lessons learned and good practices in new policy plans that are relevant for the theme				
3.2. the local government actively looks for new good practices at other local authorities and organizations concerning the theme				
3.3. the politically elected are aware of the importance to rise above party politics in this theme				
3.4. the local government is able to adapt policy to unforeseen circumstances, recognizes opportunities within the theme and is able to use them				
3.5. the local government carries out a regular policy of follow-up and evaluation regarding the theme				
3.6. the municipal administration has a high performance human resources policy (including permanent further training regarding the theme)				
4. Capability to relate and attract				
4.1. the local government is able to have an open dialogue regarding the theme with citizens				
4.2. the local government is accountable (financial, priority choices, etc.) to the population for its thematic policy				
4.3. the local government stimulates thematic participation on mechanisms for its local policy regarding the theme				
4.4. the local government has a good (collaborative) relationship with other government levels and/or other stakeholders regarding the theme				
4.5. the local government organizes a good internal and external communication regarding the theme				
4.6. the local government attracts specific projects with other partners to promote gender equality in the municipality regarding the theme				
4.7. the municipal administration pursues a gender equality policy in terms of hiring, pay and career possibilities				
5. Capability to balance emergency and coherence				
5.1. the political parties in the municipality are able to combine the real development needs with party political interests regarding the theme				
5.2. the local government takes into account the diversity of ethnic, cultural sections of the population when developing the policy regarding the theme				
5.3. the local government pursues a local consistent policy of sustainable development relating to the theme (both ecological, economic and social aspects)				
5.4. the local government has special attention for the needs and challenges of women concerning the theme				
5.5. the municipal administration reflects the social diversity				

Instructions to fill out this analysis

- This is **not** an application form, but is a tool to clarify the analysis of the situation of the municipality for the formulation of the future 2017-2021 Municipal International Cooperation programme. It is part of the participants' homework for the planning week of the next programme.
- Various leading questions are asked which have been broken down into 5 blocks. The blocks are broken down according to the 5C model, but you need not take this into account. Only the individual leading questions are important and have to be answered. The answers concern individual estimates for every question.
- Concepts: the following municipal jargon concepts are used: the politically elected on the one hand (political level) and the municipal administration (technical level) on the other hand. We also talk about the local government as a whole and with this we mean both the politically elected and municipal administration.
- Procedure to INDIVIDUALLY answer all questions. All participants of the partner municipalities to the planning week are requested to answer these questions individually:
 - Determine the theme and the sub-theme of the programme to be formulated (market management, environmental policy, waste management, local economy, etc.).
 - Read all questions individually, apply them to the theme and mark whether the question is relevant is (1-5 from very little to very relevant) for the theme.
 - Then give a positive example of something in this question which in the municipality already works well regarding the chosen theme. This may provide useful information at a later date as baseline information.
 - Then provide one or several courses of action which could be formulated regarding this to improve it. This may provide useful information at a later date to formulate results, indicators and/or activities.
 - Then determine whether this question is important for further use for the programme regarding the theme.
- Put the individual answers of all participants to the planning week next to each other. They will conduct the discussions which are necessary to formulate the programme.

Self-analysis tool of municipal capacity regarding a (sub-)theme

NAME OF MUNICIPALITY:
<h3>5 Core Capabilities of Capacity</h3> <p>Scores for question 1 in terms of relevance: 1: not very relevant, 2: little relevant; 3: moderately relevant, 4: quite relevant, 5: very relevant</p>
1. Capability to act and commit
1.1 the politically elected listen to the population and are able to effectively meet their real and pressing needs concerning the theme
1.2 the local government shows political will and engagement to make changes in the theme
1.3 the local government has capable, responsible and educated political leaders (local government members, councillors) concerning the theme
1.4 the local government has a good and shared vision of the theme both in the short and long-term
1.5 the municipal administration carries out its policy concerning the theme through a result-based approach
1.6 the municipal administration has a continuous and stable staffing level both in its entire administration and the specific thematic department
1.7 the local government has attention for gender equality in the field of the theme
1.8 the local government will earmark the required time and resources to obtain the thematic change
2. Capability to deliver technical services
2.1 the municipal administration converts political priorities into thematic policy plans
2.2 the local government carries out a gender analysis (measuring the effect of actions on men and women) when plotting its thematic priorities
2.3 the municipal administration is able to perform efficient thematic services
2.4 the municipal personnel (within the thematic department) has the right technical capacities and skills
2.5 the local government monitors a prompt and correct performance of the municipal thematic policy plans
2.6 the municipal administration has enthusiastic and motivated staff in the thematic department
2.7 the local government makes the population aware of the thematic situation, challenges and solutions
3. Capability to adapt and self-renew
3.1 the local government includes the lessons learned and good practices in new policy plans that are relevant for the theme
3.2 the local government actively looks for new good practices at other local authorities and organisations concerning the theme
3.3 the politically elected are aware of the importance to rise above party politics in this theme
3.4 the local government is able to adapt easily to unforeseen circumstances, recognises opportunities within the theme and is able to use them
3.5 the local government pursues an internal policy of follow-up and evaluation regarding the theme
3.6 the municipal administration has a high-performance human resources policy (including permanent further training regarding the theme)
4. Capability to relate and attract
4.1 the local government is able to have an open dialogue regarding the theme with citizens
4.2 the local government is accountable (financial, priority choices, etc.) to the population for its thematic policy
4.3 the local government stimulates thematic participation mechanisms for its local policy regarding the theme
4.4 the local government has a good (collaboration) relationship with other government levels and/or other stakeholders regarding the theme
4.5 the local government organises a good internal and external communication regarding the theme
4.6 the local government attracts specific projects with other partners to promote gender equality in the municipality regarding the theme
4.7 the municipal administration pursues a gender equality policy in terms of hiring, pay and career possibilities
5. Capability to balance diversity and coherence
5.1 the political parties in the municipality are able to combine the real development needs with party political interests regarding the theme
5.2 the local government takes into account the diversity of ethnic cultural sections of the population when developing the policy regarding the them
5.3 the local government pursues a local consistent policy of sustainable development relating to the theme (with ecological, economic and social aspects)
5.4 the local government has special attention for the needs and challenges of women concerning the theme
5.5 the municipal administration reflects the social diversity

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