

Decentralized Cooperation to localize the SDGs in Europe

Introduction

The specificity of European decentralized cooperation as a lever for the SDGs

Decentralized cooperation (DC) for local and regional government (LRG) development in the European Union (EU) is not essentially different from those in other geographical areas: the diversity of practices, priorities, modalities and ways of working and methodologies are a reflection of what is happening at the global level. However, the fact that Europe is primarily a donor to development cooperation has resulted in a particular scenario for diverse actors.

The European tradition, rooted mainly in official development assistance (ODA), is updated with the SDGs among the different manifestations of DC. However, it remains in many of the institutions that were created to support DC in Europe. This includes having a basis in official financial support to DC with a focus on economic development. Throughout the process of shifting development perspectives to consider sustainability as a fundamental axis of development (embodied in the SDGs), funding institutions and actor-agents of European DC have redefined ODA today. This text mainly focuses on this European conception of “decentralized development cooperation”, thus emphasizing financial cooperation, North-South, as a starting point for the current analysis of the dominant type of DC in the region.

European DC operates in certain frameworks, with characteristics and specificities that are useful to highlight and outline: both for thinking about what its contribution to the global objectives of sustainable development can be, as well as for organizing the exchange of knowledge and learning on this issue. Specifically:

- a) In the European framework, the cooperation of regional and local administrations has a fundamental facilitating element: the existence of the EU itself, and of a wide range of programs (territorial development, agriculture, climate...) in which sub-state governments are key players. In particular, cooperation programs between European and neighboring territories (Interreg, ENI), and with other regions (Urb-AL, Med-Urbs...), have served to build key capacities for DC and to standardize it, integrating it into the EU's external relations landscape.
- b) As a natural next step to this vector of cooperation between groups of cities or regions, it was foreseen to create thematic networks that would be coordinated and financed by the cities themselves. Although this step did not actually take place, there has been an important change in terms of European funding for DC. Previously, it was focused on the implementation of projects between European cities and cities in the South. Now, it has progressively provided European funding to networks of cities and even networks of cooperation of cities within the European Union (Urbact).
- c) At the state level, the existing diversity within the European DC, as well as its scope and volume, are linked to the existence of very different national legal frameworks. These act to some extent as promoters of the international

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cooperation of their territories and collaborative cultures, practices and ways of working between the central government and the LRGs. Unlike other policies - where EU membership progressively leads to a certain homogenization of legal frameworks and state practices - the regulation of development cooperation varies strongly among the different EU member states, especially in relation to decentralized public actors. Moreover, Europe is highly diversified in terms of the nature of the actors: local NGOs, local cooperation funds (e.g. in Spain), initiative facilitators (e.g. Engagement Global in Germany) or specific institutions within local government associations (e.g. VGN International in the Netherlands or Salar and ICLD in Sweden).

- d) In local realities, municipalities or LRGs are active in cooperation for different reasons such as channeling or financing solidarity actions, and integrating their knowledge in cooperation projects and programs carried out by others, among others. Expectations depend on the actors, from the interest in exchanging practices in order to learn and share knowledge to developing projects on specific themes, seeking agreements and partnerships with others. Many actors are nurturing long-established cooperative relationships. These partnerships can be activated with new themes, such as climate change or digitalization, and contribute to the sustainable development agenda.
- e) The 2030 Agenda underlines the universality of the challenges facing humanity in terms of sustainable development, but also points out distinct responsibilities for developed and developing countries (according to its own terminology). At the international level, and as constituents of donor countries, members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee, EU LRGs should pay particular attention to these guidelines for the use of public ODA resources.

Based on these general characteristics of the frameworks in which European decentralized partnerships operate, this document, organized in a similar way to the Trainers' Workshop process of Module 4, provides some more details on the reality and diversity of DC in the EU, always with the SDGs as a point of reference.

There are many challenges facing our societies today. Europe must look to other regions of the world to find solutions to climate change, perhaps the greatest and most shared global threat. DC is an excellent tool to establish learning vectors between cities and regions in the North and South. On the other hand, Russia's invasion of Ukraine is putting the consolidated democracies to the test. A great effort, not only economic but also in management, will be necessary to carry out the inevitable reconstruction of Ukraine. Beyond the problem to be solved, this is an opportunity to rethink how to cooperate between blocks, countries, regions and cities. DC actions articulated in a sustained manner between these actors and their member associations both in Europe and in other regions will contribute to making cities fairer, more sustainable and better prepared for the global challenges that confront them.

Based on the general characteristics of the frameworks in which European decentralized partnerships operate, this document, organized in a similar way to the Trainers' Workshop process of Module 4, provides some more details on the reality and diversity of DC in the EU, always with the SDGs as a point of reference.



Decentralized Cooperation in the EU: legal frameworks and their implications for SDGs' strategies

The reality of DC varies greatly among the 27 EU Member States. In each of them, development cooperation promoted by sub-state administrations -regions, municipalities, provinces, etc- shows an extraordinarily wide diversity of practices and ways of working: different modalities and instruments, actions of greater or lesser volume, preferences for one or other forms of channeling, alliances and partnerships, financing options, etc.

This diversity responds, to a significant degree, to the formalization of DC as public policy. In other words, the extent to which development cooperation promoted by non-central administrations is recognized by the legal and institutional frameworks of each State, which makes it possible to grant this activity greater or lesser legal capacity and financial autonomy.

Based on a study commissioned by the Committee of the Regions¹, which provided an in-depth analysis of these differences in DC regulations and practices, we present an updated European overview on this subject:

a) First, some EU states have legal frameworks that clearly define the parameters of local and regional authorities' activity in the provision of ODA. Among these, Belgium, France, Italy and especially Spain have significant volumes of ODA. In others -Hungary, Poland, Latvia, and Romania-, regions and municipalities are not yet devoting their resources to cooperation.

Decentralized partnerships included in this group will be able to orient their activities towards achieving the SDGs in a comprehensive manner, aligning public policy as a whole, including planning and programming, policy dialogue with partners, use of own funding, public accountability, etc.

b) Secondly, in some EU countries, despite the absence of legal frameworks defining the mandates of local and regional authorities in the provision of ODA, there are significant levels of DC for development. There are some countries (Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands) that channel a significant part of their ODA resources through their municipalities, thus facilitating their involvement in national development programs and dialogue with partner countries. Participation in DC is less intense in federal countries such as Germany and Austria (which nevertheless report some sub-state ODA expenditures, see section 3.2 below), or Portugal and Estonia.

The SDG orientation of DC within this group prioritizes operational aspects such as project design, partnership building, access to funding sources, and in general those elements aimed at building a solid capacity of its own to contribute to the sustainable development of other decentralized governments. This capacity can be supported by national and international funding programs and can be integrated into high quality partnerships.

c) Third, we have countries with low DC activity with legal frameworks that refrain from regulating this area (Denmark, Malta, Slovenia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Croatia). In addition, there are countries that actively limit the ability of local and regional authorities to participate in the provision of ODA (Luxembourg, Ireland, Greece, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Slovakia).

¹Study on the Competencies, Financing and Actions Undertaken by Local and Regional Authorities in International Development. Committee of the Regions of the European Union. <https://cor.europa.eu>



The sub-state public administrations of the countries included in this third group are not yet deploying significant DC activity. It is therefore a matter of interpreting and taking advantage of national debates on the SDGs and their localization strategies as an opportunity to present DC. These debates should showcase its key capacities for sustainable development, the internationalization of the territory and its actors, and the linkage with global agendas.

One of the characteristics of the European context in terms of the use of funds is the mandate regarding the traceability of such use, its documentation and full justification. Any recipient of European funds that does not comply with this mandate in any of its concreteness puts at risk access to funds in the future (this condition is not limited, of course, to ODA but remains active in all instruments).

Of course, this European particularity with regard to the justification of the use of funds cannot be extended to participants from other regions of the world, which can lead to a relative asymmetry in terms of transparency and accountability between different participants in the same project. This requires, on the one hand, a high level of trust between the parties, which can only be achieved through very long-term partnerships, as well as control and monitoring mechanisms adapted to each situation and in the spirit of the European requirement for accountability. This is the only way for European actors to fulfill their obligations in relation to the funds received (see also point 3.2 below).

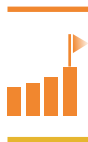
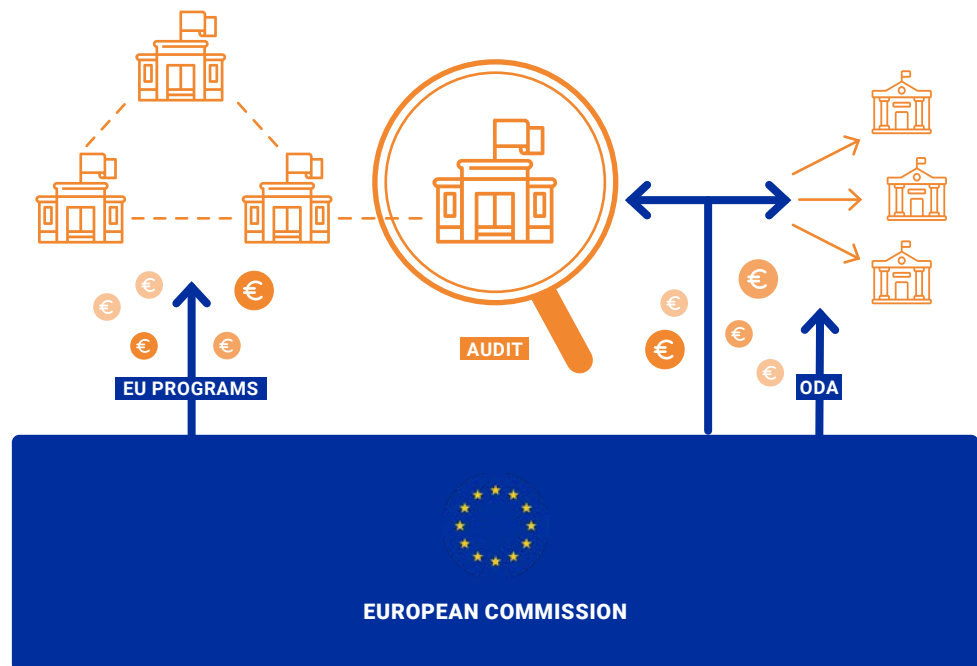


Figure 1
LRGs' task accumulation on own and EU co-funding reporting





Integrating the SDGs into cooperation policies

This section points out some issues and priorities in a European approach. Specifically, it will address the most relevant goals and targets from an ODA perspective; aspects of financing sustainable development; and policy coherence for development.

3.1 Sustainable development goals and targets and the use of official development aid

Unlike their predecessors, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the SDGs constitute a universal performance framework - not only for “developing countries” - linked to issues common to the North and the South, as well as to the planet as a whole. It is a framework that calls for a joint effort by states and their societies and requires a significant mobilization of resources in both the public and private spheres. This is why its financing goes far beyond the capacities of ODA. In turn, cooperation resources are invested in the localization of SDGs and their mobilization of actors, data and strategies in the respective European cities. However, the fact that the achievement of the SDGs requires going beyond ODA does not imply that ODA does not have an important role to play in achieving sustainable development. On the contrary, ODA flows are, as we shall see, frequently mentioned by the SDGs and their targets. ODA is an increasingly scarce and essential resource, and an SDG logic should lead to a strategic and ambitious use of its resources. The following are three questions that can be used to guide the use of ODA resources by DC policies.

First, what is the role of ODA in the 2030 Agenda?

It is a dual function:

- On the one hand, ODA can finance difficult operations with no possible return, with a focus on the least developed countries (LDCs) (targeting 0.15% - 0.20% of the donor countries' gross national income), and maintaining investment in contexts of crisis and great need.
- On the other hand, ODA is expected to play a role as a catalyst for other expenditures and investments needed for the ambitious global sustainable development agenda. Thus, SDG-oriented ODA spending should also aim to maximize the additional resources and investments - from development funds, other official flows, and private resources - mobilized by official aid.

Secondly, how should ODA resources be distributed, in a sustainable development logic, between multilateral and bilateral cooperation?

Public cooperation - including DC, to the extent of its capacities - must take into account the fact that supporting the new sustainable development framework requires strengthening certain functions and principles through the use of ODA.



Thirdly, do the SDGs contain precise indications - intervention sectors, priority countries - that can guide a DC development policy?

In fact, beyond these general guidelines, which are inferred from the principles of the 2030 Agenda itself, the various sustainable development goals that make up the SDGs are formulated as objectives and outcomes, but also as actions to be carried out by 2030. In the latter case, we speak of “means of implementation” (MOIs). In many cases, MOIs include guidelines for development cooperation and for the use of official international funding flows. Also from a DC perspective, it is important to take these SDGs and MOIs into account at the various programming levels: from multi-year strategic planning to the specific program or project. To illustrate, we can point out:



**SDG 4. ENSURING INCLUSIVE AND
EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION AND
PROMOTING LIFELONG LEARNING
OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL**

4b. By 2030, significantly increase globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular LDCs, small island developing States and African countries. This will enable students to enroll in higher education programs, including vocational, technical, scientific, engineering, and information and communications technology programs, available in developed and other developing countries.

Many European cities and regions fund scholarship programs for students from ODA countries from their own resources. Focusing on this goal can give these efforts greater reach and visibility, while associating them with partner countries' priorities on SDGs by organizing more institutionalized schemes - for example, with local schools - beyond the relationship with individual students. Development education, which mobilizes civil society actors, is also relevant. This mobilization around the SDGs has been significant not only from LRGs, but also from associations. One example is the DEAR program, funded by EU ODA.



SDG 6. ENSURE AVAILABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL.

6.a By 2030, expand international cooperation and capacity-building support to developing countries in water and sanitation activities and programs including water harvesting, desalination, water efficiency, wastewater treatment, recycling, and reuse technologies.

Water issues require large-scale investments and have a clear impact on the quality of life in the city, as well as on urban poverty. DC can promote feasibility studies and other forms of infrastructure project preparation, thus facilitating local authorities' access to the necessary funds for such interventions.

New partnerships are also emerging from local public enterprises, such as the case of the association of German municipal utilities with the help of the Connective Cities initiative or the Andalusian LRGs facilitated by Famsi. These partnerships with counterparts in other continents, in addition to technical assistance, cooperate on management and public policies (www.vku.de).







SDG 17. STRENGTHEN THE MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION AND REVITALIZE THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

17.1 Strengthen domestic resource mobilization, including through the provision of international support to developing countries, in order to enhance domestic capacity to raise tax and other revenues. Strengthening local finance allows DC to converge with a priority of more and more development actors. It is also an important area of work on the UCLG agenda.



3.2 Financing the SDGs

As we have seen in the first section, not all European DC agencies have equally clear and robust legal frameworks, nor do they have the same possibilities of budgetary provision in terms of ODA. If we look at the information currently available in the OECD statistical database, we see that the LRGs that have the most capacity of their own to finance their DC are some of those in group a) in our first section, as well as those of federal countries in group b) (figures in US\$ million).

	 Central	 Local	 Regional	 Total
Austria	545,64	22,57	-	568,21
	96,03%	3,97%	0,00%	100,00%
Belgium	1.069,08	5,09	1,78	1.175,95
	90,91%	0,43%	8,66%	100,00%
Germany	25.818,08 ²	14,02	46,69	25.878,79
	99,77%	0,05%	0,18%	100,00%
Italy	1.395,74	7,27	-	1.403,01
	99,48%	0,52%	0,00%	100,00%
Portugal	228,75	1,62	-	230,37
	99,30%	0,70%	0,00%	100,00%
Spain	678,49	114,41	243,27	1.036,17
	65,48%	11,04%	23,48%	100,00%

One of the key recommendations of the OECD report *Reshaping Decentralised Development Cooperation* (2018) refers to "establishing incentives to improve the reporting of Decentralised Development Cooperation financial flows, priorities and practices, and to better communicate their effects and results. One aspect of this recommendation is to drive ambitious initiatives in national and local governments to report on DC financial flows through the Reporting System by DAC (Development Assistance Committee) member countries. Improvements in this area will provide a more complete picture of the shared responsibility of donors and development cooperation partner countries". Clearly, as cities and LRGs are major players in the world of DC, it is precisely them who must progressively incorporate mechanisms aimed at improving the monitoring of financial flows.

² Includes living expenses for students from developing countries.



Beyond the differences between their own resources, local and regional authorities have been able to access different types of programs with which the EU has been promoting the creation of partnerships and city-to-city or region-to-region cooperation networks. Starting in 1995, the European Commission allocated funds to DC and city-to-city cooperation programs between cities in Europe and Latin America, Asia, and the EU's neighboring Mediterranean countries. Since then, different initiatives have followed one after the other, with varying geometries and forms of work, and promoted by different units (development, regional policy, neighborhood...) of the Commission, always with the objective of stimulating cooperation between territories. The fullest expression of this ambition was the Civil Society Organizations and Local Authorities (CSO-LA) program, which between 2014 and 2020 channeled \$550M to LRGs. Although the new Neighborhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) no longer has a specific thematic line for local authorities, the political commitment is that a minimum of \$500M will be channeled, in the current programming (2021-2027), to sub-state public administrations. Moreover, the interest of the new financial instruments integrated into the NDICI, such as the European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD+), and the possibilities of access for local and regional authorities, should be considered.

Thus, the EU has made a great effort over the years, trying to find the most efficient way to channel funds in different ways in order to promote and consolidate DC. The passage of time has confirmed the importance of networks and associations as a major player in this field, and they have increased their capacity, their knowledge and also their interest in finding the most efficient ways of financial monitoring of projects, providing support in management and in the scope of involving many actors.

The Platforma coalition represents the common effort of a diversity of DC actors (federations, local government associations, cooperation funds, as well as individual local individuals, provincial and local governments) to increase this European support to DC, in its different expressions. Platforma values the capacity of this activity to build on the promotion of EU values in the world, and to link European cooperation more closely to the solidarity of its citizens. Platforma possesses an important bank of knowledge to support the localization of the SDGs, including, logically, DC³.

In this sense, it is pertinent to ask why DC has not spread among LRGs with the same intensity as it has among cities. In some cases, this reduced participation of LRGs is limited to facilitating access to technical and financial resources.

³ See for example Sánchez Cano, J. (2022), "Los ODS en las políticas de cooperación al desarrollo de las comunidades autónomas españolas", Platforma <https://plataforma-dev.eu>

⁴Simpson, J. y E Crispin (2021), "Local and Regional Governments' Access to EU Innovative Development Financing: Mechanisms and Opportunities", CGLU. www.uclg.org



UCLG published its recommendations to improve LRGs' access to new development finance instruments⁴:

- "Localizing" at the territorial level the national strategic value proposition, and develop a local transformation plan and investment portfolio with a strong emphasis on execution, and in partnership with the EU, international financial institutions, and other development partners.
- Establishing alliances with a wide range of partners and organizations. This includes civil society and financial organizations for the identification and development of new projects, given the increasing competition for access to financing.
- Establishing public-private dialogues, or similar schemes with the private sector and economic and social actors. The aim is to develop bankable projects with mutually beneficial results. Understanding how to work with the private sector is important for the EU and its new financing models.
- Projects or programs that provide significant co-benefits, and better reflect the EU's key priorities (especially climate change), are more likely to succeed.
- Prioritizing financial capacity building within the city government to enable access to new financing and lending modalities.
- Creating alliances and aggregating projects in a way that achieves critical scale and reduces transaction costs

3.3 Policy coherence for sustainable development

The conventional notion of policy coherence for development refers to monitoring and limiting the external impacts of other public policies (business, trade...) when these have negative consequences for development partner countries. Within the government itself, it is often the responsibility of international cooperation units to ensure the principle of coherence between the various external actions and the purposes and principles of development cooperation, which is considered to be aligned with the development objectives of partner countries. Traditionally, policy coherence for development operates in a palliative manner, identifying *ex post* situations of conflict between external policies and proposing solutions.

Policy coherence for development has received a fundamental boost with the 2030 Agenda, with three sustainable development goals (17.13, 17.14 and 17.15) linked to it. Since 2015, a new policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD) is being discussed. It focuses on public policy dialogue for the SDGs of the whole government in a rather preventive way, and is more attentive to growth-sustainability interactions than to external impacts. A valuable contribution to understanding the new scope of coherence can be found in the text by Alexandra Rudolph and her notion of "SDG-sensitive development cooperation⁵."

⁵ Rudolph, A. (2017). "The Concept of SDG-Sensitive Development Cooperation", DIE, Bonn, www.idos-research.de



AGENDA 2030 FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

SDG-responsive action requires that countries (stakeholders) implement the 2030 Agenda to its fullest extent



1. DOMESTIC EFFORTS

Integrated deployment of SDGs and promotion of coherence between public policies, e.g. between different ministries and administrative levels.



2. INTERNATIONAL CONSISTENCY

International coherence of development policies, based on the values of the 2030 Agenda, in all areas of domestic and international policy.



3. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION (BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL)

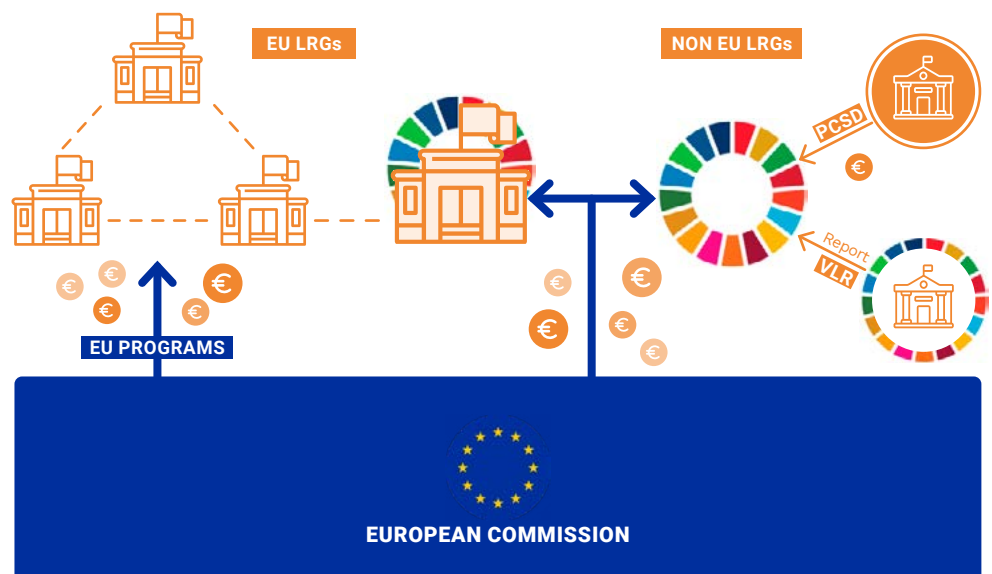
Allocation of resources aligned with the progress of the 2030 Agenda, international partnerships and global public goods.

The transition towards PCSD may alter the functions of the units responsible for DC: if cooperation has traditionally played an important role in monitoring the impacts of other policies in partner countries, the achievement of PCSD implies extending this monitoring to the internal level (whole-of-government), and approaching it in a more preventive and ambitious way -policy integration-. Development cooperation, including decentralized development cooperation, can help to transform the traditional internal-external distinction into a new logic that reflects the global nature of current development challenges. This is an important innovation, which can raise the level and profile of DC vis-à-vis other domestic public policies, and position it as a lever for change and innovation in the policies proposed by the 2030 Agenda.



Figure 2

Increase direct reporting from beneficiary non-EU LRGs





Monitoring: the SDGs as a results' framework

In terms of monitoring and reporting results, we highlight the general idea of prioritizing the use of evidence and data not only oriented to the SDGs, but also generated by the beneficiaries or development partners themselves. Therefore, the integration of the SDGs in DC policies will also reinforce the principles of Cooperation Effectiveness, already presented in Module IV, especially those of ownership and alignment with the development priorities of development partners, focus on results, and transparency and mutual accountability.

In particular, DC should seek to:

- a) Know their partners' priorities and base their programs on their demand, and not on their cooperation offer. Supporting partners' localization efforts, and thus their sustainable development agenda, is better than simply adapting and "labeling" the projects themselves and the donors' strategic priorities in SDG terms. As far as possible, monitoring of funded projects should be based on data and indicators - budget, programming, implementation, results, etc. - generated by the partners themselves and integrated into their development management systems.
- b) Understanding the SDGs not only as sectors of intervention, but as development results that emerge from integrating different areas of the intervention. Focusing on results means paying attention to official monitoring indicators, as determined by the United Nations. This is an important change, since in some cases donors - including decentralized ones - will not be able to claim responsibility for results in the countries with which they cooperate, and will have to be content with contributing to progress reported by the partner country. Continuing with the previous example:



SDG 4. ENSURING INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION AND PROMOTING LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

Target 4.b. By 2030, significantly increase global availability of scholarships to developing countries

→ **Indicator 4.b.1** Volume of official development assistance for scholarships by sector and by type of study

In this case, the indicator refers to effort, not impact. The donor can establish a baseline of expenditure, even if not aligned with the partners' priorities, and report its progress in the monitoring of Target 4.b.



SDG 6. ENSURE AVAILABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL

Target 6.a By 2030, increase international cooperation and capacity-building support to developing countries in water and sanitation activities and programmes

→ **Indicator 6.a.1** Volume of official development assistance for water and sanitation as part of a coordinated government expenditure plan

The indicator refers to effort, not impact, but it is a condition that assistance is part of a coordinated government expenditure plan (i.e., projects and interventions that are not part of the plan and are not directly managed by the recipient government cannot be captured by the indicator and reported as SDGs). The donor can establish an appropriate baseline of spending by partners, and report its progress in monitoring Target 6.a.



SDG 17. STRENGTHEN THE MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION AND REVITALIZE THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Target 17.1 Strengthen domestic resource mobilization, including through the provision of international support to developing countries, in order to improve domestic capacity to raise taxes and other revenues

→ **Indicator 17.1.1** Total government revenues as a proportion of GDP, broken down by source.

→ **Indicator 17.1.2** Proportion of national budget financed by domestic taxes.

The two indicators refer to impact, not effort. The donor will not be able to report progress on Target 17.1, which refers only to changes taking place in the partner country. The crediting of the partner country's contribution to progress on the SDGs should take place in a development dialogue between the two countries, in which priorities and support plans are established.



c) This last point for Target 17.1 illustrates the importance of transparency and mutual accountability. The logic of the SDGs favors a more horizontal approach to the sustainable development issues that cooperation is intended to address. The universality of the 2030 Agenda allows more and less developed territories to share where they stand in relation to global challenges. For example, inclusive and sustainable urbanization and improved capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable planning and management of human settlements (target 11.3), while also comparing the relationship, in both countries, regions or cities, between the rate of land consumption and the rate of population growth (indicator 11.3.1).

It will be important, in the choice of DC objectives and priorities, to choose areas of intervention that are also present in the territory itself. This makes the interdependent and universal nature of development problems more visible, and gives cooperation a more horizontal character of mutual support - despite the diversity of capacities and situations - in the face of shared challenges.



Case 1

Ostende (Belgium) and Banjul (Gambia) Municipalities



Who: Ostende Municipality (Belgium) and Banjul Municipality (Gambia)

Instrument: Europe Aid, DEVCO

Title: City Link Ostend-Banjul - partnership for sustainable city development

Amount: 3.200.000 €

LINES OF ACTION

It is structured around five components:

1. Facilitate good governance in Banjul.
2. Promote the creation of a center for sustainable development on Crab Island



3. Promote a more effective and environmentally friendly urban waste management system.
4. Greening the city in a sustainable manner using local resources.
5. To make public health and sanitation more accessible.

POINTS OF INTEREST

1. The lines of action emanate from a long-term relationship between the two cities (since 2003) that has generated a sufficient level of trust to address truly structural needs whose solution can have an impact on the system as a whole. Thus, governance does not appear simply as a purely theoretical element but as an area detected as critical by both parties in the reality of a local government in Banjul. On the other hand, the trust gained makes it possible to directly and honestly address threats that might be uncomfortable in relationships with less previous experience.
2. The perception that institutional reform is a driver of many dynamics, all leading to real social change.
3. The future-proof city concept, which connects the smart city perspective with the future sustainability of the city at all levels, taking into account all possible internal connections. This goes all the way to urban resilience in the face of rising sea levels caused by global warming, for example.
4. The complexity of the project, which addresses a large number of local government areas, has led to the establishment of a gradual reporting and economic management system. The project has gone from activating large transfers for complete work packages to doing so for specific actions in the very short term, in accordance with the budget and the satisfactory closure of the previous term. In addition, the frequent financial audits carried out in recent years have ensured that there are no problems arising from the misuse of funds.
5. The training of the teams in Banjul is based on methodologies that have already been successfully tested in Ostend, thus peer-to-peer learning is carried out in order to empower and strengthen the local ecosystem. One of the objectives of this empowerment of the local government ecosystem is to ensure the permanence of the actions outside the normal rotation in positions of political responsibility.
6. One of the main concerns in Banjul is the capacity to ensure the necessary resources for the continuity of the actions once the injection of funds from the European Union has ended. Therefore, priority is given to the generation of a network of local agents to face this challenge.
7. A large part of the challenges of the project are shared by both partners: waste management, sea level rise in coastal areas, etc. and hence the mutual interest reinforces the strength of the initiative.



Case 2

Association of Municipalities of Flanders (Belgium) and South African Local Government Association



Who: VVSG (Association of municipalities of Flanders, Belgium) and SALGA (South African Local Government Association)

Instrument: Funded by the Government of Belgium through the VVSG

Title: Strengthening Municipal Policy Making

Amount: 780.000 € (Approximately 40% contributed by SALGA and the Nquthu municipality)

LINES OF ACTION

There are two components in the cooperation program. In the first, three city-city partnerships are developed to contribute to the improvement of local governance through integrated waste management. The second component strengthens SALGA's capacities in the digital field to improve governance and, in particular, to promote the actions of the first component.

Irregular waste dumping of all kinds has saturated traditional sites, making it difficult to build housing due to the instability of the land. The same situation, to a lesser extent but with the same result, is observed with burials outside cemeteries.

POINTS OF INTEREST

1. The telecommunications company Vodafone has developed a mobile application (with a management system integrated in its back-office) to optimize off-site waste management: citizens can communicate and geolocate the presence of waste in their municipalities.



2. Waste management is closely linked to local economic development, through incentives for selective collection, and also the creation of a Recycling Purchasing Center which in turn sells the waste to a specialized company.
3. The project has a network of ambassadors in schools and communities, composed mostly of women.
4. Both parties have learned that in order to properly develop any DC project it is essential to begin by understanding the complexities of each party's local politics, and that only after a good understanding of the context can the success of specific project actions be assured.
5. Without a substratum of trust between the two parties, the project would not have weathered changing circumstances and unforeseen events; projects are created and developed between people, not simply between entities.
6. One might believe that there is a single North-South learning vector, but over time, VVSG has realized that it faces problems of the same type, just differently placed on the timeline of the problem's evolution. Sooner or later, what happens to one may happen to the other.



Case 3 City of Solingen (Germany)

Who: City of Solingen (Germany), with support from the Service Agency for Municipalities in One World (SKEW-Engagement Global)

Instrument: Self-financed

Title: Solingen's Sustainability Strategy

Amount: n/a

LINES OF ACTION

1. Social participation and education for sustainable development.
2. Climate neutrality.
3. Nature-based solutions for climate change mitigation and environmental protection.
4. A barrier-free, cosmopolitan and inclusive city.
5. Sustainable mobility.
6. Fair trade.



POINTS OF INTEREST

1. Rather than attempting to respond to the 17 SDGs, the work focused on the six thematic areas that were most relevant to the city's future and required greater involvement of the civil society.
2. There is a City Council's department called Sustainability and Planet Protection that reports directly to the mayor. Its functions are to execute the current strategy and plan the next one.
3. The main challenge has been and still is the involvement of all management areas of the City Council; in the past, the projects promoted in these areas have tended to be very operational, with little global vision.
4. The Urbact methodology forces to think in terms of what is necessary/ desired for the coming years. It has changed the way of working in a sustainability strategy.
5. Social agents and private entities have not participated in the strategy beyond the initial meetings. In the short-medium term, the intention is to involve them in the entire process offered by the Urbact methodology.
6. Indicators are a fundamental element of any strategy. The Global Goals⁵ approach helps to identify the most relevant data sources for the strategy: the next step should be to build a robust and impact-oriented indicator system.
7. The collaboration with IGES (Japan) has been particularly interesting: obtaining data and comparing with other cities in relation to CO2. The key is to harmonize the parameters of comparison and to seek the involvement of citizens and social-economic agents in the achievement of the objectives set, with a permanent quantitative view.
8. Participation in the Eurotowns network is decisive in terms of the potential for peer-to-peer learning with other European cities. Solingen leads the Task Team Global Goals within this network.
9. The German federal government is increasingly supporting SDG projects with cooperation funds.

⁵Decentralized Cooperation to localize the SDGs in Europe Goals for Cities is a network of 19 cities launched by URBACT in 2021, in collaboration with the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), to assist cities in their efforts to localize the SDGs. The main objective of the network is the exchange of experiences on this topic, the development and testing of new tools and the training of local actors.



Case 4

VVSG Association of Ukrainian Cities and the International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities



Who: Association of Ukrainian Cities (AUC) and the International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG)

Instrument: Framework collaboration program between VNG and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands

Title: Support for the recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction of local governments and communities in Ukraine

Amount: 999,589 euros (at the time of writing the project is pending approval)

LINES OF ACTION

The general objective is to improve local governance processes and to train authorities in the planning and execution of reconstruction actions.

1. Development of Local Recovery Plans in the selected areas, incorporating principles of transparent and open government, technological modernization and sustainable development.
2. Support for access to international financing for recovery.
3. Support for cooperation between authorities and citizens for recovery and sustainable development.
4. Creation and dissemination of a Local Recovery Plan model.



POINTS OF INTEREST

The project plans to engage interested and capable Dutch partner municipalities in a peer-to-peer approach. This project will play an active and facilitating role in cooperation at the municipal level, while recognizing that one-to-one partnerships are not always feasible and may not always be the most effective. The key element is the specific input that each actor can transfer to the recipients.

The project will be governed by some basic criteria:

- a. **"Ukrainians leading"**: Above all, the citizens of Ukraine should always be in charge of determining their own recovery and reconstruction;
- b. **"Bottom-up approach"**: The initiative on directions, tasks and projects comes from the citizens of the territorial community;
- c. **"Nothing for the community without the community"**: All decisions should be developed, made and implemented with the participation of active territorial community citizens;
- d. **"Better is better"**: The results of project implementation depend entirely on the activity and successful interaction of local authorities and civil society (NGOs, citizens, etc.) (in case of refusal or lack of civil society activity in the selected territorial community, we reserve the right to choose another territorial community at the beginning of the project);
- e. **"Building back better"**: Restoration and recovery of the territorial community to a better condition than it was before the war and taking into account the new vital requirements, real needs and priorities of the citizens of the community.

The project has great potential for growth both in terms of the interest it is expected to generate in more Dutch municipalities and the volume of funds that can be mobilized in the future.