



# VVSg SDG PILOT PROJECT WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENTS 2017-2019: APPROACH AND LESSONS LEARNED



VVSG is the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities. It represents all 300 local governments in Flanders, Belgium. VVSG has worked on localizing the SDGs since the signing of Agenda 2030. Most of the work has been concentrated in a pilot project (2017-2019) with 20 local governments, with financial support from the Flemish Government – Department of Foreign Affairs – and the federal government – Directorate-general Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid.

This document describes the approach and methodology of the pilot project and the lessons learned. It serves as a learning document for associations of local governments worldwide. For more information, you can contact VVSG International at [internationaal@vmsg.be](mailto:internationaal@vmsg.be).

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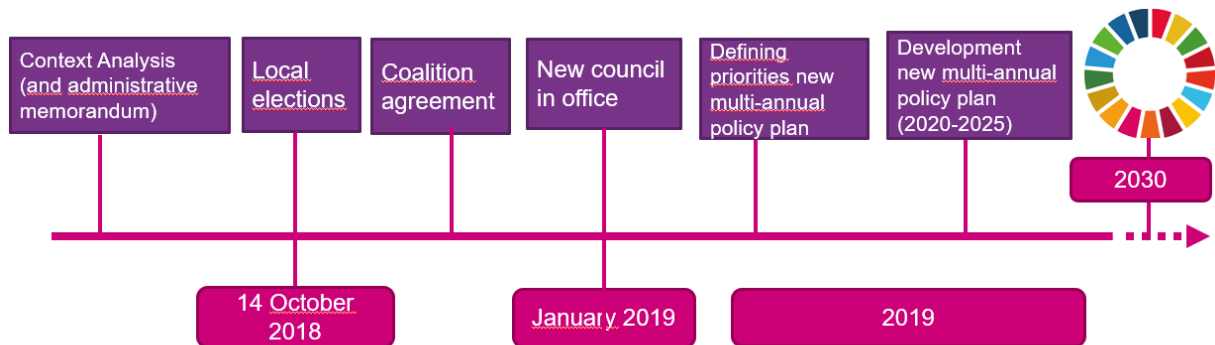
## 1 Pilot project for local integration of Agenda 2030

The VVSG (Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities) supports municipalities in the local translation of European and international agendas. In September 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was signed by 193 member states of the United Nations, including Belgium. This Agenda includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that take into account social, environmental and economic sustainability worldwide. In view of the inclusion of SDG 11 around sustainable cities and communities and the many linkages with the responsibilities of local authorities, the VVSG attaches great importance to the link between this Agenda 2030 and the Flemish cities and municipalities.

The team of VVSG International, which is part of the general management of the VVSG since 2017, coordinates the localization of the SDGs, both within the organisation and together with the Flemish municipalities. Since there were few guidelines and practical examples, the VVSG decided to experiment and test with a fixed group of 20 Flemish municipalities on how to translate the 2030 Agenda locally. This is the SDG pilot project that started in May 2017 and ended in December 2019. **The aim was to develop material and recommendations for all Flemish cities and municipalities with regard to awareness raising, public support and policy planning and implementation.**

The timing of the pilot project was important. In October 2018 there were local elections in Flanders, followed by the drafting of the new municipal policy plans for 2020-2025 (part of the local policy and management cycle). In order to achieve a real local integration of the SDGs that leads to more sustainable long-term policy choices and more transversal work, the SDGs need to be structurally part of the policy planning process. We were therefore ahead of that process in the various steps of the pilot project. The pilot municipalities experimented with scenarios to integrate the SDGs into the Municipal Context Analysis, before most of the municipalities started this analysis. The same applies to the Municipal Multi-Annual Planning. Based on the experiment and the experiences of these pilot municipalities, we developed methodologies and guidelines for all 300 Flemish municipalities. This way, they had access to the necessary material when they started with the different steps of their policy planning.

Figure 1. Municipal policy planning process Flanders



We also consciously decided to work with a permanent pilot group for a longer period of time, instead of working with different municipalities on an ad hoc basis. You have a permanent group of committed municipalities that put in their candidacy for a long-term and intensive experimentation with SDG integration. In addition, exchange between a fixed group of municipalities ensures that the contact persons get to know each other better. This increases mutual contact and exchange.

Figure 2 below (p.11) illustrates the timeline of the pilot project with the most important milestones.

## 1.1 Pilot project part of general SDG activities

The VVSG pilot project is part of the VVSG's broader SDG activities. The VVSG offers services to all Flemish cities and municipalities and also integrates the 2030 Agenda into its own organisation. A number of examples:

- [SDG declaration of commitment](#) that municipal authorities can sign
- Information sessions and workshops on request
- Organisation of the Week of the Sustainable Municipality, a campaign format in which municipalities celebrate local heroes for sustainable development.
- Material to (visually) raise awareness on the SDGs, such as SDG pins, seat cubes, banners, [Flemish mayors' video for the SDGs](#) and methods such as the [SDG circle exercise](#).
- Supporting municipalities in [integrating SDGs into international cooperation](#), through training sessions and publications
- Integration of the SDGs at various VVSG events and study days
- Use of the SDGs as a common thread for the [VVSG memorandum](#) on the occasion of the Flemish, federal and European elections (May 2019)
- Cooperation and coordination with, among others, the federal and Flemish authorities, with provinces, civil society and academia

- Profiling Flemish practices at international forums, as well as learning from foreign local governments

All information in English, French and Spanish can be found at <https://www.vvsg.be/kennisitem/vvsg/sdg-documents-in-foreign-languages>.

## 1.2 Results pilot project

VVSG's work on the SDGs, and more specifically the pilot project, has had strong effects, both in the pilot municipalities, other Flemish local authorities and the VVSG.

Participation in the pilot project has triggered a **dynamic** in the pilot municipalities that would otherwise have been much less possible or even impossible. The pilot municipalities have succeeded in creating a larger support base for 2030 Agenda within their municipality and organisation and in taking the SDGs to the structural level (e.g. by the policy cell and/or management team). Sustainability has become more standardised and is no longer seen as just the task of the sustainability officer. In many pilot municipalities there is also more cross-departmental work on sustainability. In addition, several pilot municipalities have used the SDGs as a compass for their policy planning. Based on the 2030 Agenda, municipalities have thought about their local objectives and actions in future policy, whereby planning documents such as the context analysis and the multi-annual policy plan are also based on the 5 pillars of sustainable development or the 17 SDGs. The pilot municipalities have also disseminated the SDG message to neighbouring and other Flemish municipalities, including through VVSG training sessions and study days and through regional consultation structures.

The trajectory offers the pilot municipalities a strong basis on which to build. For example, in 2020 the city of Harelbeke was elected as one of the Belgian SDG voices by the Federal Institute for Sustainable Development. Several pilot municipalities remain involved in SDG working groups for advanced municipalities, for example in the context of monitoring and reporting.

In addition, the experiences and lessons learned from the project have led to various tools and recommendations for all Flemish municipalities. These include material such as:

- The SDG basic tool for municipalities
- Inspiration guide SDGs in context analysis
- Inspiration guide SDGs in local party manifestos
- Inspiration guide SDGs in the Policy and Management Cycle: multi-annual planning
- Publication Local support for global challenges with inspiration for local actions per SDG
- Local SDG indicator set with accompanying manual

- Catalogue with 50 practical awareness-raising examples

All these materials are available on <https://www.vvsg.be/kennisitem/vvsg/sdg-documents-in-foreign-languages>.

It is important that the developed materials always take into account the different realities, starting positions and engagement levels of the Flemish municipalities. There is **no one-size-fits-all approach**. There is no fixed blueprint that can be applied equally by all municipalities. The developed materials therefore provide different scenarios and pathways to integrate the SDGs into local policy.

Supported by the developed materials and the efforts of the pilot municipalities and the VVSG, the **majority of the Flemish municipalities are working on localizing the SDGs**:

- Almost 1 out of 3 Flemish municipalities signed the SDG declaration of commitment.
- Almost 1 out of 5 Flemish municipalities included the SDGs in their coalition agreement (after the local elections of October 2018).
- 60% (178 out of 300) of the Flemish municipalities integrate the SDGs in the 2020-2025 policy and management cycle. This is done in different ways, such as the integration of the SDGs in international policy; an assessment of objectives and actions against the SDGs; the use of SDG indicators and/or SDG reporting codes; the use of the 2030 Agenda as starting point for local goals and actions; the development of specific SDG actions; and the use of the SDGs in citizen participation.
- 40% of the Flemish municipalities participated in the Week of the Sustainable Municipality 2018 and/or 2019.
- Local authorities raise awareness within their organisation and municipality about the 2030 Agenda (see e.g. [SDGs in your municipality: 50 practical awareness-raising examples](#)).

Finally, the pilot project also has an effect on the VVSG itself. In 2018, the VVSG was elected SDG voice, enabling it to organise the Week of the Sustainable Municipality for the first time. In addition, the VVSG and the Flemish local authorities are a **national and international reference** in terms of SDG integration. There are more and more organisations (private, academia, civil society) that focus on the local translation of the SDGs, with local governments as a target group. In addition, Flemish practices serve as good examples abroad. For example, the VVSG was part of the Belgian delegation at the High Level Political Forum in New York and is collaborating with the Flemish Government on the OECD study 'A territorial approach to the SDGs'.

## 2 Selection pilot group

In February 2017, the VVSG sent out a call to all Flemish municipalities, addressed to the Council of Mayor and Aldermen, to participate in the SDG pilot project. The local authorities were given until the end of March to apply. There were a number of conditions:

- The political signing of the [VVSG declaration of commitment](#) to the SDGs
- Appointing a contact person for the duration of the pilot project
- The commitment to participate in the collective meetings (foreseen on average 4 times a year) and in an annual session for local politicians.
- A clear letter of motivation

50 municipalities applied for the pilot project. Since there was only room for 20 municipalities in the core group, VVSG International, together with a multidisciplinary advisory group (see below), made a selection based on the following criteria. This selection took place during a physical meeting in April 2017.

- Motivation
- Geographical distribution (different provinces)
- Diversity (urban-rural/large-small/centre-peripheral/various political coalitions)
- Presence of a [local global policy](#) of the interested municipalities

The final selection has been validated by the VVSG management.

In the philosophy of 'leaving no one behind', we included all candidates in two different groups. There was intensive cooperation and experimentation with the 20 municipalities in the core group.<sup>1</sup> The remaining 30 municipalities received less close guidance, but were kept informed, including through an annual SDG meeting and telephone contact.

The municipalities in the core group were: Roeselare, Oostende, Harelbeke, Oostkamp, Diksmuide, Gent, Evergem, Herzele, Nazareth, Herent, Halle, Tienen, Berlaar, Edegem, Balen, Hoogstraten, Genk, Leopoldsburg, Hamont-Achel and Sint-Truiden.

The municipalities in the second group were: Kortrijk, Brugge, Tielt, Izegem, De Pinte, Maldegem, Merelbeke, Nevele, Aalst, Bornem, Zoersel, Westerlo, Herentals, Brecht, Mol, Brasschaat, Geel, Heist-op-den-Berg, Turnhout, Mechelen, Lille, Boom, Diest, Beersel, Leuven, Brussel, Dilsen-Stokkem, Lommel, Hasselt and Herk-de-Stad.

## 3 Approach pilot project

We distinguish three pillars in the pilot project: awareness-raising, politics and policy planning. You have to work on all three pillars in order to build a solid SDG story in your

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<sup>1</sup> 19 municipalities remained at the closing of the pilot project.

municipality. However, they are interconnected. SDG workshops in the context of policy planning are a good example. You collect policy input, but also raise awareness about SDGs among the participants (staff, local politicians and/or external stakeholders).

### 3.1 Joint meetings and individual visits

The pilot project was aimed at both collective and individual learning and experimentation. We worked with joint meetings of the core group and with individual visits from VVSG International to the 20 pilot municipalities.

The **joint meetings** always took place in Brussels. The original idea was to hold 3 to 4 meetings per year. Eventually, 7 meetings took place (2 in 2017, 3 in 2018 and 2 in 2019). Some of the planned meetings have been replaced by smaller working groups, e.g. around the 5 scenarios of the context analysis and around specific aspects of SDG integration in policy (SDG monitoring, SDG check, SDGs as a transversal programme and SDGs in citizen participation).

During the meetings, the focus was on the exchange of experience, the elaboration of scenarios to integrate the SDGs into policy and on ideas for strengthening support. Normally, 1 or 2 people per municipality attended the meetings. In general, these were always the same contact persons, i.e. the officer international affairs, sustainability officer and/or policy officer.

Since every local reality is different, we always used multiple perspectives and scenarios to translate the SDGs locally, for example for the context analysis and the multi-annual policy plan.

In the last meeting, the group rewarded 4 pilot municipalities with the title 'most rewarding pilot municipality'.

Once a year, during summer, staff of VVSG International **visited each pilot municipality individually**. The aim was to look into the individual trajectories of the municipalities, to feel the temperature in each municipality around a number of ideas for the pilot trajectory and to be able to offer better tailored guidance. The SDG contact person within the municipality brought a number of people together for a half-day meeting. Ideally, the VVSG asked the contact person (often the officer working on international affairs), a policy officer and an alderman to join the meeting. The municipality could invite other employees and politicians if they wanted.

On the day of the individual visit it was also possible to organise an information session or workshop about the SDGs, given by the VVSG. Especially in 2017 many of these information sessions take place, mostly with staff members and the council of mayor and aldermen as target audience.



In 2017, a **political meeting** took place at which politicians from the majority of the pilot municipalities gave input on the draft note on the integration of the SDGs in election programmes and at which input was given on how the VVSG could do even more for local politicians in terms of Agenda 2030. In 2018 and 2019 such a separate meeting was no longer organised, but replaced by other initiatives. In 2018, VVSG International gave a brief introduction to the SDGs at the VVSG training sessions for new councillors (after the October elections). These sessions took place at 20 locations and reached more than 2000 local mandataries. In 2019, a political consultation was organised within the scope of the study day 'Local = Global: On the road to 2030'.

A facebook group was also set up for the 20 pilot municipalities, on which the municipalities could post questions and practices in order to promote the exchange of experience and learning from each other. However, this group was underused and most of the exchange took place during the collective meetings.

### 3.2 External expertise

For the pilot project, consultants were hired to work on the scenarios for SDG integration in the context analysis and to develop the set of local SDG indicators.

In addition, external speakers were invited during various pilot meetings, such as Dutch and other Flemish municipalities, the European umbrella association (CEMR) and the private sector.

### 3.3 Advisory group

In March 2017, a first day of reflection with external partners was organised, including the federal and Flemish government, the provinces, civil society, research institutes and two cities.

The purpose of this reflection day was threefold:

- To inform partners about the future plans of VVSG International with regard to the SDG pilot project.
- Collecting input from partners to further shape the content of the pilot project, in terms of awareness raising, policy planning and relations between local governments and stakeholders.
- Gaining insight into the possible contribution of different partners to the pilot project.

Several of the partners present at this reflection day were also part of the multidisciplinary advisory group. This group made the selection of the pilot municipalities, supported the pilot project throughout the three years and advised regarding specific questions and challenges.

The advisory group consisted of VVSG International, VVSG employees of various departments and external partners:

- Government sector: City of Sint-Niklaas, Province of Antwerp, Directorate-general Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid, Department of Foreign Affairs of the Flemish Government, Department of Chancellery and Administration of the Flemish Government, VNG International (Note: The Flemish and federal governments also grant subsidies to VVSG International for the local translation of the SDGs).
- Research institutes: Public Management Institute KU Leuven, CIFAL Flanders
- Civil society: 11.11.11, Join for Water, Rikolto
- Private sector: Voka

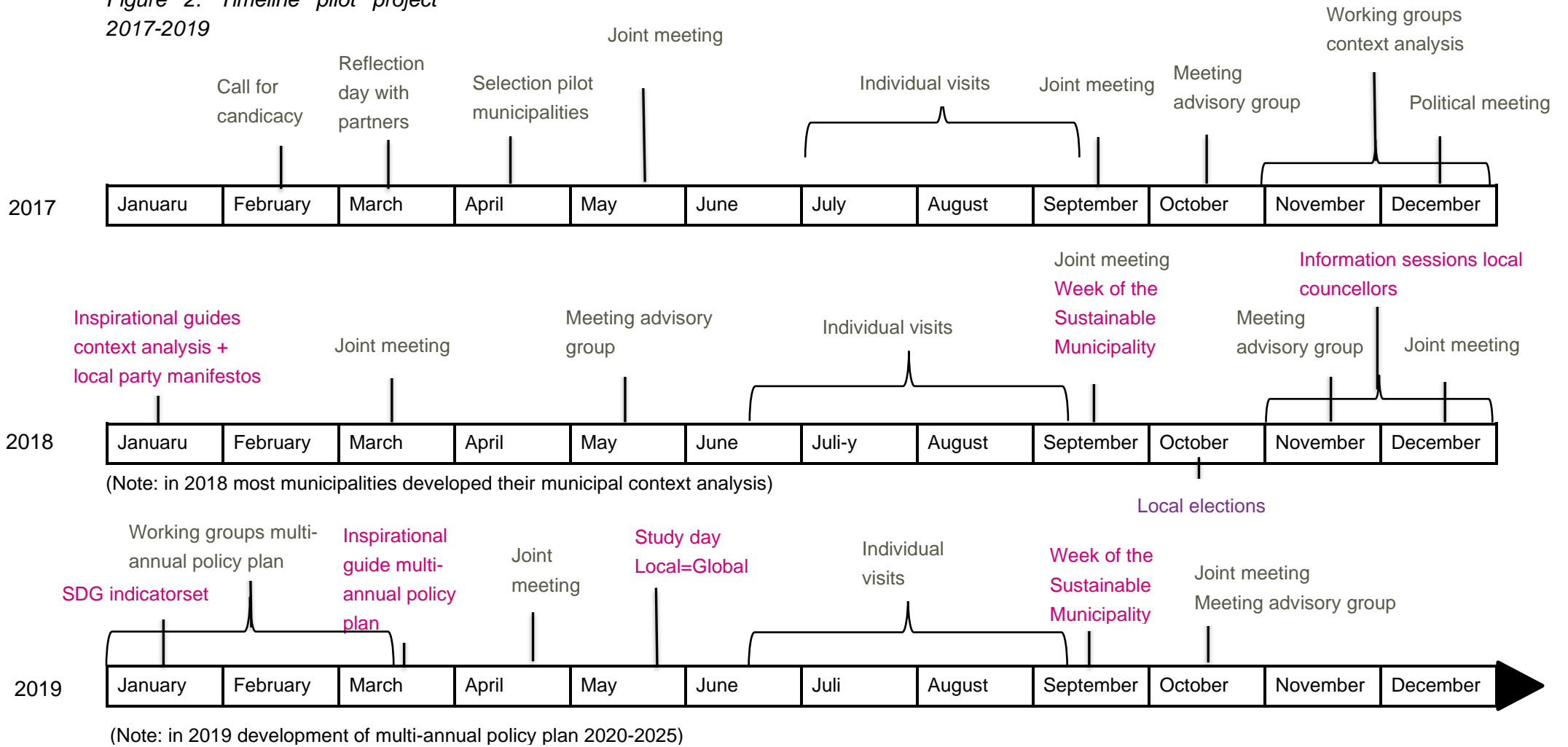
### **3.4 Evaluation pilot project**

The pilot project has been evaluated in different ways, both throughout the project and at the end. During the individual visits, expectations with regard to and points for improvement for the VVSG and the pilot project were discussed. During the last visit (2019) we also focused on an evaluation of the most important changes for the municipality since participation in the pilot project. Furthermore, the advisory group shed light on the project and identified key concerns. We also performed an evaluation of the advisory group itself, asking the members about the added value of the advisory group and what they thought was good and what not.

We could have paid more attention to evaluation during and of the joint meetings.

In addition, external evaluators took a closer look at the SDG pilot project in 2018. This took place as part of the evaluation of the Flemish subsidy programme of VVSG International. This evaluation stressed the importance of the pilot project for the core group of 20 municipalities and by extension all Flemish municipalities, but also formulated a number of learning points. These are described under point 4, lessons learned from the pilot project.

Figure 2. Timeline pilot project 2017-2019



## 4 Lessons learned pilot project

### 4.1 Approach

1. Being a member of the core group was leverage for the pilot municipalities to accelerate the local SDG integration. The label of pilot municipality led to an **increased sense of responsibility**.  
Consequently, with the end of the pilot project, there is also a risk that the dynamic and pace will weaken. It is important to continue to involve former pilot municipalities in the SDG activities of VVSG and to use them as good practice.
2. The long-term trajectory with a fixed group of municipalities has strengthened the ties between the pilot municipalities. This ensures stronger **mutual contact and learning**.
3. The **variation in pilot municipalities** (urban-rural/ large-small/ timing policy planning/ ...) is both an added value and a difficulty. On the one hand, this variation ensures that the recommendations and tools resulting from the pilot project are useful for all Flemish municipalities. On the other hand, it also brings entails a number of challenges. For example, the steps in the pilot project came too early for some municipalities and too late for others (e.g. some municipalities already went through the first phases of the context analysis before it was elaborated in detail in the pilot project). In addition, experiences of smaller municipalities are different than those of larger municipalities and examples are not directly replicable. In order to meet the heterogeneity and wishes of the group, flexibility is therefore important. During the pilot project we worked several times in smaller groups based on the individual choices of each municipality (e.g. working groups around the 5 scenarios in the context analysis) and on the size of the municipality. A good balance between the input of the VVSG and the input of the participants during the joint meetings is also important.
4. More attention needs to be paid to **communication and follow-up in-between meetings**, f.e. by communicating about additional steps taken by the VVSG and by sharing good practices from the pilot municipalities.
5. The combination of collective processes and individual support was positive. However, the pilot project lacked an elaborate **methodology**, both within the approach of the pilot project and within the pilot municipalities themselves. The final goals and intermediate steps were insufficiently defined; what do we want to achieve as a group and what does each municipality want to achieve individually, when can we call the pilot project successful. This made it difficult to carry out interim evaluations (are we on our way to achieving our final goals). The lack of a

project methodology also resulted in insufficient focus on learning from each other (on top of the exchange of experience) and insufficiently documented processes of change. Mostly the results were visible rather than the road and process that led to these results in the pilot municipalities. A possible solution is to provide a format at the start of the trajectory in which the pilot municipalities regularly fill in the state of affairs with regard to SDGs in their municipality.

6. We developed tools and recommendations for each step of the local policy planning process. Ideally, these should be ready and available before the municipalities embark on each step. However, this sometimes proved difficult due to a mismatch in terms of **timing**. The pilot municipalities thought about possible scenarios for the different steps in the policy planning process and these thoughts and first experimentation with the scenarios was included in the tools and recommendations. However, the actual results were only visible after each step of the policy planning process was taken. The local translation of the SDGs was therefore unknown territory. For the next policy cycle, the tools and recommendations of the pilot project will of course serve as a solid basis.

#### 4.2 Time and resources

7. The pilot project was very **time-consuming**, both for VVSG International and for the pilot municipalities. It is therefore important to communicate clearly from the start about the set-up and expectations towards the pilot municipalities. Now it was insufficiently clear that a large part of the work would have to be done by the pilot municipalities themselves (experimenting and working out the scenarios, instead of merely implementing them) and how much time this would take. In addition, it is also essential, as the organising body (VVSG), to make sufficient staff available. From 2017 to 2019, approximately 2 full-time equivalents coordinated the pilot project and related SDG activities. Also after 2019, these two full-time equivalents will remain in charge of consolidating the results of the pilot project and other SDG initiatives.
8. It is important to provide sufficient **financial resources**. Participation in the pilot project was free of charge. VVSG International received both federal and Flemish subsidies to implement the pilot project. This includes not only the organisation of the meetings, but also the development, printing and translation of publications and tools, and the use of external expertise (consultancy).

#### 4.3 Expertise

9. The advisory group was a good way to inform on and involve (internal and external) partners in the pilot project. Because the donors of the pilot project (the federal and

Flemish authorities) were part of the advisory group, the project also gained more visibility with them.

On the other hand, we should have been more flexible with regard to the **composition of the group**. The members were chosen in 2017 on the basis of VVSG International's expectations at that time of the content focus of the project. In reality, however, it turned out that the pilot municipalities wanted to focus very strongly on policy planning (context analysis, multi-annual policy plan). However, few people and organisations with expertise on local policy planning were part of the advisory group. Because of this, the group could often give insufficient input regarding important bottlenecks and issues in the pilot project.

10. As the local translation of the SDGs covers different themes, you need different expertise. As the coordinating team (VVSG International) you do not have all the necessary expertise. Therefore, cooperation is important, also within the organisation. You should make sufficient efforts to actively involve the necessary **colleagues**, not only within the advisory group during the project, but also to think about tools and activities from the get-go. Discuss how these colleagues can free up some of their time for the pilot project.

#### 4.4 Support base

11. **Linking with existing local processes** is essential for the success of the pilot project. The pilot project focused on creating support and tools in the run-up to and during the local elections of October 2018 and the drafting of the new municipal multi-annual policy plan (2020-2025). This made the local SDG integration relevant and ensured that it was seen much less as something new and as extra work. The 2030 Agenda provided a framework to rethink and/or strengthen existing processes, for example by stimulating cross-sectoral cooperation. Nevertheless, some people and departments within a number of pilot municipalities did consider the SDGs as extra work in a context with many simultaneous change processes, such as the integration of the local government and Public Centres for Social Welfare, a new political council after the elections and the drafting of a new multi-annual plan.
12. It remains a challenge to create a **widespread support base for the SDGs** within the municipality. For example, if the contact person of the pilot project was unable to attend the joint meetings, there was often no replacement by a colleague. It is therefore important within the framework of the pilot project to focus on activities aimed at different target groups in the municipality. We did this through SDG information sessions in the pilot municipalities, the individual visits and two sectoral training sessions (leisure and social affairs and public care) in cooperation with the VVSG colleagues. In the future, we will focus additionally on the integration of the SDGs into existing VVSG networks. However, it would have been better to have

worked out a strategy from the start to strengthen the support base within the pilot municipalities (as part of the project methodology, see lesson 5).

13. We only had one **political meeting** with the pilot municipalities, in 2017. However, political support is crucial for local SDG integration. Probably it would have been a better choice to organize a political meeting in 2018 and 2019 as well, so that the pilot project and the developed tools were more attuned to the political reality, in addition to the administrative reality.

#### 4.5 Coherent policy for sustainable development

14. The pilot project is only a first step towards a more coherent policy for sustainable development. How do you go beyond linking existing policies to the SDGs? How do you ensure that the 2030 Agenda 2030 leads to more cross-disciplinary cooperation and to a **transition** towards sustainable development in the long-term, in which the positive and negative effects of policy choices are considered? Moreover, when can you call a sustainability policy sufficiently ambitious and to what extent can this be attributed to the 2030 Agenda? Therefore, there needs to be follow-up of the results of the pilot project.
15. Working with the International 2030 Agenda does not necessarily lead to a greater focus on **international justice**. The development of a global reflex throughout the municipality is and will remain point of attention, both for the municipality and for the VVSG.

### 5 Localizing the SDGs: Factors for success and challenges

The long-standing experience of the VVSG and municipalities in the local translation of the SDGs provides insight into the added value, success factors and challenges.

#### 5.1 Added value localizing the SDGs

1. The SDGs are in line with the general societal trend to put sustainability higher on the agenda. The SDGs provide an **overarching framework** for rethinking existing processes (such as the drawing up of the multi-annual policy plan rethinking the organizational structure), and for connecting the various projects and activities in the municipality – we are working towards the same goal. The broad approach of Agenda 2030 is appealing. It is a forward-looking, socially relevant agenda in which everyone can find linkages to their own work. It offers the opportunity to look at local challenges from a broader perspective (outside-in approach).

2. The SDGs provide an incentive for **cross-departmental cooperation**. Instead of thinking about goals and actions in each service/department separately, several municipalities have worked in cross-sectoral working groups on the context analysis and the multi-annual policy plan – for example, per pillar of sustainable development. Different services are involved in the start-up of new projects. Transversal SDG working groups have been set up.
3. SDGs are a reference point for making **more focused, long-term decisions**. "The SDGs are a kind of walking stick that provide more comfort and structure and help to keep a clear focus on bumpy roads" (quote Jan de Keyser, mayor of Oostkamp). The SDGs are a means and not an end in themselves.
4. The SDGs offer a **common language** to cooperate with external stakeholders. The 2030 Agenda is an international framework that has not been developed by local government. It is therefore a neutral agenda and is not seen as a framework imposed by the city council. The 2030 Agenda also offers a common framework to design and develop programmes of international cooperation.
5. The SDGs are a useful, comprehensible and visually attractive framework to **communicate about your local policy**..
6. The 2030 Agenda offers an impulse to strengthen the **global reflex** in the municipality. For example, in some municipalities services working on international affairs have been given a more strategic position in the organization because of the SDGs. However, it is not easy to put and keep international justice on the agenda. This remains a working point.

## 5.2 Local success factors

1. **Build on what's already there**. Start with a number of motivated people ('coalition of the willing') who see added value in the SDGs and want to exchange and implement this in their work. Demonstrate that the municipality already contributes to the SDGs through its projects and activities. Link up with existing processes; for example, make the link with political party manifestos and with projects such as Covenant of Mayors.
2. **Look for ambassadors** for your local SDG story. You need people who know the 2030 Agenda, talk to colleagues and partners about it and take initiative. These ambassadors may be individuals in the beginning, but try set up an SDG steering group later on. Several municipalities indicate that such a working group helps to strengthen the support base and give more direction to the SDG story of the



municipality. This group can start with a number of enthusiasts and later on involve more different municipal services/departments. It is also important to have some ambassadors among the citizens and stakeholders who, in turn, can influence their own network. Your SDG story can start small, but in the end you need **leadership**, at the level of both politics and administration. There must be a mandate to roll out and implement the SDGs.

3. **Choose for a strategic approach.** To make real progress in your SDG story and work towards a coherent sustainable policy, the policy department and the management team need to get involved. In practice, this works well in tandem with, for example, a civil servant and/or councillor working on international affairs and/or sustainability.
4. Make an SDG impact analysis. SDGs are an internationally approved framework, not developed specifically for local governments. Municipalities therefore need to make a **local translation**: what do the SDGs mean at local level and what impact can you have as a municipality? How do you translate the global objectives into local goals? An impact analysis can help. This involves mapping out on which SDG objectives and targets you can have the most impact with your local government, what you are already working on and where there is still potential for improvement. In this way, you can also define a number of priority SDG action areas.
5. **Communicate** about SDGs, both with the local government organization and to citizens. Include the SDGs in your communication about actions and projects. The communications department is an important partner.
6. **Make the SDGs concrete.** Show what the SDGs mean in practice by means of concrete initiatives and actions. That way, the SDGs do not remain too abstract. For example, you can do the [SDG circle exercise](#) with the staff or with advisory boards. You can work with local heroes for sustainable development who, in their daily work or life, contribute to the objectives of Agenda 2030. Include concrete SDG-examples in your staff or local magazine.
7. **Repetition is key.** Keep repeating the SDG message and look for various ways to bring to communicate.

### 5.3 Local challenges

1. There is **no one-size-fits-all approach** that works for all municipalities. Every local reality is different, so different steps will be taken. Experiences and examples from other municipalities can serve as inspiration, but it is difficult to uncritically replicate their trajectory in your own municipality.

2. How can we balance the local and **international dimensions** of Agenda 2030. All too often the focus is only on how to work on the SDGs in one's own municipality, and international justice is insufficiently taken into account.
3. There is a risk that the SDGs will be used as a mere **labelling exercise**, with existing initiatives being awarded an SDG label to show that the municipality is contributing to the 2030 Agenda. This exercise is an important (first) step, but it should not end there. This exercise should also be linked to an analysis of where the priorities lie, where you also have a negative impact on the SDGs, which existing initiatives can be made more sustainable, where the municipality can step up its efforts and how it will do so. We must therefore strive for a coherent sustainable policy and for a transition towards sustainable development.
4. **How can we keep the SDGs alive?** The SDGs are part of a long-term agenda until 2030. It is not easy to create a broad support base for the SDGs and to keep up the motivation and spirit for the years to come.
5. **17 SDGs can be a lot.** The SDGs are one and indivisible, which means that an action or project usually has an impact on several SDGs. This interconnectedness and broad approach of the 2030 Agenda ensures that everyone can identify with the agenda and encourages a multisectoral approach. However, it also makes it difficult to go back to these 17 objectives for each action and initiative of the municipality and to determine to which SDGs an action or project contributes. Can you develop a general SDG check for activities and projects? Is it best to select some key projects where you consistently use the SDG-lens?
6. **SDG monitoring** remains a challenge. How can you monitor your contribution to SDGs at municipal level? Where are we doing well and where are we underperforming, where are we making progress or going backwards?
7. While SDGs are a common language, it remains a challenge to engage in **concrete cooperations** with external partners around this agenda, to move from discussions to concrete joint initiatives to give substance to the SDG commitment.