



City-to-city cooperation Herent and Nimlaha'kok, Guatemala

# Winning through Twinning

Municipal International Cooperation in Flanders (Belgium)

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**What role can a local government in Flanders (Belgium) play in the field of decentralised cooperation? This is the main question posed in this article, which aims to discuss the context of municipal international cooperation from the point of view of Flemish local governments.**

**We describe the legal framework for the different subsidy programmes and their different approaches, before concentrating on the instrument and characteristics of city-to-city cooperation between two local governments. It should be pointed out at the start that subsidies are always used through the formula of co-funding so that, in the end, it is the local governments themselves that invest most of the resources in international cooperation. The motivations that make local government act in the field of international cooperation are related to the concept of glocality. This enables the global world to be analysed from the local perspective and vice versa. Furthermore, city-to-city cooperation is characterised by key words such as institutional reinforcement, partnership, reciprocity and strengthening local democratisation processes. The article concludes by mentioning a number of new challenges in the field of municipal international cooperation, such as the search for other monitoring formulas and new forms of cooperation.**

**This article presents a preparatory study for the 2010 Yearbook of the Observatory of Decentralised Cooperation between the European Union and Latin America (see: [www.observ-oed.org](http://www.observ-oed.org))**

## 1. Introduction

The fact that local governments play an important role on a global level in the field of international cooperation has already been widely documented. From Local Agenda 21 to recognition by the European Commission<sup>1</sup>, it has been a long and important road for local governments to achieve recognition as real actors in this area. At the same time, Flemish local governments took their first steps in municipal international cooperation. After an initial pilot project, different opportunities of subsidisation were formally established by both the Flemish regional and Belgian federal governments. It should be stressed that although we now talk about subsidisation programmes, in fact they are co-financing programmes. Flemish local government provides most of the financial, human and logistic resources. The subsidies are additional contributions to this.

There are currently 36 Flemish local governments involved in a partnership or city linkage with a town on the other side of the world. This article talks about city-to-city cooperation (C2C) and municipal international cooperation (MIC). It is true that there are other terms used to describe these concepts. In particular, this article refers to twinning, sister cities and municipal cooperation as a form of city-to-city cooperation.

The practice of creating links between towns (twinning or jumelages) started after the Second World War to promote peace and unity between former enemies. However, although there are similar elements, twinings between local governments from North and South<sup>2</sup> have fundamentally different characteristics. Partnership, equality and reciprocity are key concepts for the processes of capacity building with the aim of strengthening the institutional capacity of local governance.

The Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG, in its Dutch abbreviation) accompanies these city-to-city cooperations very closely. Municipal partnering is a new form of cooperation and is somewhat different from other - possibly more traditional - forms of cooperation between (other) governmental and non-

governmental bodies. Thus, at the VVSG, we aim to systematise and document the added value of this specific type of direct cooperation between local governments. This contribution is part of that goal. However, we believe that, despite the efforts made so far, it is a work in process and the systematisation is still incomplete.

We realise that there are other expressions of decentralised cooperation in Flanders but consider them to be outside the scope of this article. We also wish to stress that this article is written from a practitioner's perspective based on the practical support work carried out with Flemish local governments and people involved in municipal international cooperation.

## 2. Legal framework of municipal international cooperation

### 2.1. Three levels of international cooperation

Discussing local governments in Flanders involves explaining the state and governmental reality in Belgium. Belgium is a federal constitutional monarchy. Through a series of constitutional reforms in the '70s and '80s the regionalisation of this unitary state led to the establishment of a federal system structured on three levels and to the creation of linguistic communities and regional governments:

1. The three regions: the Region of Flanders, the Region of Wallonia and the Region of Brussels-Capital.
2. The federal government.
3. The three linguistic communities: the Flemish Community (which speaks Dutch and represents 60% of the Belgian population), the French Community (which represents 40%) and the German-speaking community (which speaks German and represents around 1% of the Belgian population).

Through different stages of state reform, the process of regionalisation led progressively to more powers and competences being handed to regional governments, such as education, culture, the environment and social affairs, among others. After the last state reform, an intense debate regarding the Lambermont Agreement of 16 October 2000<sup>3</sup> led to transfer 'aspects of international cooperation' to regional governments. In Belgium, the regions have legislative powers and regional governments can approve decrees. Furthermore, it is important to know that since the 1990s, Flanders has started implementing a policy of international cooperation. Therefore, when discussing (decentralised) cooperation in Belgium, one has to refer briefly to these three levels: national (federal), regional (Flemish) and local. In each case, we aim to present the general context before focussing on the aspect of municipal international cooperation.

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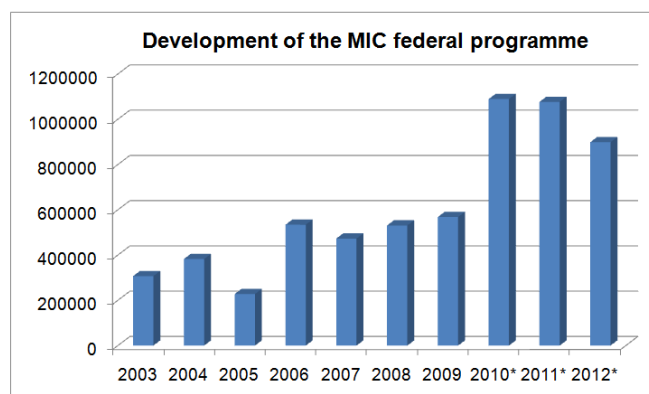
## 2.2. The federal government of Belgium

Belgium's official cooperation, Official Development Assistance or ODA, still mostly comes from the Belgian federal state. In general, the budget of the Directorate-General for Development (DGD<sup>4</sup>) has risen by €438 million in the last two years (from €848 million in 2007 to €1,249 million). This means that in 2009 total ODA was 0.55% of the GDP<sup>5</sup>. A political agreement between the parties reiterated the commitment to reach 0.7% in 2010, but a major effort is still required to achieve this. Belgian international cooperation is framed within the fight against poverty and this principal goal is reflected in the 1999 Law on International Cooperation for Development. Furthermore, official policy stresses its support for the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), putting into practice the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. Bilateral official cooperation is concentrated in 18 partner countries<sup>6</sup> and attempts are currently being made to increase the geographical concentration of civil society's interventions. For some years, local governments twinned in one of the 41 officially approved countries<sup>7</sup> have been able to apply for a federal subsidy. Within this, the VVSG acts as the programme administrator and coordinator. In 2008, the VVSG, together with 12 city-to-city cooperations, received the approval of a 5-year subsidy for a municipal international cooperation programme. Strengthening institutional capacities in local governments in the South aims to contribute to sustainable human development and reduction poverty. The federal municipal international cooperation programme is concentrating on strengthening institutional capacities in the areas of youth, environment and local economic development. To apply for a subsidy, each Flemish local

government, together with its partner, has to produce a detailed application file based on the logical framework and on defining intermediate results and indicators. It should be mentioned that the Directorate-General for Development establishes the same administrative and financial regulations for the VVSG as for NGOs.

We believe local governments represent a non-specific actor<sup>8</sup> in the field of international cooperation and hence the VVSG continues to press for the use of norms and regulations better adapted to municipal reality. In any case, this is the first time that the VVSG is implementing a five-year programme together with local governments. We consider this to be a unique opportunity to gain experience in the field of direct cooperation between towns.

The federal subsidy programme is aimed especially at Southern countries. In particular, the programme and financial investment this implies is focussed mainly on strengthening twinning, i.e. in strengthening local government institutions in the South. As a result, the 12 municipal international partnerships in the subsidy programme are generally able to invest some €60,000 per year. This amount is divided into five categories: investment, operational costs, training, personnel and missions. Within the federal programme, at the VVSG we believe that the most serious limitation is the list that limits the number of partner countries. This restriction means that successfully operating city-to-city cooperations cannot apply for a federal subsidy programme, just because the partner country does not appear on the official list. Strangely, some municipal partnerships that used to operate in some countries recognized by the bilateral priority list, nowadays cannot apply anymore because of the official changes on the list. In Namibia, for example the city-to-city cooperation between Lommel and Ongwediva was able to undertake projects within the framework of the federal programme, while a new partnership established between Harelbeke and Eenhana cannot apply to the federal government because Namibia appears no longer on the list. However, it should be pointed out that the federal subsidy programme started in early 2000 and is gradually increasing, as shown in the following figure:

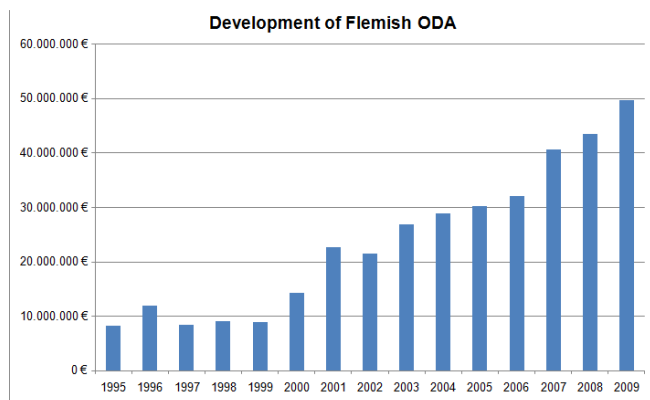


The figures given for 2010 and onwards represent budgets already approved. However, these figures may still vary as VVSG is negotiating a budget increase to include three new city-to-city cooperations that are in the process of producing their application file and which aim to start

implementation in early January 2011. Another aspect that will influence these figures is the possibility of transferring unused amounts from the current year to the following year.

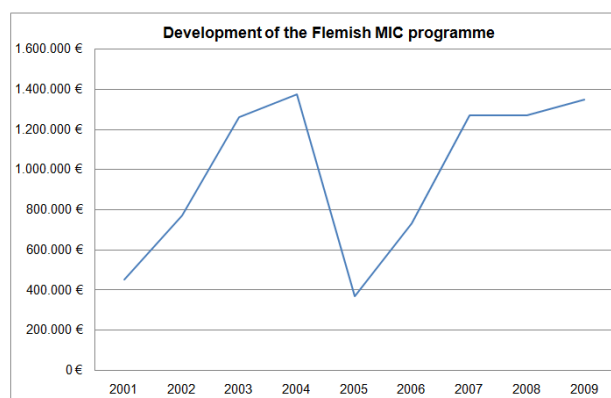
### 2.3. The regional government of Flanders

Since the last state reform, the Flemish region's direct budget for international cooperation has increased significantly, as shown below.



The regional government has reiterated its intention to multiply the international cooperation budget by 2020, reaching a figure of €83 million that, together with other decentralised bodies, will represent 7% of all ODA<sup>9</sup>. As currently implemented, the municipal cooperation programme covers 3% of the €49 million provided by Flemish ODA. Flemish bilateral cooperation is focussed on southern Africa, implementing official programmes with South Africa, Malawi and Mozambique.

It is clear that municipal international cooperation represents a small amount of the total ODA, but the financial support in itself is significant:



Due to particular circumstances, there was a drop in the 2005 budget, but the budget available to local governments in general is still increasing slightly. The figures<sup>10</sup> include both the subsidy for local governments and the contribution of the VVSG through its training and support role.

The conditions for obtaining a Flemish subsidy are explained below, after discussing a more complicated issue, the legal framework. On 2 April 2004, the Flemish government and parliament approved the Decree on Municipal International Cooperation Agreements<sup>11</sup>, which was put into operation in an application decree in 2005. Since 13 June 2007, the International Cooperation Framework Decree regulates all previously signed legislative decrees, including the Decree on Municipal International Cooperation Agreement. What exactly does the subsidy for municipal international cooperation consist of? A local government signs a covenant with the Flemish government for a three-year period. Flemish policies include stimulating initiatives to extend the support for international cooperation, both with regard to citizens and in the different municipal departments and services. In election years, the Flemish government does not approve any covenants. Once the project has been approved by a committee of experts, the local government is provided with €48,000 for three years for an indirect cooperation agreement, without city-to-city cooperation.

Also, local governments that sign a direct cooperation agreement are provided with up to €96,000 for three years. Additionally, local government receives a contribution for personnel (€15,000 per year for an equivalent of full time) and the Flemish government awards a bonus of €5,000 to towns with a city link in southern Africa. The implementation section is divided into the categories of sensitisation, training and missions. Finally, every three years, Flemish local governments have to draw up a strategic plan focussing on the intermediate results. Furthermore, an operational plan has to be presented every year.

‘ It has been a long and important road for local governments to achieve recognition as real actors in the area of international cooperation

An important characteristic is that the covenant aims to sensitise people who do not normally come into contact with the field of international cooperation. These are personnel who also work within Flemish local government in positions such as reception, the technical department, cleaning and others. They represent sections of society normally not reached by the traditional actors in international cooperation and thus, through this subsidy, local government aims to provide another image of the South and break with stereotypes.

### 2.4. The role of local government in Flanders (Belgium)

Why should a Flemish local government be concerned with issues of international cooperation? If it is not within their key competences, what are their reasons for appearing on the



Delegation of Banjul, Gambia (city-to-city cooperation Oostende) at the VVSG during a training

international arena? Lommel's North-South civil servant<sup>12</sup> offers an explanation: *'Every day, global processes enter into different areas of administration and politics and this clearly happens at a local level too. In other words, the world enters our town. We believe that a local government has an exemplary and indicative role. It is our job, as local government, to contextualise international issues and translate them to the local level. As a central axis within North-South politics, the role of local governments varies from that of actor, facilitator and, occasionally, director'*<sup>13.</sup>

Thus, local government also responds to the show of solidarity among its inhabitants, not just by channelling resources for international cooperation locally, but also by showing how it can contribute to a better world. Thus local government acts in different ways, for instance, within a city-to-city cooperation, it takes the role of actor in the field of international cooperation. Also, local public administration, in its role as facilitator, is positioned to provide the human, logistic and even financial resources so that other initiatives may be carried out within its own territory or on the other side of the world. It involves offering citizens, through subsidies, the logistic support to organise their own activities.

As mentioned above, Flemish local governments can access two different subsidy programmes, although the largest contribution to an international cooperation comes from municipal government itself. Large cities such as Antwerp or Gent have an annual international cooperation budget of over €300,000, without even counting the contribution of subsidies. Almost every town has regulations regarding subsidies so local government itself becomes an important donating body, subsidising structural initiatives from civil society or private initiatives. Of the 308 Flemish municipalities, at least 257 (83%) spend a certain amount

of their annual budget on international cooperation. At least 267 (87%) local governments have a councillor for international cooperation and at least 168 (55%) municipalities have an active advisory commission on these issues. Furthermore, at least 147 (48%) local governments have a civil servant (part-time or full-time) responsible for international cooperation<sup>14</sup>.

### 3. The role of the association of local governments (VVSG)

The Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG) plays an important role in three main areas: providing information, training and advisory services to 308 Flemish local governments; lobbying to defend local government interests; and creating networks promoting international municipalism.

In this context, the VVSG<sup>15</sup> organises training sessions on topics that are relevant to towns involved in municipal international cooperation. The VVSG's role differs within the two subsidy programmes. Firstly, in the Flemish programme, the VVSG organises training sessions and general support for local governments that wish to sign, or that have already signed, a covenant with the Flemish government. In this case, the local government has direct relations with the Flemish Agency for International Cooperation (VAIS, in its Dutch abbreviation). The VAIS is the body with overall responsibility for administering the programme. For its part, the VVSG has also signed a management agreement with the Flemish VAIS agency, which is valid until 2011.

Secondly, in the federal programme, the VVSG manages the whole municipal international cooperation

programme, from the start the files production process to the delivery of financial reports and reports on content. The work of the VVSG does not just include the administration and assistance for local government, but also all financial management of the 12 twinnings within the federal programme. In this case, the VVSG works as a bridge between local governments and federal administration, represented in this field by the Directorate-General for Development (DGD).

Despite the different approaches of the two programmes, the VVSG considers them to be highly complementary. The Flemish programme is aimed at strengthening the basis of support for international cooperation, sensitising the citizens of municipalities, while the federal programme implies heavy investment in the Southern twin. In both programmes, the VVSG maintains a 'helicopter' view of municipal projects, promoting networks and information through representations in (inter)national forums.

To conclude this topic, the characteristics of the two programmes and the role of the VVSG within each one may be summarised as follows:

	Flemish Covenant Programme	Multi-year Federal Programme
Duration	Three years	Max. Five years
Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education and sensibilisation in the North</li> <li>• With or without direct co-operation (C2C-cooperation)</li> <li>• Financial support for the South is limited</li> <li>• Stimulation policies to extend the grassroots support for international cooperation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only for local governments in the South within the twinning programme</li> <li>• Municipal partnering = twinning between cities</li> <li>• Focus on the reduction of poverty</li> <li>• Commitments to results</li> </ul>
Legislative framework	International Cooperation Framework Decree (2004) and Application Decree (2005)	1999 Law on International Cooperation for Development
Sectors	Youth, environment, local economy, civil status, education, culture, ICT, municipal management	Youth, local economy, environment
City twinnings	Unlimited, additional economic, stimulus for twinnings in southern Africa	Limited to a list of 41 countries
Subsidy (=co-financing)	70% subsidy, 30% own resources	100% subsidy
Role of VVSG	Training and assistance	Management, assistance and coordination
Administrative management	Portfolio of training, sensitisation, mission and training	Investment, operation, personnel, mission, training
Local government	Sign a covenant with the Flemish government	Royal Decree (RD) establishes twinnings that are managed by VVSG
State bodies	VAIS (Flemish Agency for International Cooperation)	DGD (Directorate-General for Development)

‘The fact that both partners, both twins, can learn from each other requires a new way of thinking about models and forms of cooperation

#### 4. A glocal (= global + local) approach: characteristics of municipal international cooperation

##### 4.1.GLOCAL: the autonomy of local government

Municipal international cooperation is mainly aimed at strengthening local governmental power, through acquired experience and knowledge. This means that direct cooperation specifically enhances the capacity of local government to develop its own organisation in such a way to make politics meet citizens' expectation. In other words, it is the opportunity for local government to play an autonomous role in relation to the community that elected it. In this context, it is important to underline the added value and particular role of local public institutions in the scope of international cooperation. Local government is a public body, whose fundamental task is linked to reinforcing the roots of local democracy in its territory. Therefore, in the field of international cooperation, its role is different from that of an NGO. Local governments exceed the level of technical assistance precisely because of their public role and because they involve civic actors in their management and in their politics.

Bearing in mind the two complementary subsidy programmes, it is important to underline that local governments act from a glocal approach. In other words, the wish to connect to an increasingly globalised world with their own town and community. This glocal perspective is crucial for Flemish local governments: institutional strengthening in sister towns functions only when a part in the North works to increase grassroots support for international cooperation. Extending grassroots support means promoting greater public understanding of world structures and the complexity of it, the importance of human development, solidarity between peoples, and so on.

And vice versa! In other words, it is a two-way relationship. A city-to-city cooperation aimed at strengthening local government power is a relationship between partners, based on the principles of equality and reciprocity. Local governments have more or less similar tasks in different parts of the world. This characteristic enables them to enter into a dialogue between equals, between equivalents. Despite the socioeconomic and cultural differences, the fact of being a public body that provides and delivers similar services to its citizens links local governments throughout the world. The environment civil servant for the town of Edegem, for example, speaks the same

technical language as his colleague in the sister town of San Jerónimo, Peru. Thus, the training process, which includes a dialogue on strengthening institutional capacities, is easier.

The aspect of reciprocity is a fundamental element that distinguishes municipal international cooperation from other forms of (in)direct cooperation. The fact that both partners, both twins, can learn from each other requires a new way of thinking about models and forms of cooperation. Indeed, glocality operates in two directions: the towns of the South do not only receive institutional support in their own location but they can also contribute elements of discussion and reflection to their Flemish partner. For example, the people from the town of Herent, during a delegation visit of their partners from Guatemala, noted the astonishment on the faces of their Guatemalan equivalents when broaching the subject of poverty in Flanders and so asked them to critically analyse their social policy. In Flanders (Belgium), the poor do not tend to talk about their problems in groups; they consider it taboo and live their circumstances in isolation. Therefore, public social healthcare centres implement a more individual policy, warning and advising on a personal or family level. This approach appeared very strange to the Guatemalans, who strongly recommended trying group work, giving people the opportunity to discuss their problems in the company of an expert in social affairs. This recommendation was successfully applied by Herent. In this case, their experiences within the municipal partnership served as a mirror to reflect and

consider their own policies. When the Q'eqchi'és of Nimlaha'kok (Guatemala) were visiting their partner town of Herent another time, they considered the relationship between the two local governments as that of a younger brother (Nimlaha'kok) who needs the support of an older brother (Herent). Immediately, the councillor for Herent, Luk Draye added, stressing the aspect of equality: *'Rather than an older brother and a younger brother, we feel like twins, who are now separated by the sea, but who share the same interests and who are in the same position.'*

Within the context of glocality, it should also be noted that VVSG, as the umbrella organization of the Flemish cities and municipalities, strongly defends the aspect of the local government autonomy. This means that, in the end, Flemish municipalities decide with which town and in which country they wish to establish a structural relationship based on their own profile, their strengths and their weaknesses.

## 4.2. GLOBAL: the direct relationship with the South

### 4.2.1. Conditions to be met for a city-to-city cooperation

We have noted that the two subsidy programmes complement each other. However, in practice a city-to-city cooperation first passes through the Flemish programme through a covenant that a local government signed with the Flemish government. After letting the international municipal partnership mature over a few years, a



City-to-city cooperation Eenhana, Namibia and Harelbeke

number of them decide to join the federal programme, to strengthen certain and specific aspects of the Southern municipal partner. It is worth stressing that in this case, the city-to-city cooperation receives complementary subsidies from both programmes at the same time. Given that they are a factor in promoting municipal international cooperation, it is worth listing these requirements.

1. Flemish towns that wish to receive a subsidy from the Flemish government must set up an international cooperation advisory committee, recognised by the municipal council. This commission consists of different actors from civil society actors and serves to issues warnings and advice on municipal international cooperation policy. Thus, civil society participates actively in local government policy. In this way, each annual monitoring report or each new strategic or operational plan first has to receive approval of the international cooperation advisory committee. This procedure ensures the participation and involvement of civil society in a city-to-city cooperation.
2. The towns have to assign a budget line in the municipal budget specifically for international cooperation. Furthermore, they must draw up and approve a municipal policy plan for the international cooperation sector. These two conditions depend on the fact that local government has its own resources that can be invested in sensitisation activities and/or the municipal international relationship, on top of the subsidy.
3. The Flemish government requires the municipal council to appoint a councillor for international cooperation, as the town's politically responsible figure. As well as this political post, it requires a North-South civil servant to be contracted to implement the municipal policy for international cooperation. The North-South civil servant is the person responsible for coordinating the city-to-city cooperation from the Flemish side and, after three years of receiving the Flemish subsidy, the town has to guarantee this post's continuation on a full-time basis. Although these conditions are rather strict they do make it possible to start a dialogue and consultation process within the town. Local government does not only operate as an actor in direct cooperation, but also facilitates the sensitisation process within its own territory. This is why the support of civil society is essential. At the same time, as mentioned above, the advisory commission also advises local government on the distribution of municipal subsidies among local civic associations and organisations. Finally, we believe that the strong emphasis on these conditions serves to guarantee quality, not just in the activities within the municipal international cooperation programme, but also to extend grassroots support for international cooperation and solidarity.

#### 4.2.2. In search of a partner/ sister/ twin

Establishing a twinning relationship is a long process which lasts mostly a year and a half and which initially involves as many people as possible. Starting a city-to-city cooperation requires grassroots support from both the local government's administrative and political personnel and the town's citizens. Experience shows that the selection process of the partner municipality is an essential

key to success. Many of the difficulties that occur within a city-to-city cooperation, once the relationship has been established, stem from the selection process, that has not been carried out accurately.

To avoid these difficulties, the VVSG supports local governments in their search and has produced a plan to follow.



In discussing these steps, it is worth analysing certain issues in a little more depth. For example, drawing up a profile is one of the things that requires most diligence. The VVSG encourages local governments to select candidate towns for municipal partnership on the basis of their own town's characteristics and strengths. This means taking into account the number of inhabitants and certain other special characteristics (such as a port, university or historic links, among others). The subsequent matching process is no guarantee that the municipal partnerships will work well and effectively, but we have observed that the opposite case, i.e. city-to-city cooperation between towns whose profiles are too far apart, already contains the elements for possible failure from the start.

Another important element that the selection committee should always bear in mind is the specific and particular role of municipal international cooperation. This is a form of cooperation that is somewhat different from other, more traditional, types of cooperation. Therefore it adds a specific value to these other forms. This implies that the decision on a city-to-city cooperation has to be preceded by the task of sensitisation regarding municipal international cooperation. However, in towns in both the North and South, one still finds a charitable mentality based on the construction of infrastructures. Indeed, evolving from a purely infrastructure-based or, more problematically, a charitable approach towards a more structural and sustainable approach remains one of the VVSG's on-going challenges. The key elements of the latter involves concepts like partnership, equality and reciprocity which must be continually reminded to both sides of the city-to-city cooperation.

However the international municipal relationship between two local governments can have different origins. In some cases it is initiated by an inhabitant of the Flemish town who has lived and worked for several years in the region, town or country of the partner town<sup>16</sup>. Most Flemish municipalities pass their candidate partner or sister town through a selection committee, which looks at proposals from civil organisations





City-to-city cooperation between Edegem and San Jeronimo, Peru

or the town's citizens. Its work consists of matching profiles.

Once the candidate sister town has been selected, the Flemish municipalities use project cycle management (PCM). This methodology consists of the consecutive phases of identification, design or formulation, implementation and evaluation, before reaching a new programming phase. This is a participative process, in which both partners have to get to know each other thoroughly through several working visits. Then, after having agreed to the areas of work, these topics are reflected in a long-term city-to-city cooperation agreement.

#### 4.2.3. Sectors of direct cooperation in the municipal international partnership

It is obvious that the topics for cooperation defined in the city-to-city cooperation framework are related to local government's powers and role. These powers can vary from country to country, but identifying them in a new matching process helps align strengths and priorities in both local governments. Generally, the choice is limited to the sectors of youth, environment, local economic development, civil registry, culture and education.

The town of Edegem, twinned to the town of San Jerónimo, 10 km from Cuzco, in Peru, is given here as an example of how such a

partnership works. The link started in 2004 and has various areas that are targets for cooperation. After a consultation process, it was decided to focus the international cooperation on the areas of the environment and the local economy. San Jerónimo has one of the largest markets in the region, where wholesalers, retailers and people from Andean villages buy and sell their products. It was decided that the city-to-city cooperation should strengthen the market management structure, supporting both the hygiene and quality of the products. At the same time, in the environment sector, it was decided to work on making compost from organic waste using the city-to-city cooperation funds.

In this context, the municipal partnership and expertise not only focussed on financial resources but also on training. In San Jerónimo, the civil servants had already experimented several times with processing organic waste anaerobically into compost, but without appreciable results. During a visit to Edegem, the San Jerónimo civil servant for compost was trained by his equivalent and taught how to process organic waste aerobically. With this experience and the assistance of Edegem, San Jerónimo started a pilot project. Given the size of the market and the fact that 2.6 tonnes of waste are produced daily, the pilot project consisted in collecting this waste and processing it into a high-quality fertiliser. In doing this, San Jerónimo combined the two main sectors involved in the city-to-city cooperation: the local economy and the

environment. After this successful exercise, a compost plant is being built in San Jerónimo to process not only organic waste from the market but also waste produced in the town's neighbourhoods.

Another aspect of the project linked to the local economy in San Jerónimo, is related to the market of regional products which is organised once a month with the name: *Sabor Andino* (Andean Flavour). Once a year in Edegem, a culinary festival is organised with the same name, to draw the population's attention to the sister town.

Another example demonstrates collaboration between various international municipal partnerships in a youth network called JOPAC, *JÓvenes PAra el Cambio* (Young People for Change). Six municipalities involved in city-to-city cooperation formed a network (three from Nicaragua and three from the Andean region) to exchange experiences both in the North and South, on how to strengthen municipal policy for young people within the framework of the municipal international programme. JOPAC was started by two young Flemish consultants who became aware of the need to create a coordinated structure to give voice to the youth associations in the territory. Once started, the process has continued through exchanges between young people and civil servants in the respective towns to make the most of each other's experiences and to formulate specific joint actions.

In Nicaragua, for example, the young people of Ciudad Darío, Santo Tomás and Nueva Guinea meet regularly to discuss topics such as youth leadership, setting up youth organisations and networks, and so on. Furthermore, the civil servants from the three Nicaraguan towns are following the example of their young folk and are organising exchanges of experiences on farmers' markets and ecological toilets, among other topics.

#### 4.2.4. Geographic scope

Respect for local government autonomy and the partner town selection process (the profile matching process) involves certain consequences. The most obvious is, of course, the geographical spread. Flemish local governments have 36 municipal international partnerships in 19 countries, as shown in the following table

One explanation for this spread is precisely the fundamental vision of municipal international cooperation. Respecting the autonomy of local governments, towns can establish a municipal international cooperation in any of the developing countries. Before doing so, they must first invest in sensitisation and training (of their personnel, politicians and advisory committee) in their own town.

The geographic spread, however, makes it difficult to coordinate the work and create networks for exchanging experiences. In a single continent, the reality and context can vary to such an extent that successful projects cannot be adapted from one partnership to another just like that.

On looking at direct cooperation in Latin America, one can see, as shown in the table, that there are currently 12 city-to-city cooperations, some of which have historical or personal roots. The link between Mol and Santo Tomás in Nicaragua celebrated its 25th

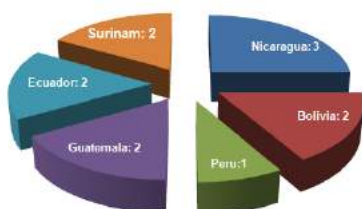
List of City-to-City cooperation			
Flemish Local Government	Twinned With	Covenant with the Flemish Government	Agreement in the Federal Programme
Aalst		x	
Balen		x	
Beringen		x	
Bierbeek	San Felipe de Oña (Ecuador)	x	x (in progress)
Bornem	Nquthu (South Africa)	x	x (in progress)
Brasschaat	Tarija (Bolivia)	x	x
Brussels	Kinshasa (Congo DR)	x	
Diepenbeek		x	
Dilbeek	Franschhoek-Stellenbosch (South Africa)	x	
Edegem	San Jerónimo (Peru)	x	x
Essen	Witzenberg (South Africa)	x	x
Etterbeek	Essaouira (Marocco)	x	
Evergem	Guaranda (Ecuador)	x	x
Geel	uMlalazi (South Africa)	x	
Genk	Francistown (Botswana)	x	
Gent	Mangaung (South Africa)	x	x
Halle		x	
Harelbeke	Eenhana (Namibia)	x	
Hasselt	Missour/Outat-Oulad-El-Haj (Marocco)	x	x
Herent	Nimlaha'kok and Nimlasachal, Cobán (Guatemala)	x	x (with Nimlaha'kok)
Herentals		x	
Ieper	Wa (Ghana)	x	
Izegem		x	
Koksijde	Albina/Galibi (Surinam)	x	
Kortrijk	Cebu (Philippines)	x	
Leuven	Para (Surinam)	x	
Lommel	Ongwediva (Namibia) and Ciudad Darío (Nicaragua)	x	x (with Ciudad Darío)
Maaseik		x	
Maasmechelen	Tshwane (South Africa)	x	x
Mechelen	Sucre (Bolivia) and Nador (Marocco)	x	x (in progress with Nador)
Merelbeke		x	
Middelkerke		x	
Mol	Santo Tomás (Nicaragua) and Kara Kara (Niger)	x	x (with Santo Tomás)
Olen	Ixcán (Guatemala)	x	
Oostende	Banjul (Gambia)	x	
Roeselare	in progress (Benin)	x	
Sint-Niklaas	Tambacounda (Senegal)	x	x
Sint-Truiden	Nueva Guinea (Nicaragua)	x	x
Ternat	in progress	x	
Turnhout	Hanzhong (China)	x	
Waregem	Gatsibo (Rwanda)	x	
Westerlo	in progress	x	
Zemst	Sokone (Senegal)	x	
Zoersel	in progress	x	
<b>Total</b>	<b>36 twinnings</b>	<b>41 agreements</b>	<b>15 programmes</b>

It is our job, as local government, to contextualise international issues and translate them to the local level.

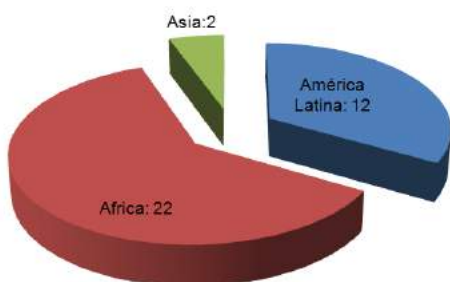
anniversary in 2010. It started with the solidarity and support of civic volunteers in Mol during the period of the Nicaraguan revolution. Since then, solidarity has continued to be the basis of the partnership, which in Mol has grassroots support from hundreds of volunteers. However, over the years, strengthening local governmental power was included in the municipal international relationship.

Another factor involved in the selection process is language. Good communication is a fundamental condition for the smooth working of the city-to-city cooperation. For the Flemish, speaking or learning Spanish is not always an immediate necessity, hence the obvious motivation to establish a city-to-city cooperation with a town in Africa. The language factor also explains the attraction of Surinam, where Flemish municipalities can communicate in their own language.

City-to-city in Latin America



City-to-city by continent



#### 4.3. LOCAL: in the North

We have already mentioned that within the agreement signed between a Flemish local government and the regional government, great emphasis is placed on sensitisation activities

in the territory. Local governments use this subsidy but it should again be stressed that they often invest additionally much more of their own resources in sensitising the public. In this context, two initiatives are worth special mention.

The first is the campaign for fair trade among municipalities, which is part of a larger worldwide campaign (Fair Trade Towns). In Flanders, a consortium of organisations drew up six criteria for obtaining the title 'Fair Trade Town'. These are:

1. The local government promotes and supports fair trade (and uses fair trade products).
2. Shops and restaurants sell or serve at least two fair trade products
3. Schools, companies and local organisations consume fair trade products, to spread knowledge about, and involvement in, fair trade.
4. The local media are involved
5. There is a coordinating group
6. Through its own initiatives, local government promotes local consumption and production of sustainable foods.

Once these six criteria have been met, the town receives the title of 'Fair Trade Town'. Currently, 84 (27%) towns have the title while another 228 (74%) are active in one or more criteria.<sup>17</sup>

Secondly, the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) campaign. This campaign is promoted in Flanders by another consortium 2015 DE TIJD LOOPT (2015, TIME FLIES) under the chairmanship of the umbrella organization of the NGOs 11.11.11. With the collaboration of the city of Gent, this consortium has organised an event to mobilise thousands of people during the night of 11 September 2010. The initiative is called 'Night of Waiting', indicating that we are still waiting for the MDGs to be met. The event also serves to put pressure on national politicians to take this message to the summit on the MDGs in New York at the end of September. In this context, local governments are invited to sign a motion with the same message of waiting. During the 'Night of Waiting', on 11 September, all the mayors who have signed the motion will be meeting.

Alongside this, a number of local governments are organising sensitisation activities regarding the MDGs. The city of Bruges (or Brugge, in Dutch), for instance, has linked the MDGs with the World Cup, inviting its inhabitants to score goals for 2015 through a variety of activities (such as tournaments and concerts).

As well as the existing campaign activities, many local governments also organise so-called 'world festivals': the Africa festival in Louvain and Turnhout, Third World Week in Dilbeek, the Bruges Park Festival, Villa Pace in Sint-Niklaas, Southern Madness in Geel and others. During these days, the public can meet the municipal organisations that work on cooperation

projects, while enjoying food and music in solidarity with the South. In the framework of city-to-city cooperation, other sensitisation activities are organised. There are photo exhibitions on the twin towns. And the towns of Mechelen and Sucre, for instance, have recorded a video presentation of how they work.

## 5. The 'Fourth Pillar' - A new phenomenon in Decentralised Cooperation?

For some years, local governments in Flanders have felt provoked by a new phenomenon that has been named 'The Fourth Pillar'<sup>18</sup>. They feel provoked in the sense that – as local government – they are faced with responding to this movement that is taking place in their own territory. But first of all, what is the fourth pillar all about?

The sector of International Cooperation (or North-South cooperation) is traditionally characterised by three main pillars, each with its own modalities and characteristics. The first pillar has to do with official bilateral cooperation. The direct cooperation of the Belgian as well as the Flemish government is considered to be the first pillar. The second pillar refers to multilateral cooperation – the support that national and regional governments provide to international organisations such as the United Nations, the World Bank and the European Commission. Within the third pillar is a group of specialist Non-Governmental Organisations<sup>19</sup> concerned with international cooperation, who receive co-financing from the national government in order to support projects with partner organisations in the South. Whilst the first two pillars are within government domain, the actors within the third pillar are indirect and non-governmental.

This was the landscape of international cooperation until a few years ago. But, on categorising the different actors, Develtere (2005) came across an emergent group that did not fit into any of the abovementioned three pillars, thereby inventing the concept of the 'Fourth Pillar'. So who does this fourth pillar represent? According to Develtere, it involves a heterogeneous organisation which he labelled an umbrella concept comprising '*solidarity groups that support missionaries and volunteers, trade unions, mutual benefit societies, agricultural organisations, corporations, foundations, youth organisations, hospitals, cooperatives, socioeconomic organisations, cities and municipalities, migrant organisations, interest groups...*'<sup>20</sup> The common aspect in the fourth pillar is that it is made up of groups whose principal objectives do not fall within the field of international co-operation. Their *raison d'être* cannot be defined in this sector – they have another purpose. The fourth pillar's origin can be found in the immediate global world, and not (as is the case for the actors in the other three pillars) in the unstable North-South relationship or in a context of structural injustice. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that it is not something unique to Flanders but also exists in other countries, although under another name. In the Netherlands for example, this category was called "Private Initiatives".

One thing immediately seems surprising. Do these solidarity and support groups really constitute a new phenomenon?



City-to-city cooperation Nueva Guinea, Nicaragua and Sint-Truiden

Support for volunteers or missionaries, the interest groups that support projects in the South, have existed for many years – that is a fact. However, the distinction and the novelty now lie in the fact that whereas previously these groups were linked to the NGO pillar and supported certain projects, they now wish to have direct involvement. The fourth pillar wants to do something different from the NGOs and offer direct and personal aid, without some part of it paying for salaries in the North, and above all – they do not wish to be controlled.

Something else would appear interesting to this discussion. Cities and municipalities are mentioned as belonging to the fourth pillar, but do local governments really come under this category? This certainly seemed strange to us. Do they not classify as governments and do they not belong to the first pillar? And how is it possible to class local government – with a long-term management plan, with policies and experts involved in a relationship of direct structural cooperation – as being at the same level as a solidarity group that, for example, wants to build a school in the country where they spent their holidays. What is more, the Dutch researcher Schulpen (2007) concluded that this new sector of international cooperation does not operate as effectively and efficiently as it would like to appear. In fact, local governments are recognised as being an authentic actor in the international cooperation sector and



City-to-city cooperation Gent and Mangaung, South Africa

therefore do not in any way fit into the fourth pillar listing. Hence it is understandable that mayors, town councillors and government officials are against being placed in the fourth pillar category. Those who were strongly opposed made the transfer from fourth pillar to first, where the structural concept of twinning was recognised more as a 'local government bilateral cooperation'<sup>21</sup>.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the phenomenon of the fourth pillar is gathering a lot of momentum in Flanders. Estimates point to between 1113 and 2000 initiatives stemming from the fourth pillar group in Flanders. Apart from what has already been mentioned, growth of the fourth pillar is revealing another phenomenon, one which has been named 'the socialisation of international cooperation' (*vermaatschappelijking van de ontwikkelingssamenwerking*). International cooperation is therefore no longer a field reserved solely for traditional experts, but is attracting new actors in the form of private citizens. With growth of the fourth group, the number of support bases for international cooperation is increasing. There are more and more actors cooperating directly with the South of their own accord, meaning governments and NGOs must look for ways to support the fourth pillar. Leading members of Flemish NGOs (11.11.11) and the Flemish government have since created a point of support for the fourth pillar<sup>22</sup>.

But local governments feel that they too ought to address this fourth pillar, since these groups are formed by citizens in their

municipality. Many local governments are therefore offering funds – via regulated subsidies – to the fourth pillar within their municipality, for their activities in the South. Total funds per municipality can vary between 500 and 4,000 Euros for a project – and approval mechanisms vary just as greatly. In some municipalities there exists a commission for project approval; in others, they are subject to advice from the advisory commission, and in other cases they are approved by government officials or politicians.

With the rise of the fourth pillar, local governments (as well as regional and national ones) feel they are faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, there are groups of citizens claiming a share of the municipal subsidies. On the other, at first glance it would appear quite difficult to harmonise the dissemination of the fourth pillar with the structural approach of a city-to-city cooperation. Then there are the challenges of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, which also have their agreements and implications for local governments – as concluded in the UCLG essay.<sup>23</sup> What is certain is that over the next few years, this will be a recurring theme for local governments. Together with 11.11.11 and various local governments, the VVSG began a process of working out how to guarantee objectivity and quality for the fourth pillar group, within a framework of regulated municipal subsidies for local activities of international cooperation.

## 6. Lessons learned

### 6.1. From good ideas and plans to dry formats and requirements

#### 6.1.1. Continuing with the *i!*-logical framework...

The biggest challenge for local governments is undoubtedly format management. Firstly, administrative requirements of the two programmes are different, which already presents a difficulty. In the federal programme, local governments have to fill in the logical framework for a maximum duration of five years, contributing to indicators with a baseline study. The Flemish programme, on the other hand, requires a three-year strategic plan and an annual operational plan. Nevertheless, apart from the different formats, both programmes utilise the same concepts and the same terminology of objectives, intermediate results and indicators. The main difficulty lies in translating complex ideas and intricate plans into a rigid framework. Undoubtedly, this represents a challenge for each of the actors involved in international cooperation, as they all struggle with the logical framework. We must also always bear in mind that for local governments, international cooperation does not constitute a core, or priority, task. Also, the strategic programmes and logical frameworks of the two programmes are formulated and managed by the local government itself, whilst the VVSG only plays a support role here. It is certainly worth looking into improving the quality of application files and strengthening the capacity to formulate logical frameworks. But aside from that, local governments feel they are limited in the use of logical frameworks since they are not adapted to the municipal reality. The main limitation is the fact that the international municipal partnership is a process during which various unforeseen things can occur – things which are not directly related to the logical framework, but which influence the municipal relation in an indirect way.

In fact, in the majority of city-to-city cooperations, monitoring represents one of the least developed elements of the relationship. Once a year, the annual report constitutes an ideal moment to reflect on advances, achievements and difficulties as well as plan for the following year. The format of the annual report allows the sister cities to compare the current situation with the ideas and plans of the logical framework (assessing indicators and the fulfilment of intermediate results). Throughout the course of the year, additional contact via email, Skype conferences and missions and delegation visits are all important opportunities for reflection.

To start with, we are focusing on two methodologies that may help us contribute additional information on the city-to-city cooperation process. Of the methods at our disposal, we are experimenting with the Most Significant Change Technique and Outcome Mapping. Two things are of note in this context. Firstly, the search for a new monitoring system is still ongoing, and secondly, it is not a case of finding a complete alternative to the logical framework, but rather to expand on it with elements that capture information about the processes (and not just the results).



City-to-city cooperation Zemst and Sokone, Senegal

Within activity monitoring as a whole, it is worth mentioning two aspects which we, on behalf of the VVSG, are in the process of carrying out. Firstly, we believe it is important to start looking at things from another perspective within local governments and certainly within a city-to-city cooperation. There is a need for a new attitude to monitoring, not only as a control mechanism, but also – and above all – as a tool for improved municipal international relations. Up until now, participating municipalities on either side of the twinning agreement have felt obliged by donor governments to monitor activities by way of the annual report. It is considered more as an inherent requirement in subvention, rather than an instrument that will help them make quantum leaps in the field of city-to-city cooperation. We must therefore ‘demystify’ the notions of monitoring and evaluation. Secondly, we are presently experimenting with various methodologies in order to enrich the monitoring system currently in force.

### 6.1.2 Enriching the monitoring system – MSC and OM

Most Significant Change (MSC)<sup>24</sup> is a new technique used to measure the effects or impact on a target group within international cooperation projects. The technique was first devised by Rick Davies and Jess Dart in 2002. Since then, and through experience, it has been enhanced. Various aspects have motivated us to concentrate our efforts more around MSC. Firstly, this monitoring method is participatory and simple, based on the compilation of stories about the most significant change. Secondly, it is sometimes referred to as “monitoring without indicators” and the process of collecting the stories is just as important as the information gathered. It is participatory and simple in the sense that each of us is able to tell a story or give an account. Following demarcation and definition of the domains of change, several groups begin collecting stories, always selecting the most significant and providing an explanation. For example, within a city-to-city cooperation set-up, we demarcate the domain as *‘increase in municipal capacity to recycle organic market waste into high quality compost’*

Then the group, including all those involved at each different level (municipality technicians, market salespeople and buyers, villagers who use organic fertiliser, etc) start to tell stories and make selections. They individually respond to the following question: *‘Over the last month, what in your opinion was the most significant change that took place for participants in the programme?’<sup>25</sup>*

Groups of two (or more) people choose the story of most significant change in the narratives given. Then two groups get together to discuss the reasons for their choice and make a new selection before meeting a further two groups and so on and so forth until the stories are whittled down to one Most Significant Change. MSC is about picking the change that according to the participants was deemed to be the most important, out of a multitude of changes.

‘Despite the socio-economic and cultural differences, the fact of being a public body that provides and delivers similar services to its citizens links local governments throughout the world.

The technique is simple because anyone in any culture can tell stories and thereby feel part of the monitoring process – not simply the object of the monitoring, as is the case with the measurement of indicators. Simple, however, does not mean fast, since the technique takes considerable time to carry out. Discussions must take place regarding the domain of change, the hierarchy of selection (who is to make the final selection), the frequency, process documentation, etc. But feedback on the selection of the final story to the different participating groups, forms part of the technique. Aware that this aspect has always been a weak point within traditional monitoring processes, we found it very interesting.

Another reason why we are inclined towards the MSC technique is the fact that it can be used in any language and with audiovisual tools. That is to say, it is possible to record the stories fuelling group discussion, and the discussion itself can take place in the group’s native language. This aspect is of great interest to us, given that in some city-to-city cooperations, the target groups are indigenous and are therefore able to express themselves in their own language during a monitoring process. Also, discussions about story selection are now not only focused on the story itself, but on the programme as a whole, and therefore contain many additional elements for adjusting plans and modifying the direction that the programme is going in.

MSC does not offer a complete alternative to planning, monitoring and evaluation and therefore must be implemented in conjunction with the mechanisms already in place. Another methodology in which we are dabbling at the moment offers a complete set of ready-to-use tools. Outcome Mapping (OM) has been designed by Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IDRC<sup>26</sup>). Outcome Mapping is a new method used for planning international development projects and measuring their results.

The method is so new that it is still in the developmental stage in practical terms. For this reason, a virtual Outcome Mapping community has been set up for people to share experiences and tools using the method. What is appealing is that Outcome Mapping provides a real alternative to the logical framework

and other strategic and operative plans. The difference lies in the fact that the focal point of OM is the change in people’s behaviours through the intervention of an international project. Recognising the fact that changes are complex, OM attempts to visualise each of the actors as boundary partners.

‘Outcome Mapping distinguishes the study from the results – “outcomes” – that fall strictly within the programme’s sphere of influence. It only analyses the activities

*to which the programme has contributed directly*<sup>27</sup>.

To elaborate further on this method would lead too far from the main discussion, but suffice to summarise that through a participatory planning process, the actors involved are clearly defined and visualised in a more explicit way, in terms of boundary partners. The measuring of project outcomes is also strictly limited to within its sphere of influence or control. It is no longer so much about a group of indirect beneficiaries whose individual contributions to a particular change or impact are extremely difficult to measure. Once the vision and mission of a programme or project has been established, a strategy of intervention is mapped out which clearly identifies the boundary partners and the desired outcomes, whilst monitoring signs of progress over time. Far from the conceptual, OM is one of the first methods to offer concrete tools that are ready to use during monitoring (achievement diaries, strategy diaries and performance diaries).

Some municipalities are currently experimenting with Outcome Mapping. The city of Antwerp, for example, is redefining its international policy through involving certain groups of emigrants in their own territory. The aim, therefore, would be to achieve results in (for example), the Democratic Republic of Congo through the Congolese community living in Antwerp. In this case, we deemed the demarcation of boundary partners, definition of desired outcomes and delineation of the sphere of influence all to be adequate tools for planning the new international strategy. The VVSG and a larger group of municipalities are also experimenting with MSC as an additional monitoring tool. The objective of both routes is to gain experience in order to formally incorporate it in a new monitoring plan further along the line (within two years). This plan must be adapted more to the municipal reality and be ready to employ in activities in the North as well as in city-to-city cooperation.

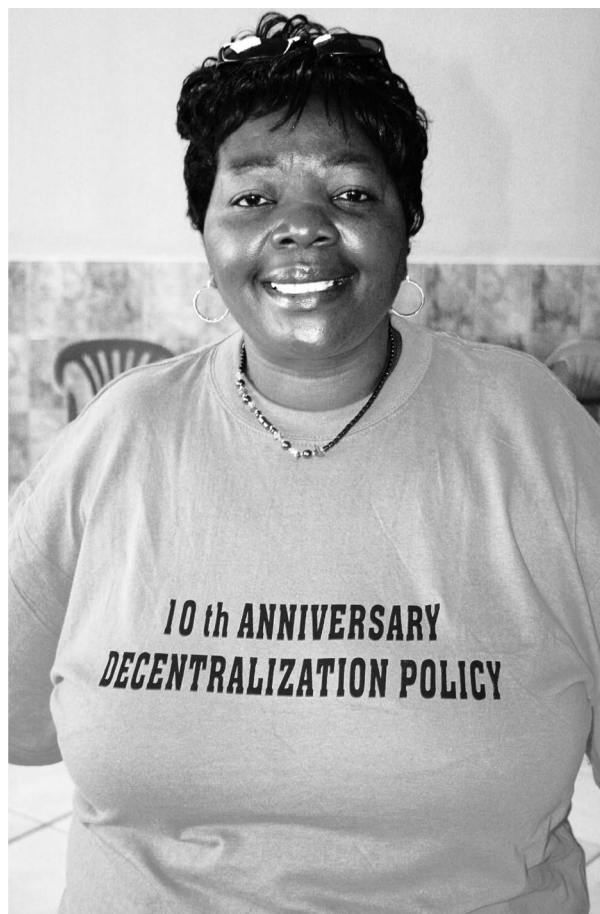
As mentioned previously, in its role as accompanying entity, the VVSG is faced with a complex reality. The visualisation of boundary partners and spheres of influence could help us in defining more concrete, precise outcomes during the planning phase – whilst MSC could enrich the way we measure effects and results not planned during the twinning process. Therefore, a monitoring plan for local governments, set up to measure the effects of all their international work, would ideally include experience of the logical framework with the new knowledge gained from MSC and OM. In other words, we are creating our own monitoring procedure by cherry-picking useful elements of other methodologies.

## 6.2. Constant challenges within city-to-city cooperation

Once an international relationship has been formally established between two local governments, the city-to-city cooperation is subject to inherent changes to the municipal reality. For example, a possible change of political leadership can take place on either side of the city-to-city, posing a serious threat to the continuation of the partnership. In both Flanders and the South, political elections always present a risk factor, given that there has to be a political desire to uphold commitments. In Flanders it often has to do with political parties' ideologies and priorities – and with a change of leadership (which can happen every six years on a local level) – it is always necessary to reaffirm the international commitment. In the Southern states, city-to-city cooperations are often regarded as being the previous mayor's achievement or concern. Consequently, a change of political party means renegotiating commitments and fields of cooperation with the new municipal council. The municipality of Bierbeek, for example, dealt with possible change

by making a presentation about twinning in front of all the political candidates in its sister municipality – and it was accepted. In all cases, political leadership plays an important and decisive role in city-to-city cooperation. On occasion, mayoral candidates commit to signing a letter of intention promising to maintain municipal international cooperation and include it in their policy.

But it continues to pose a significant threat because, unlike the changes in Flanders, new political leadership in the South often also means a change of administration. That is to say, in the absence of a municipal hierarchy, the new municipal management will make personnel changes within its administration. This implies that the commitments of the city-to-city cooperation not only have to be politically reaffirmed but also the agreements and the proper functioning must often start again from square one. Often, the personnel involved with city-to-city cooperation on the Flemish side feel that from one day to the next, the majority of their counterparts are no longer working with the sister town council. This greatly jeopardises the strengthening of institutional capacities in the Southern municipality, as well as the relationship with the Flemish local government. The issue of how to manage this change of leadership and provide continuity within the city-to-city cooperation beyond the elections, remains a fundamental problem to which we are yet to find an adequate solution. Within



City-to-city cooperation Eenhana, Namibia and Harelbeke

this, it is important to establish and maintain reciprocal trust. It is sometimes necessary to bring difficult issues to the table, for example the question of money management.

Another issue requiring constant attention is the importance of good communication. Firstly, this is relevant to the previous point regarding continual changes to personnel, inasmuch as the Flemish municipality has nobody they can contact in their sister municipality. Secondly, it would also imply that – despite ample communication – whatever is said is not always correctly interpreted in either Flanders or on the other side of the world. Aside from the difficulty represented by intercultural communication, the actors within the city-to-city cooperations are realising that informal communication is also an excellent way to improve relations.

## 6.3. New forms of cooperation

Apart from certain countries with a concentration of municipal international cooperation greater than one (principally South Africa and Nicaragua), the VVSG is looking for ways to break with the philosophy of isolated city-to-city cooperations. We are trying to increase the impact of individual relationships via a range of experiments, although much is still work in progress.

An initial discussion revolves around the expansion of the field of work to an institutional relationship with sister associations in the partner countries. Currently, municipal international cooperation is limited to – as the name suggests – individual partnerships between local governments. Until now, the VVSG has not entered into the terrain of institutional strengthening of local government associations (Association Capacity Building, or ACB). Certainly, relationships do exist and regular meetings do take place with several of these associations – AMUNIC (Association of Nicaraguan Municipalities) in Nicaragua, SALGA (South African Local Government Association) in South Africa – but up until now, the VVSG has not embarked on a structural relationship with them. To be able to take the results and learning process within a twinning agreement to a level beyond a municipal international relationship, we believe we must be structurally linked with certain local government associations. This is something that the VVSG plans to include in a new federal programme (from 2012).

Another way to disseminate lessons learned to other municipalities is by way of South-South exchange programmes, which we have already been developing for a short while. Since the context in the





City-to-city cooperation Zemst and Sokone, Sengal

home country or continent is often similar to the home municipal reality, we consider such exchanges a complementary way of distributing own experiences or, conversely, learning from other municipalities. If a municipality invests human and financial resources in the construction of a composting plant in San Jerónimo, Peru, it can serve as an example to its neighbouring municipalities. Within this context, we are also investigating the possibility of developing 'Triangular Cooperations'<sup>28</sup>. The city of Lommel, for example, is twinned with the municipality of Ongwediva in Namibia. Ongwediva, for its part, has signed an agreement with the municipality of Musina in South Africa. If municipal international cooperation were to be extended to a triangular set-up, we would gain greater results with the same resources. The city of Lommel is also twinned with Ciudad Darío in Nicaragua. For Ciudad Darío to enter into a similar triangular cooperation, crossing continents is perhaps not so feasible. However, young people in the three municipalities have succeeded in sharing their experiences at annual meetings.

The VVSG considers its principal task to do the documentation and development of its vision (and that of the Flemish local governments) for municipal international cooperation. By way of regional conferences – one in South Africa in October 2010 and another in Nicaragua in March 2011 – it will seek to arrive at a

shared vision with the greatest support base of municipalities on both sides of the city-to-city cooperations. This systematisation of experiences will lead to a culmination of a (new) shared vision at an international conference in Belgium in autumn 2011. With the conclusions and recommendations of this meeting in mind, the VVSG, together with the participating municipalities, will present a new programme before the federal government.

## 7. By way of conclusion

The indigenous mayor of the region of Nimlaha'kok (Guatemala), Herminio Caal, states that city-to-city cooperation '*means joining hands; one partner picks up the other when we fall and we carry on together.*<sup>29</sup>' This is clearly shown by the characteristics on which the city-to-city cooperations are based: showing solidarity within a relationship of equals, involving a process of institutional administrative empowerment.

Indeed, the VVSG considers it important to consolidate the existing international links between local governments and at the same time promote and experiment with new (innovative) forms of international cooperation. Therefore, for the moment, our interesting story of city-to-city cooperation **will be continued ...**

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> COM (2008) 626 final, Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee and Committee of the Regions, 8/10/2008.

<sup>2</sup> North and South, developed and developing countries... It is well known that each of these concepts is incomplete. We have opted for these terms, where 'North' refers to Europe (specifically Flanders) and 'South' refers to Latin American, African and Asian countries.

<sup>3</sup> See: Lambermont Agreement of 16 October 2000: <http://www.vlaamparlement.be/vp/informatie/lambermony.html>

<sup>4</sup> See [www.dg-d.be](http://www.dg-d.be)

<sup>5</sup> 11.11.11 (2009), *Jaarrapport. De Belgische ontwikkelings-samenwerking in 2009*, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> The 18 partner countries for Belgian bilateral cooperation are: Algeria, Benin, Bolivia, Burundi, Congo DR, Ecuador, Mali, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, the Palestinian territories, Peru, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, Vietnam and South Africa.

<sup>7</sup> If a city-to-city cooperation wishes to join the federal government subsidy programme, they can only apply for the subsidy when the municipal international cooperation is in one of the Belgian priority countries. This list consists of 18 priority countries for bilateral cooperation mentioned above and 21 countries for indirect actors.

<sup>8</sup> *Niet domein specifieke actor*: means that international cooperation is not a main task or goal for Flemish local governments. They are committed to the field of international cooperation because of their knowledge and expertise in other sectors and fields.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with the Minister-President of the Flemish government, Kris Peeters, in the magazine *MO\**: Goris, Gie (2010), 'Vlaanderen wil nog steeds overheveling Ontwikkelingssamenwerking', available at: <http://www.mo.be>

<sup>10</sup> Calculation based on the Flemish ODA reports 2001-2009, Flemish Department of Foreign Affairs, Policy Division, May 2010.

<sup>11</sup> See: <http://ontwikkelingssamenwerking.vlaanderen.be>

<sup>12</sup> The North-South civil servant is responsible for carrying out sensitisation activities within his or her town and for the city-to-city cooperation.

<sup>13</sup> The North-South civil servant for Lommel, Toon Jansen, quoted in De Bruin, T. & Huyse H. (2009), p. 41.

<sup>14</sup> These figures are several years old. The VVSG is now conducting a survey with more recent municipal data. The incorporation of these data can be seen at: [www.noordzuidkaart.be](http://www.noordzuidkaart.be).

<sup>15</sup> The association is made up of different political and administrative bodies (governing body, annual assembly, etc.) and 10 working parties (environment, social policy, safety and others). Within this structure, the international team is responsible for the field of municipal international cooperation, including the European dimension, and has five people to provide support for local governments

<sup>16</sup> This is the case, for example, of the city-to-city cooperation between Herent–Nimlaha'kok/Nimlasa'chal, between Sint-Truiden–Nueva Guinea and between Lommel–Ciudad Darío. In the first two cases, the current cooperation civil servants of the Flemish town have spent various years in the partner town, working with an NGO. In the latter case, one of the inhabitants of Lommel is still working in the region of the twin town.

<sup>17</sup> See: [www.fairtradegemeenten.be](http://www.fairtradegemeenten.be), consulted on 25 May 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Develtere (2005) used this term for the first time, after which it was adopted by the majority until it was widely accepted as a concept.

<sup>19</sup> In Belgium there are 115 organisations officially recognised as NGOs.

<sup>20</sup> Develtere, P. & Stessens, J. (2006), p.1

<sup>21</sup> Bruyn in Huyse (2009), p.37

<sup>22</sup> See: [www.vierdepijler.be](http://www.vierdepijler.be)

<sup>23</sup> CIB (2009)

<sup>24</sup> For more information can be found at the following yahoo mailing list:<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/MostSignificantChanges/>

<sup>25</sup> DAVIES, R. & DART, J., (2005), *Most Significant Change (MSC) Technique*, p.5

<sup>26</sup> See: [www.idrc.ca](http://www.idrc.ca)

<sup>27</sup> Outcome Mapping Learning Community. See: [www.outcomemapping.ca](http://www.outcomemapping.ca)

<sup>28</sup> "The rationale underlying triangulation is that Southern contributors, which are still themselves developing, are felt to be better placed and have the relevant experience to respond to the needs and problems of programme countries. In particular, many Southern contributors have come up with successful models or practices, which can be more appropriately transferred to other developing countries, than those of Northern donors." (ECOSOC, background study for the Development cooperation forum, 2008)

<sup>29</sup> De Mets, Jan; De Wachter, Betty; Palmaers, Bart; & Renard, Ilse (2006), p. 6.

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