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SDC's Ex-Post Evaluation: The Decentralisation and Local Development Programme (dldp) in Albania

Project No. 7F-04382 (2005-2020)





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of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

Contents:

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I Evaluation Process

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) is part of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and implements Switzerland's official development assistance, with head office in Bern.

Evaluations commissioned by the SDC's Board of Directors were introduced in 2002 with the aim of providing an independent assessment of SDC activities. These Evaluations adhere to the OECD DAC Evaluation Standards and are part of the SDC's concept for implementing Article 170 of the Swiss Constitution, which requires Swiss Federal Offices to analyse the effectiveness of their activities.

The Evaluation and Controlling Specialist Service is responsible for mandating and managing large-scale independent thematic and institutional evaluations as well as evaluations of Swiss Cooperation Programmes. The Evaluation and Controlling Unit commissions the evaluation, taking care to recruit independent evaluators and manages the evaluation process. The responsibility for individual project evaluations on the other hand is assumed by the operational units both at headquarters and in the field. Since project evaluations are usually conducted mid or end-term of a project cycle with a focus on project steering and project planning, the OECD DAC criteria of Impact and Sustainability are often assessed at a likelihood level with limited suitability for accountability purposes in these two criteria. In 2024, the Evaluation and Controlling Specialist Service was therefore mandated to conduct a series of 8-10 ex-post project evaluations between 2025 and 2028 with a special focus on longer-term impact and sustainability. The evaluations conducted under this mandate will serve the evaluation purposes of institutional learning on the aggregated level, while they will at the same time strengthen accountability towards the Swiss Parliament and Public.

The present evaluation was carried out according to the evaluation standards specified in the Terms of Reference. The Evaluation and Controlling Unit oversaw the evaluation process, including validating the evaluation methodology as laid out in the Inception Report and commenting on the evaluation findings. Further details regarding the evaluation approach are available in the evaluation report and its annexes.

II Evaluators' Final Report

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List of Abbreviations

ARDECO	Annual Regional Database of the European Commission's Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy
DCM	Decision of Council of Ministers
dldp	Decentralisation and local development programme
EPR	End of Project Reports
EQ	Evaluation Questions
EC	European Commission
ET	Evaluation Team
GLP	General Local Plans
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
LGU	Local Government Unit
MoFE	Ministry of Finances and Economy
MoI	Ministry of Interior
MTBP	Medium Term Budget Programme
OSR	Own Source revenue
PFM	Public Financial Management
PLGP	Planning and Local Governance Project
RDP	Regional Development Programme
SDPeMTBP	Strategic Development Plan and Medium-Term Budget Programme.
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
STAR	Support to Territorial and Administrative Reform in Albania
ToR	Terms of Reference
ToC	Theory of Change
TAR	Territorial Administrative Reform
WiP	Women in politics
GEF	The Gender Equality Facility
ReLOaD	Regional Programme on Local Democracy in Western Balkans
IADSA	Italian Albanian Debt for Development Swap Agreement

Executive Summary

The Decentralisation and Local Development Programme (dldp), funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by Helvetas from 2006 to 2019, supported Albania's decentralisation reform through strengthening municipal governance, improving service delivery, and enhancing citizen participation. This ex-post evaluation covers all four programme phases, from initial piloting in northern Albania to national-level influence, and assesses the sustainability and longer-term impacts of the programme's contributions up to 2025. The evaluation's primary objective was to determine the outcomes and impacts - intended and unintended - of dldp, to assess their sustainability six years after the programme's completion, and to identify lessons relevant for future governance programming in Albania and beyond.

Evaluation Approach and Methodology

The evaluation applied a Theory-Based Evaluation (TBE) approach, reconstructing dldp's Theory of Change (ToC) to reflect its evolution over time in response to shifting contexts, policy priorities, and reform momentum. The assessment adopted a two-tiered strategy: (a) a programme-wide assessment – drawing on systematic document review, programme monitoring data, and external reports to analyse results across all phases and thematic areas; and (b) in-depth case studies – focusing on three strategic areas, namely, Public Financial Management (PFM), Municipal Solid Waste Management (SWM), Territorial Administrative Reform (TAR) via the Functional Area Programme (FAP). In the case studies, contribution analysis was the central analytical tool, supplemented by process tracing, difference-in-difference analysis (on PFM), and triangulation of qualitative and quantitative evidence from key informant interviews, surveys, and external datasets.

Findings

Dldp evolved from pilot in a small number of northern municipalities into a nationally recognised governance programme, with direct influence on policy, standards, and methodologies in decentralisation reform. Its adaptive and flexible design allowed for adjustments in scope, objectives, and thematic entry points in response to changes in Albania's political context, EU accession priorities, and reform momentum.

The evaluation finds that dldp was largely effective in delivering on its objectives across all four phases, achieving results in both municipal capacity development and national policy influence. The programme consistently met or exceeded planned outputs in its core areas - Public Financial Management, Solid Waste Management, and Territorial Administrative Reform - while also contributing to cross-cutting priorities such as citizen participation, women's participation and gender equality, and inter-municipal cooperation.

Dldp's alignment with national reform processes, particularly those linked to EU accession, was a defining feature of its success. By maintaining strong vertical linkages between local innovation and national policy uptake and promoting horizontal replication of tools and practices across municipalities, the programme positioned itself as both a knowledge broker and a bridge between governance levels.

In Public Financial Management (PFM), dldp's support enabled municipalities to improve their capacity for strategic planning, budgeting, and expenditure management. The tools, training, and advisory support provided by the programme helped local governments adopt more transparent and performance-oriented budget processes. Several of these methodologies were later integrated into national guidance, underscoring their relevance beyond the original programme area. Dldp achieved strong complementarity with other donor programmes, particularly the USAID Public Local Governance Programme (PLGP). While PLGP focused on

fiscal decentralisation and revenue generation, dldp concentrated on the expenditure side of public finance, ensuring coherence and avoiding duplication. Many municipalities continue to use the PFM tools introduced by the programme, although outcomes vary depending on local leadership and resource availability.

In Municipal Solid Waste Management (SWM), dldp made tangible improvements to service delivery. Supported municipalities extended waste collection to an estimated 172,000 additional people, moving beyond urban centres to expand coverage in peri-urban and some rural areas. The programme also developed a cost calculation methodology and waste service planning tools that were later incorporated into the national methodology and the 2020 National Integrated Waste Management Strategy. Its introduction of waste management zones as a model for inter-municipal cooperation demonstrated the potential for cost efficiency and was formally recognised in national policy. Nevertheless, challenges remain: cost recovery is still below 50% nationally, tariff collection rates are low, and rural and remote areas continue to face service gaps. Meeting EU environmental standards will require significant infrastructure investment - beyond the scope of dldp's mandate.

In Territorial Administrative Reform (TAR), the Functional Area Programme (FAP) provided a robust evidence base for reform decisions. Through functional area analyses, dldp informed the design of new municipal boundaries and helped clarify functions of local governments. Dldp supported municipalities in establishing planning systems, engaging citizens, improving service delivery, and aligning their structures with decentralisation objectives. This work directly influenced national decision-making on municipal structuring, providing one of the clearest examples of dldp's policy impact. When political momentum for territorial administrative reform presented itself, SDC worked closely with the government and other donors to ensure both alignment and coherence. For SDC this culminated both in the continuation of dldp, and by joining forces with others in the STAR (i.e. Support to Territorial and Administrative Reform in Albania) programme, i.e. a multi donor initiative working under the auspices of the Ministry of State for Local Government in the office of the Prime Minister to implement the reforms nationwide.

From a sustainability perspective, several tools, methodologies, and approaches introduced by dldp have been institutionalised in national policy frameworks and are still in use in municipalities - both those originally supported and others that adopted them later. The uptake of the waste costing methodology, the replication of inter-municipal cooperation models, and the incorporation of PFM practices into national guidance all illustrate dldp's influence. Sustainability has been strongest where dldp worked in close partnership with national institutions, creating ownership and ensuring integration into legal or procedural frameworks. However, disparities in municipal capacity, resource availability, and political commitment mean that application at times is uneven. Taking a broader perspective than dldp alone, the Swiss approach in Albania combined the complementary strengths of SDC and SECO, with SDC leading on governance, decentralisation, and municipal capacity development, and SECO contributing targeted technical and policy expertise in areas such as public financial management and infrastructure investments. Switzerland's role as a neutral and trusted partner - valued for its long-term commitment, political impartiality, and ability to work constructively with both central and local actors - helped it maintain access and influence across political cycles, ensuring that local innovations were operationally relevant, nationally aligned, and broadly supported.

Lessons learned

Linking decentralisation to a highly visible, citizen-facing service is smart. SDC frequently connects decentralisation and local development programming in country programmes to specific service sectors. This makes the benefits of decentralisation more immediate and tangible for citizens.

Strategic flexibility is essential for institutional reform. The programme adjusted its objectives and methods in response to contextual developments, emerging policy windows, and reform momentum. Dldp functioned not merely as a project implementer but as a facilitator and knowledge broker - linking local experiences to national reform agendas and building coalitions for change.

Facilitation, not implementation, builds ownership. By positioning itself as a neutral facilitator and technical advisor, dldp built trust with both national and local actors. Its role in supporting policy dialogue rather than imposing predefined solutions enabled broader buy-in and sustainability.

Capacities built must be safeguarded against staff turnover. Municipal staff trained by dldp have contributed to improved local governance, but political cycles and staff turnover risk eroding these gains. A system-wide approach to professionalisation and retention in local administration is needed.

Sequencing matters: from pilot to policy. Dldp's progression from piloting tools in local governments to scaling them nationally through policy and law reform demonstrates the value of a gradual, evidence-based approach to systems change. Structured learning and documentation facilitated this transition.

Long-term engagement supports deep reform. The 13-year duration of dldp allowed the programme to respond to shifting dynamics, consolidate gains, and support reform processes from inception to institutionalisation. Such long-term commitment is crucial for complex governance reforms.

Policy influence is amplified by neutrality and credibility. Dldp's non-partisan stance and evidence-based facilitation enabled it to impact high-level reforms like TAR. Building trust across political divides is essential to influencing structural reforms.

Strategic partnerships sustain reform momentum. The programme's impact was extended through coherence with initiatives like STAR, Bashki te Forta, and SECO. Building coalitions and aligning with broader donor strategies enhanced both sustainability and scalability.

1. Introduction

This evaluation concerns the: "*The Decentralisation and Local Development Programme*" (dldp) in Albania, selected to be evaluated under the SDC mandate to conduct ex-post project evaluations with a special focus on longer-term impact and sustainability. The overall objective of the series of 8-10 ex-post evaluations to be conducted between 2025 and 2028 is accountability towards the Swiss Parliament, as well as institutional learning.

The dldp was initiated in 2006 and closed in 2019. Dldp was a four-phase programme in support of Albania's transition toward more democratic and effective local governance. Funded by SDC (as a mandate), dldp was implemented by Helvetas Swiss InterCooperation (from here on referred to as Helvetas). Dldp was from the start an important programme in the SDC Strategy for Albania where decentralisation and local government accounted for roughly a third of the overall SDC portfolio in Albania.

The Evaluation was conducted by an Evaluation Team (ET) from Nordic Consulting Group (NCG) composed of four experts:

- Ms. Anne-Lise Klausen, *Team Leader*
- Ms. Ayla Olesen Yurtaslan, *Evaluation Expert*
- Ms. Juela Shano, *PFM expert (Tirana based)*
- Mr. Erik Hedegaard Knudsen, *Data specialist*

1.1. Structure of the report

Following this introduction, **Chapter 2** outlines the analytical framework, methodology, and limitations of the evaluation. **Chapter 3** provides a contextual overview, presents the programme's evolution over its four phases, and introduces the reconstructed Theory of Change. **Chapter 4** assesses the programme's achievements across five outcome areas at the time of completion. **Chapter 5** traces the longer-term impacts of dldp, based on in-depth case studies in public financial management, solid waste management, and territorial administrative reform. **Chapter 6** examines the programme's alignment and coherence with national policies and complementary donor initiatives. **Chapter 7** assesses the sustainability beyond the programme's closure. Finally, **Chapter 8** presents the conclusions and key lessons learned, with a particular focus on impact and sustainability.

This report expresses the views of the consultants, and they take responsibility for errors and mistakes.

Nordic Consulting Group, Copenhagen 13th August 2025

2. Approach & Methods

This chapter briefly outlines the overall analytical framework, including an overview of the key approaches and methods applied. A more detailed approach and methodology is included in Annex 2. Overall, the Evaluation makes use of a *mixed-methods approach*, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. Below, the key approaches and methods that have been applied are briefly presented.

2.1. Analytical approach and methods

The Evaluation applied a **theory-based evaluation (TBE) approach** as the core analytical foundation. A TBE is particularly well-suited to an ex-post, impact evaluation where the primary objective is on assessing results - outcomes and longer-term intended and unintended impacts – of a complex and multi-phase programme.

A central element of this approach was the re-construction of **dldp's Theory of Change (ToC)** alongside the development of a **timeline of the programmatic and contextual developments**, which together capture key changes in context, strategic direction, objectives and outcomes. The reconstructed ToC, presented in Section 3.3, served as the analytical backbone understanding the programme's logic, assessing dldp's results at the time of programme completion, and in guiding the selection of case studies for more in-depth analysis of impact trajectories.

While the primary emphasis of the evaluation was on effectiveness, impact, sustainability, broader dimensions such as relevance, coherence, and capacity development were also addressed. This has provided a more comprehensive analysis of the programme's performance and its longer-term implications, while also guiding the identification of lessons learned.

An **Evaluation Matrix** was developed, translating the overarching Evaluation Questions (EQs) into a detailed operational framework by identifying specific judgment criteria, indicators, and means of verification, along with corresponding methods and data sources for collection and analysis.

The full matrix is presented in Annex 3, while the six main EQs are listed below:

The main Evaluation Questions (EQs)

EQ 1 - What were the main achievements (outcomes) at the time of project completion?

EQ 2 - To what extent are the project outcomes still relevant and aligned with similar/related interventions?

EQ 3 - To what extent have the outcomes achieved been sustained, scaled-up or replicated 3-6 years after project completion?

EQ4 - How has the project contributed to strengthening of capacities and to what extent have these been sustained?

EQ 5 - Which impacts have been achieved after project conclusion?

EQ 6 - What were the potentials for replicability in the same geographical context or elsewhere?

Given the broad scope of dldp – spanning four phases from 2006 to 2019, - the ET has adopted a two-tiered approach for assessing results.

A. Broad assessment of programme results

The first tier consisted of a broad, systematic assessment of dldp's results across phases. In this broad assessment, the ET primarily drew on a **systematic document review** of dldp reports, external review reports, and programme monitoring data. The broad assessment was undertaken prior to the field work / primary data collection, to allow the ET to validate and triangulate findings through **key informant interviews**. Chapter 4 presents findings of the broad assessment of the extent to which planned results were achieved across the breadth of the programme, held up against the reconstructed ToC.

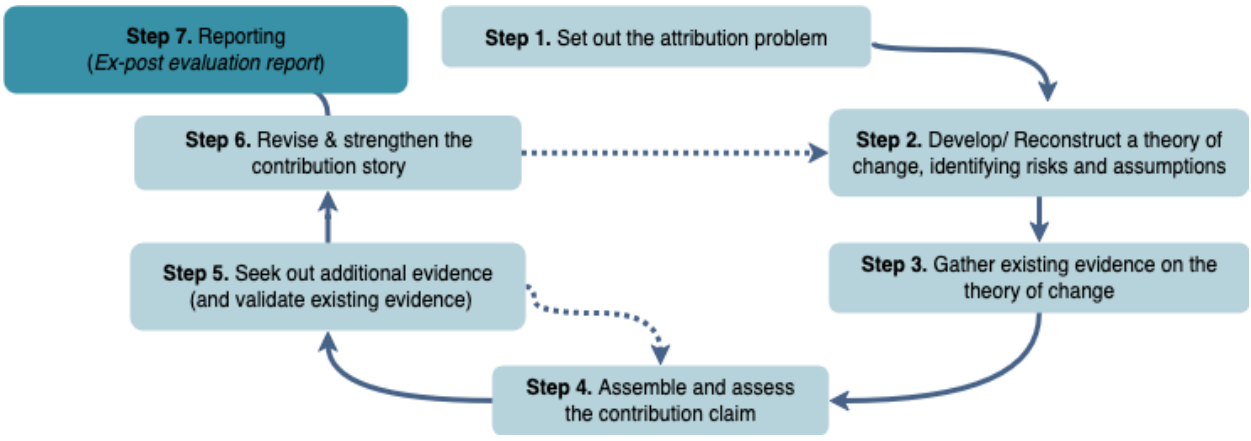
B. In-depth case studies

To complement the broader assessment, the second tier involved **three in-depth case** studies to trace dldp's contribution toward higher-level outcomes and impact. The three case topics were selected based on their strategic importance and alignment to dldp's core objectives, their potential to generate learning, and the availability of reliable data to assess outcomes and impact over time. The cases cover the following areas:

1. **Public Financial Management,**
2. **Municipal Solid Waste Management,**
3. **Territorial Administrative Reform through the Functional Area Programme.**

Within the case studies, the Evaluation applied **contribution analysis** as a central approach to trace and assess dldp's contribution to observable outcome and impact-level changes. Contribution analysis is designed to assess the extent to which an intervention contributed to **observed outcomes and impacts,** particularly in complex settings where direct attribution is challenging.

Figure 1: The Contribution Analysis process (adapted from Agpar, M. (2020) and Mayne, J. (2011)



As illustrated in Figure 1, contribution analysis involves developing and testing a **contribution claim/story**, using a combination of evidence and logical reasoning to determine whether and how the programme plausibly influenced the observed results - while also considering alternative explanations.[1] This approach allowed for a more nuanced understanding of dldp's role in driving systemic or sustained change in each thematic area.

[1] Mayne, J. (2011), "Contribution analysis: Addressing cause and effect". ; Apgar, M. *et al.* (2020), Contribution analysis for adaptive management.

For each of the cases, such a **contribution claim/story** was developed and assessed drawing on a mix of qualitative and quantitative, primary and secondary data sources. Other analytical approaches were applied when assessing the contribution claim (Step 4 in Figure 1) and alternative explanations (step 5 in Figure 1) – hereunder the **capacity development assessment framework, process tracing, regression analysis and difference-in-difference analysis.** Table 1 below summarises the contribution claim guiding each case, the main data sources available, and the analytical approaches applied to assess the contribution claim. See Annex 2 for more details on the methods and analytical approaches.

Table 1: Overview of the case study approaches and data sources

Case/Area	Contribution claim	Main data sources	Analytical approach
Public Financial Management	Dldp's capacity support contributed to tangible improvements in local governments' financial management - and indirectly to Own Source Revenue (OSR) generation.	• Key Informant Interviews • Dldp documentation • Evaluation report* • Data on Own Source Revenue (OSR)	• Contribution analysis • Regression analysis & Difference-in-difference analysis (on OSR) • Capacity development assessment framework • Triangulation
Municipal Solid Waste Management	Dldp's contributed to improved planning and delivery of waste management services in partner municipalities.	• Key Informant Interviews • Dldp baseline (2011) and endline survey (2018) • Dldp capitalisation reports • External reports/data on solid waste management	• Contribution analysis • "light" process tracing • Capacity development assessment framework • Triangulation
Territorial Administrative Reform & Functional Area Programme	Dldp's contributed to the design and early implementation of Albania's territorial administrative reform through the Functional Area Programme	• Key Informant Interviews • Dldp documentation / capitalisation reports • Other programme evaluations (e.g., STAR)	• Contribution analysis • Process tracing • Capacity development assessment framework • Triangulation

2.2. Challenges & limitations to the evaluation

There are several limitations and challenges inherent to conducting an ex-post impact evaluation, which bear mentioning to contextualise the findings presented in this report. Evaluating long-term outcomes after programme closure - particularly across multiple phases and diverse thematic areas - introduces **methodological constraints, data gaps, and attribution/contribution challenges**. While the Evaluation has applied rigorous triangulation, these limitations should be kept in mind when interpreting the results.

As an intervention, dldp has been extensively documented, both from the implementation (e.g., Annual Reports, End of Phase Reports), and from the capitalisation outputs developed during the exit phase. These documents provide valuable insights into programme design, adaptation, and reported achievements, and therefore serve as an important foundation for the Evaluation. However, the ET notes a key caveat in relying on this documentation as a primary data source, as it tends to focus on higher-level, aggregated results. Consequently, the ET has sought to **triangulate dldp-commissioned documentation** with **external sources, independent data,** and **validation interviews** with key stakeholders**.**

A key, primary data source for cross-validating claims made in both SDC and Helvetas documents has been **semi-structured key informant interviews**. While in Albania, the ET managed to conduct in-depth interviews with senior Government representatives – both at national and municipal level, both those who had interacted with dldp directly and also indirectly. These interviews, which covered all three of the thematic case areas, were an important source of strategic insights and validation. However, the ex-post nature of the evaluation presented several challenges that bear mentioning.

- Given the 20-year time perspective, **recollection bias** was evident, particularly regarding earlier phases. This made it difficult to retrieve granular operational details, but the interviews could nevertheless provide strategic-level assessment of dldp.
- While SDC and Helvetas provided the ET with support in **tracing and identification of persons relevant to interview**, securing interviews with "external" stakeholders, such as other donors and external consultants /experts was difficult.[2]
- An additional complexity was the **overlap between dldp, and its successor programme**, Bashki te Forta, which is currently being implemented across all municipalities in Albania. For some stakeholders, distinguishing between the two different programmes was difficult – particularly at the level of results.

The ET applied a rigorous methodological approach to mitigate these limitations, in particular relying on triangulation to validate key claims. While some degree of uncertainty is inherent to ex-post evaluations, the findings presented in this report are grounded in a careful and balanced synthesis of available evidence.

[2] In terms of donors, USAID was the other key donor working on decentralisation in Albania during the period, and given USAID's withdrawal/closure, it was not possible to pursue interviews with their project staff. As lead on the STAR project, UNDP was identified as another relevant donor/actor but unfortunately did not respond to the ET. In terms of external consultants/experts, the ET tried to reach out to e.g., experts from University of Lucerne without success.

3. Background

3.1. Context

When dldp was introduced in 2006, Albania's national priorities centred on economic progress and integration into the European Union. A major emphasis was placed on aligning local governance with the European Charter of Local Self-Governance. Although decentralisation in administrative, fiscal, and political spheres began in the early 1990s, a significant milestone occurred in 2000 when the first State Budget Law introduced unconditional transfers to Local Government Units (LGUs).[3] This marked the start of fiscal reforms aimed at giving municipalities and communes greater financial independence through local taxes and fees.

At that time, the structure of local governance was highly fragmented. The country was divided into 12 regions (Qarks) and 373 LGUs, of which 65 were urban municipalities, and 308 were rural communes. Smaller LGUs faced significant challenges, especially in service delivery, as many lacked the capacity to generate revenue and were essentially dependent spending units.

In light of these inefficiencies, the notion of territorial and administrative reform gained traction, and it was clear that a comprehensive strategy and territorial administrative reform process was necessary. While various studies and political discussions recognised the need for territorial administrative reform, efforts lacked the political support needed to move ahead. Political polarisation between the ruling Democratic Party (DP) and the opposition Socialist Party (SP) made consensus difficult. The 2011 local elections further deepened tensions, especially in LGUs where mayors and council majorities represented opposing parties, resulting in political gridlock. These dynamics delayed or stalled several decentralisation efforts. External support for reform, including the dldp, had to navigate this fragmented landscape.

A turning point for decentralisation and local governance came in 2013 with national elections that provided a strong mandate to a new government. This paved the way for transformative reforms in local governance, beginning with a comprehensive Territorial and Administrative Reform (TAR) that restructured municipalities. The government followed up with a Decentralisation Strategy, new legislation on Local Self-Government and Local Finances, and various sectoral reforms, including on digitalisation of administrative services. Backed by strong political will and international support, these changes were implemented rapidly and decisively.

[3] When dldp was initiated in 2006, there were 373 LGUs in Albania: 65 municipalities (urban areas) and 308 communes (smaller, rural areas). After the 2015 Territorial and Administrative Reform in Albania, communes were abolished as an administrative unit, with a new administrative division composed of 61 larger municipalities/ LGUs. Each of them is composed of several administrative units, which typically are the former communes. Generally, the borders of former municipalities or communes did not change. These units were brought together into the new territorial entities.

3.2. The Programme

This section briefly introduces dldp and its evolution across the four programme phases. Table 2 below presents the timing and budgets of each phase.

Table 2: Budget of dldp across phases (CHF)[4]	
Phase 1. 2006-2009, Northern Albania, Shkodra region	4,53 mio
Phase 2. 2010-2013, Northern Albania, Shkodra and Lezha region, research for national reform	4,8 mio
Phase 3. 2014-2017, Institutionalising practices, linking local development efforts to broader regional development frameworks.	9,8 mio
Phase 4. 2018-2019, Capitalisation, closure of support cycle on PFM and WM	1,5 mio

From the outset (Phase 1, from 2006-2009), dldp was designed as a targeted initiative to build basic capacities of 8 LGUs in Shkodra region in Northern Albania, one of the poorest regions in the country. The focus was on practical, bottom-up support to strengthen inclusive local governance through strategic planning, budgeting, and basic service delivery improvements. Quick-start projects - which contributed to service delivery and LGU administrative functions – were paired with capacity strengthening support on financial management, strategic planning. In many ways, the first phase of dldp aimed to demonstrate that, with the right support, even weak and poor municipalities could plan and deliver better public services.

In Phase 2 (2010-2013), dldp expanded to the Lezha region, covering a total of 54 LGUs. The approach shifted from one-off support to a dual-level strategy: broad capacity-building for all LGUs in the two neighbouring regions[5], and more intensive, tailored support for selected municipalities that would serve as "centres of competence." Dldp also began more explicitly to engage with national-level actors, aiming to influence decentralisation policy and reform through evidence and experience. Peer learning, competitive grants, and performance-based assessments were introduced as mechanisms to drive innovation and raise standards across the regions. The Functional Area Programme (FAP), and functional area approach was developed within the dldp, to influence and facilitate the territorial administrative reform process.

Phase 3 (2014-2017) deepened the programme's focus on institutionalising practices and linking local development efforts to broader regional development frameworks. Dldp's experience also increasingly informed national discussions, responding to a shift in the context: Albania launched the ambitious TAR in 2015, consolidating 373 LGUs into 61 municipalities. Dldp adapted by expanding to five regions: Three in Northern Albania - Shkodra, Kukës, Diber - and two in Western Albania - Durrës and Lezha - covering about 30% of the country's population. While it continued to build LGU capacity in core areas like public finance management (PFM), solid waste management, and e-governance, the programme also became more involved in shaping national policy based on local level experiences (e-governance, solid waste and one stop shops and mid-term budgeting). It contributed directly to the design of the TAR and played a leading role in developing laws on local governance and local finances. Dldp's tools, such as the waste cost-recovery model and strategic planning curricula, began to be formally adopted nationwide.

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4 The information on budgets in the phases of dldp vary. The ET has used Helvetas documents as the main source since they are the used consistently.

5 The expansion to the neighbouring region of Lezha also intended to boost interactions between the Shkodra and Lezha.

Phase 4 - the final phase of the programme (2018-2019) - was designed as a shorter exit phase, with the explicit goal of consolidating results, transferring knowledge to national institutions, and ensuring sustainability. As the landscape stabilised post-TAR, dldp focused on completing "unfinished business" in waste and financial management, while anchoring its tools in national training systems like the Albanian School of Public Administration (ASPA). It supported five municipalities in completing integrated planning cycles and refined national standards and guidelines.[6]

Simultaneously with dldp entering its final phase, SDC embarked on a new decentralisation and local governance programme, the Bashki te Forta (stronger municipalities), which is implemented in 2 phases from 2017 to 2026. Bashki te Forta covers all municipalities in Albania, building on the tools, methodologies and lessons developed in dldp.

3.3. Mapping goals/objectives and organisation of outcome areas.

Dldp was a broad and long-term institutional development programme that has been both adaptive and flexible in its implementation. To accommodate flexibility and adaptiveness, the programme outcomes were often framed in broad terms, and over the course of its four phases, the programme's scope, objectives and outcomes were adjusted in response to an evolving context, available entry points, emerging achievements, and resources. Moreover, because of the close interlinkages to Albania's reform processes, dldp's results/outcomes often span across multiple thematic areas, making clear attribution to single components difficult.

Against this backdrop, and to analyse and frame the main outcomes and impact(s) of the programme, the ET engaged in two analytical processes:

C. The evolution of the programme's goal/main objectives over time was **mapped**, to establish an overview of thematic coverage, levels of engagement, and strategic shifts over time (see Figure 2).
D. The outcomes across the phases were reviewed and re-organised into a reconstructed ToC with **five main outcome areas**. This reconstruction served as a central analytical tool, allowing the ET to focus on the core elements of the programme logic and to trace the pathways from activities towards impact. The ToC is illustrated in Figure 3, and the five outcome areas are presented below.

Table 3: dldp's 5 main "outcome areas" – based on the Evaluation's ToC reconstruction

Outcome Area 1. Capacity of local government on strategic planning, administration, and financial management.
Strengthening capacities of local government has been central across all phases of dldp, building and consolidating LGU capacities for planning, administration, financial management, and service delivery and e-governance. Over time, dldp shifted from developing foundational skills on planning, PFM, and service delivery, toward institutionalising and sustaining capacities, and linking them to specific projects/ services. **Phase 1 & 2:** Strategic planning, service implementation, financial management **Phase 3 & 4:** Consolidated capacities post-territorial administrative reform, quality service delivery

[6] Among other, dldp worked with municipalities to develop General Local Plans – a new tool introduced together with the new law on territorial development – with the aim to enhance internal territorial development and cohesion of new municipalities.

Outcome Area 2. Improved public & administrative services.
Local governments have improved their public & and administrative services. This area has grown in emphasis from Phase 2 onward, thereby aligning service delivery with improved governance and territorial administrative reform. Changes from having a narrow focus on selected services to a broader focus on services in general. **Phase 1:** Indirect via action plans and projects **Phase 2-4:** Increasingly explicit focus on inclusive and quality service delivery
Outcome Area 3. Knowledge development & institutional anchoring.
Throughout the programme, dldp has played the role of a knowledge broker, supporting exchange across municipalities, and linking LGUs to international and national experts. As the programme matured, dldp sought to anchor expertise in national institutions, and consolidate knowledge gained from piloting different approaches into knowledge products (trainings, manuals, guidance documents). **Phase 3:** National access to dldp products (curricula, packages of Best Practices) **Phase 4:** Knowhow is systemically used and triggers change; products gain international reach
Outcome Area 4. Influencing policy and legal frameworks
While national level policy dialogue and advocacy were less prominent in the first phase of dldp, from Phase 2 onward, dldp began to engage in national processes related to territorial administrative reform, fiscal decentralisation, etc., strengthening vertical integration with the work done at municipal level. Over time, the programme shifted focus from facilitating local-to-local peer exchange toward a local-to-national policy dialogue approach, elevating the piloted approaches and experience gained across partner LGUs up to national level to inform key decentralisation frameworks. **Phase 2:** Influence through LGU associations **Phase 3-4:** Structured learning feeds into decentralisation policy and legal reforms
Outcome Area 5. Citizen participation & Accountability.
Introduced early as a standalone objective, this area reflects dldp's commitment to participatory governance. While citizen participation and accountability were included as an explicit outcome area in the first phase, it was later mainstreamed across the other outcome areas, particularly in terms of service delivery. **Phase 1:** Dedicated objective on participation mechanisms **Phase 2 onward:** Implied within governance improvements and inclusiveness goals

Figure2 2: Evolution of dldp's overall objective across phases

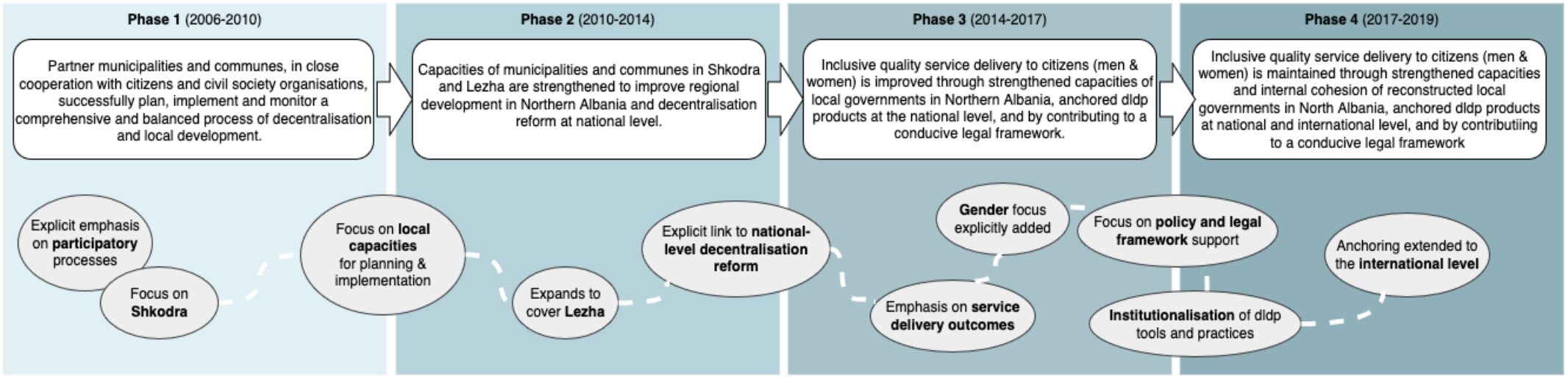
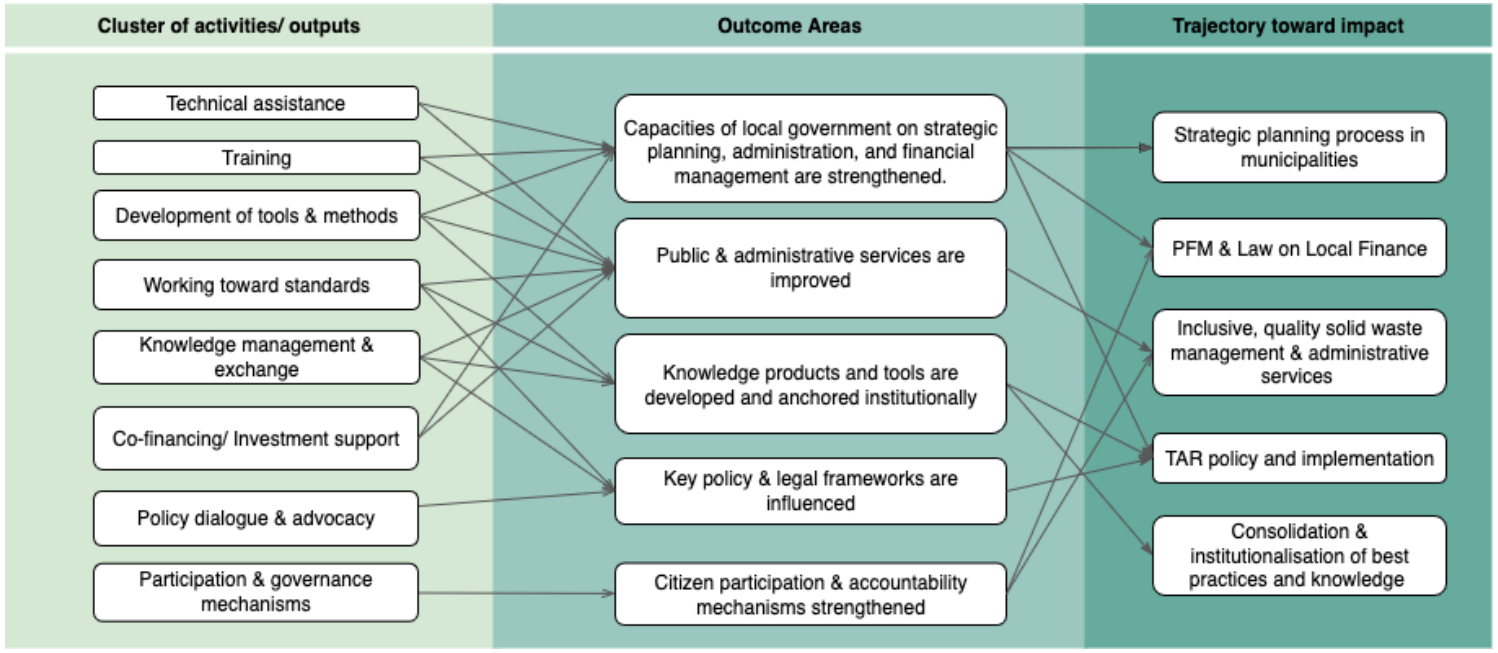
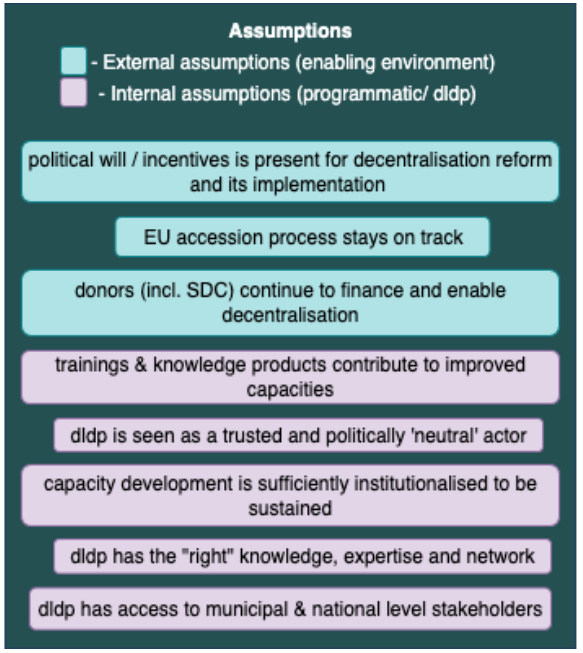


Figure 3: The Evaluation's re-construction of dldp's Theory of Change





4. Main achievements at the time of programme completion

Main questions

- What were the main outcomes achieved at the time of programme completion?
- How has the project contributed to strengthening of capacities and to what extent have these been sustained?

In this section, the Evaluation assesses dldp's achievement of outcomes at the time of programme completion, including outcomes related to capacity development.[7] In order to cover the full evaluation period (2006-2019) and the four programme phases, the analysis has been structured according to the five outcome areas (presented in Chapter 3 above) based on the ToC reconstruction.

Outcome Area 1. Capacity of local government on strategic planning, administration, and financial management.

Strengthening capacities of local government has been central across all phases of dldp, building and consolidating LGU capacities for strategic planning, administration, financial management, and service delivery. The approach evolved across the different phases, shifting from developing foundational skills, toward institutionalising and sustaining capacities, particularly in the newly constituted municipalities after the territorial administrative reform.

Overall, the support to planning, administration and financial management shows solid outcomes. Key achievements/results at outcome-level identified by the Evaluation are listed below:

- **Comprehensive support to strategic planning capacities of partner municipalities, through the development of methodologies, guidelines, and hands-on technical assistance.** Dldp supported the elaboration of new Strategic Development Plans (SDPs)[12] in several municipalities, and the updating of existing plans with enhanced analytical frameworks. Through the instrument of the Functional Area Programme (FAP), dldp supported municipalities in conducting *functional area analyses* – contributing toward a better understanding of territorial, demographic and economic linkages beyond territorial boundaries – which facilitated the preparation of Functional Area Development Plans.
- **On solid waste management, dldp filled a critical gap by providing guidelines and tools for municipalities to use in sectoral planning and administration of solid waste, covering key aspects of costing, cost-recovery, procurement.** While responsibility for solid waste management was decentralised to the municipalities, the practical plans, guidelines and tools for operationalisation were not concretised.[8] dldp's baseline study (2011) indicated that around 25% of municipalities in Shkodra, and 20% in Lezha reported that they had a waste management plan.[9] By 2018, the programme had supported and enabled the development of waste management plans in its 6 partner municipalities (Malësi e Madhe, Lezha, Tropojë, Dibër, Shijak, Shkodra), and general local plans in 5 municipalities (Malësi e Madhe, Vau Dejës, Tropojë, Mat, Klos).[10] In fact,

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7 Capacity development was in principle included as a separate evaluation question; however, since it constitutes a core element of dldp's approach across outcome areas (particularly Outcome Areas 1 and 3), the ET has opted to address it in this Chapter to avoid repetition.

8 Kodra, A. and L. Milios (2013), Municipal waste management in Albania.

9 Karakaçi, V. *et al.* (2011), Baseline survey - On local governance in Shkodra and Lezha (Albania) implemented by Decentralisation and Local Development Programme (dldp), p. 89.

10 Titka, M. (2018), Survey on the Waste Management and Administrative Services – Synthesis Report.

Shkodra and Lezha, with support from dldp, were among the first LGUs in Albania to have concrete solid waste action plans.[11]

- **Transformation of local government financial management practices across multiple dimensions of the PFM cycle.** The programme successfully supported 29 municipalities in developing participatory development strategies and financial planning documents, establishing a foundation for evidence-based budgeting and resource allocation that became the national standard for municipal financial management. The Strategic Development Plan and Medium-Term Budget Programme (SDPeMTBP) approach was elaborated in full compliance with legal budgeting requirements of Albania, especially taking into account Law No. 9936, enacted in 2008, "On the management of the budgetary system in the Republic of Albania."
- **Development and institutionalisation of tools for financial planning which local budgeting practices countrywide i.e., the Financial Planning Tool (FPT), innovative Excel-based instrument.** This comprehensive tool[12] was specifically designed to facilitate strategy-oriented, transparent, and coherent financial planning in LGUs through combined top-down and bottom-up procedures. The tool integrated strategic priorities with resource constraints, enabling municipalities to move beyond traditional input-based budgeting to comprehensive medium-term financial planning aligned with performance objectives. This includes the introduction of the Classification of Functions of Government (COFOG) at municipal level.[13]

Outcome Area 2. Improved public & administrative services.

Dldp has supported the decentralisation agenda by enabling local governments to better manage and deliver public and administrative services:

In terms of public services, the Evaluation in particular looked at the outcomes of dldp on municipal solid waste management, **where dldp inter alia supported strategic planning, costing, tariff-setting, procurement, inter-municipal/LGU collaboration**. At the outset of the programme in 2006 received limited attention and prioritisation nationally,[14] and therefore dldp had a key gap filling role, contributing to:

- **The development of important tools, methods and models.** At the start of dldp, most municipalities did not have the know-how, nor were tariffs being collected for the service. Municipalities confirmed that dldp's support in this area was key and formed the basis for their approach to plan and deliver waste management services. Dldp contributed with a costing/ tariff-setting methodology, and models for inter-LGU cooperation (regional waste management zones).
- **An increase in tariffs collected in the dldp supported municipalities.** Toward the end of the programme (2017), comparing dldp partner municipalities and similar municipalities[15] not supported by dldp, the dldp municipalities collected higher tariffs (total and per capita). However, full cost recovery was still far from attained at the end of the programme (discussed further in Chapter 5 on Impact).

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11 Agency for the Support to Local Self-Government (2023), Municipalities in the Process of Integration of Albania in the European Union - Assessment Report 2022, p. 110. By 2022, a performance review of municipalities' progress toward EU integration reported that 22 municipalities had drafted Local Integrated Waste Management Plans (five more than in 2021).

12 dldp (2013), Medium-Term Financial Planning for Local Governments in the context of Albania.

13 dldp (2018), Decentralization and Local Development Program (dldp) Reporting period: January – December, p. 8.

14 Steimann, B. (2018), Changing Policies Beyond Policy Dialogue: A documentation and qualitative analysis of dldp's policy engagement and impact, pp. 16–17.

15 Draws on dldp impact analysis report, which identified similar municipalities for each dldp partner municipality in terms of criteria such as number of population (based on census data), surface and economic development.

- **The programme contributed to an expansion of service delivery in waste management, and dldp-supported municipalities generally performed better than non-supported municipalities.** At the time of the baseline (2011, after Phase 1), of 51 LGUs surveyed in Lezha and Shkodra, all of the municipalities, and half of all communes offered waste collection services; in particular, small or remote communes did not offer the service.[16] By the 2018 endline survey confirmed that the municipalities supported by dldp had improved waste services, extending them not only in the centre/urban areas, but also to other administrative units. Most of dldp's partner municipalities had expanded coverage to 80 percent or more of the municipality. [17] Moreover, comparing the expansion of services to the population in Shkodra municipality, a key partner for dldp across all phases, against the national coverage level, Shkodra's coverage level was above the national average from 2015-2017.[18]

Dldp also strengthened the delivery of administrative services in municipalities in two key areas: the design and establishment of a One-Stop-Shop model, and through support to digital platforms and infrastructure for municipalities.

- **Dldp designed and established a One-Stop-Shop model in several municipalities**. These centres were designed to streamline citizen access to a range of administrative services - such as civil registration, tax payments, certificates, and permits - by consolidating them into a single, efficient service point. Municipalities with One-Stop-Shops reported higher citizen satisfaction, improved service access (especially in rural and remote areas), and greater efficiency in municipal operations. The centres became an important replicable model in view of the territorial administrative reform, where new larger municipalities needed a way to extend administrative services outside of the centre of the municipality to their newly delegated administrative units.
- The programme also provided **technical assistance and investment** in ICT systems and service counters, enabling digitised workflows and better internal coordination among municipal departments. According to some, this laid the groundwork for integration with national digital governance initiatives.

Outcome Area 3. Knowledge development & institutional anchoring

Capacity development has been a consistent and major activity throughout the programme, and dldp has played an important role of a knowledge broker – finding ways to link local knowledge and experience with national policy dialogue and reform. The fact that dldp dedicated a whole programme phase to consolidate, anchor and disseminate outcomes is a solid witness of the focus on this outcome area.

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16 Karakaçi, V. *et al.* (2011), "Baseline survey - On local governance in Shkodra and Lezha (Albania) implemented by Decentralisation and Local Development Programme (dldp)," pp. 25–28.

17 Titka, M. (2018), "Survey on the Waste Management and Administrative Services – Synthesis Report," p. 11; CSD Engineers (2017), Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation DLDP.

18 For national service coverage data, the Evaluation draws INSTAT, and for Shkrodra, values are from dldp's endline survey from 2018. Citation: Albania Institute of Statistics Dataset (INSTAT) (2023), Annual Survey on Urban Waste - Coverage Level; Titka, M. (2018), "Survey on the Waste Management and Administrative Services – Synthesis Report."

Dldp's has had a comprehensive and multi-layered approach to knowledge and capacity development[19], which has entailed:

a) **Developing and documenting "know-how**", in the form of guidance manuals, tools and templates, training curricula and materials, case studies and capitalisation reports.

b) **Supporting inter-municipal and international knowledge exchange,** inter alia through so-called Centres of Competence (inter-municipal technical working groups) - and international study tours to other countries (incl. Switzerland).

c) **Capacity development,** through training programmes for local government staff, delivered in partnership with ASPA and line ministries, as well as coaching and technical assistance (international and national experts).

d) **Feeding knowledge into policy processes**, supporting the drafting of legislation and by-laws related to thematic packages (i.e. the Law on Local Finance 2017) – and participating in policy discussions, development and influencing.

A key outcome on knowledge management is the four thematic packages that dldp developed, consolidated and made available for municipalities via dldp's "Knowledge Management for Local governance and Decentralisation" (eKM) platform.[20] These packages (described in Box 1 below) span the different approaches described above, from developing the knowledge (tools, methods) to feeding into policy reform. The Evaluation has not been able to assess capacity results across all the thematic packages, but rather, has focused its in-depth assessment on the PFM component.

Box 1. Dldp's Knowledge Packages

Public Finance Management	Solid Waste Management
• The knowledge package supported integration between strategic development planning and budgeting, • Dldp developed tools for performance-based budgeting, medium-term budget planning, and expenditure tracking at the municipal level. • Outputs include guidance materials, municipal finance analysis templates, and workshops delivered through ASPA (Albanian School of Public Administration).	• The knowledge package included the development and piloting of the national costing and tariff methodology, first used in northern municipalities and later endorsed by MoI. • Also included are operational planning tools for waste zones, models of inter-municipal cooperation, and practical guides for service extension.
E-Governance & Communication	**Fund Access**
• This package focused on One-Stop Shops (OSS) for municipal service delivery, digitalisation of local services, and building communication capacities within LGUs. • Included tools for internal coordination, website templates, and training on how to conduct citizen consultations and feedback loops. • Communication was recognised as both a service and a governance tool, supporting transparency and trust.	• This package focused on helping municipalities align their development objectives with financing opportunities (e.g., EU and national funds). • Dldp developed tools and guidance for municipalities to prepare fundable project proposals, in line with national investment criteria and donor expectations. • Includes a project preparation template, pipeline tools, and training modules.

19 Hatcher, C. (2018), Learning and Knowledge Sharing in dldp.

20 The Knowledge Management Platform can be accessed here: https://km.dldp.al/

Dldp's PFM capacity development activities were anchored in two fundamental pillars: recognising that sustainable capacity development required both *knowledge transfer* and *practical application support*. This dual approach ensured that local financial management could support effective service delivery while creating transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in budgeting processes. The combination of training and coaching proved essential for effective capacity development, with coaching being identified as a crucial success factor for the elaboration of improved financial plans and comprehensive MTBPs. However, resource limitations meant that only a fraction of trained LGUs could receive intensive coaching support, highlighting the importance of adequate resources for comprehensive capacity development.

With reference to the Evaluation's capacity development framework (see Table 4), dldp has contributed both toward capacity creation, utilisation and retention from individual to policy environment levels:

- **At the *individual level*,** training and coaching strengthened municipal staff skills in strategic planning, performance budgeting, and fiscal analysis, with many applying them in their day-to-day work. 450 municipality staff (170 women and 280) men trained across 12 municipalities on mid-term budget planning and annual budget preparation.[21]
- **At the *institutional level*,** dldp supported 29 municipalities in developing participatory development strategies and financial planning documents. The dldp developed curricula[19] for the Albanian School of Public Administration (ASPA), including Strategic Development Planning, e-Medium Term Budget Planning, Financial Planning Tool, and Budget Execution and Evaluation. The Quality Assurance System supported by dldp has evaluated[22] 67 curricula, with 42 passing the 70-point threshold for national adoption, ensuring continued professional development in PFM practices. In addition, dldp transformed budgeting into a cross-departmental function and supported the integration of structured processes across municipalities. Ministry of Finance recognised that dldp-supported LGUs achieved the highest ratings at the country level according to PEFA assessment criteria.
- **At the *enabling environment level***, dldp influenced the creation of key national laws, standards, and training curricula, notably the Law on Local Finances and the Financial Planning Tool.

21 Helvetas (2019), 12 year - Worthwile Human Stories, p. 16.
22 Hatcher, C. (2018), "Learning and Knowledge Sharing in dldp," p. 8.

Table 4: The Evaluation's Capacity Development Assessment Framework

	Capacity creation	Capacity utilisation	Capacity retention
Individual level	Public servants have skills, knowledge, competencies of on PFM.	Public servants apply skills, knowledge, competencies in municipal budgeting, planning, and monitoring.	Knowledge between public services facilitated within municipalities ensuring capacities are retained.
Institutional level	Municipalities have relevant and efficient tools, processes and procedures of on PFM	Municipalities institutionalise relevant tools, processes and procedures	Municipal budgeting processes continue to follow strategic, participatory, and performance-oriented approaches developed by the programme.
Enabling environment	Establishment of adequate institutions, laws and regulations	Municipalities experience enabling legal framework on fiscal decentralisation, aligned to municipal PFM practices.	On-going engagement with national policy processes and continuous refinement of tools and methodologies

Outcome Area 4. Influencing policy and legal frameworks.

While national level policy dialogue and advocacy were less prominent in Phase 1 of dldp, from Phase 2 onward the programme began to engage in national reform processes, actively strengthening vertical integration by linking municipal-level practice and lessons with policy development and legal frameworks at central government level. The outcomes of this policy engagement are visible across three main areas: *the territorial administrative reform*, where dldp's functional area approach influenced the structure of new municipalities; *waste management,* where dldp's costing and zoning models were taken up nationally; and *fiscal decentralisation and PFM,* where dldp's tools and training contributed to improved planning and budgeting practices aligned with national standards. [23]

- **On influencing the Territorial Administrative Reform.** dldp's Functional Area Programme (FAP) provided critical data, analysis, and pilot experiences that directly shaped the national debate and design of the 2014 Territorial Administrative Reform, because the FAP went beyond the redesign of administrative borders by simply enlarging local government units. The concept of functional planning units and inter-municipal cooperation - piloted and proven effective by dldp - was reflected in national policy frameworks. dldp played an important role in the development of **the national TAR law and its emphasis on equitable territorial development.**[24] A study tour to Switzerland and a presentation of the Functional Area Study were also contributors to the TAR[25].

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23 Steimann, B. (2018), "Changing Policies Beyond Policy Dialogue: A documentation and qualitative analysis of dldp's policy engagement and impact."

24 Bushati, B. *et al.* (February 2020), Unlocking territorial potential - Functional areas, local development and inclusive policy-making in Albania, p. p 5.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 12. - (Laws and policies) – i.e., the Law on Territorial Administrative Reform (July 2014), the Decentralisation.

- **On national frameworks and tools for Waste Management.** dldp's waste costing and tariff methodology, originally piloted in northern municipalities, was recognised and adopted by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy and incorporated into national guidelines. Dldp also contributed to the National Integrated Waste Management Strategy 2020–2035, especially regarding service zoning and inter-municipal cooperation.
- **On fiscal decentralisation and PFM**. Through dldp's engagement with Ministry of Finance and Economy (MoFE) and the Ministry of Interior (MoI), the programme contributed to discussions and working groups that informed revisions to laws on local government finance and budget transparency and facilitated the harmonisation of local financial management practices with national frameworks. On the Law on Local Finances (April 2017), dldp influenced the concrete content of the legislation, particularly on PFM with technical expertise and extensive consultations with the local level[26].

Outcome Area 5. Citizen participation & Accountability.

Citizen participation and accountability were a cross-cutting aspect in outcomes throughout the lifespan of dldp. In Phase 1, the focus was on general public participation outcomes. It is also only in this phase that citizen participation and accountability was a standalone objective. After the first phase, this outcome area was mainstreamed across activities, and it is therefore less visible in an ex-post evaluation. Nevertheless, the Evaluation has traced participation and accountability in later phases of dldp in terms of participation of women in politics and gender mainstreaming. For example, in Phase 3, where dldp makes a shift to national level engagement, the focus on women's engagement in politics as voters and candidates is a more tangible and focused way of addressing and promoting participation aspects.

The Evaluations finds that participation aspects generally have been more pronounced than accountability aspects, although it can be argued that overall decentralisation of government is about citizen accountability and a stronger social contract between state and citizens. Accountability takes centre stage in the successor programme to dldp, the Bashki te Forta, where bolstering the local councillor role and capacity is a key element in enhancing the checks and balances between the executive and the legislative branches of government.

Overall, there are results in this outcome area, which are foundational for impact in the longer term. Looking into the specific results achieved, the following stand out (particularly documented in Phases 1 and 2):

- **Improvement in information and communication to citizens**. Across dldp phases, there were many different achievements in improving citizen information: One-Stop-Shops; internet platforms for communicating with citizens; communication strategies and information materials in the waste sector; consultations in the preparation of MTBPs.
- **Increase in women's engagement as candidates,** including the election of the first woman as major (in Skhodra) and two deputy mayors. The number of elected women LGU council members in Lezha Qark also increased from 18 to 21 (out of 343) and at least 1 Qark Council member is female. Dldp-supported LGUs in Skhodra and Lezha perform better than the national average. Women on top of the list for both main political parties in Shkodra and Lezha (2013 national elections). In the 2011 local elections, the number of women elected increased (from a very low base[27]). A gender quota was also introduced in local elections.

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26 Steimann, B. (2018), "Changing Policies Beyond Policy Dialogue: A documentation and qualitative analysis of dldp's policy engagement and impact."

27 The number of elected women LGU council members in Lezha Qark has increased from 18 to 21 (out of 343) and at least 1 Qark Council member is female. Furthermore, 2 deputy mayors are female. The number of elected women LGU council members in Shkodra Qark increased from 28 to 41 (out of 529). One woman head of council was elected in Rubik. Note: The Electoral Code stipulates that in local elections one in every three names on each candidate list must belong to each gender.

- **Increase of voter turnout in local elections**. Although a comparison between the voter turnout in the 2007 local elections remained the same in the 2011 local elections in Shkodra and it reduced in Lezha, dldp made considerable efforts in this regard.
- **Gender equality mainstreaming** at the national policy level in the Law on Local Finances and Self-Government was supported through dldp's engagement with local women's alliances.

This chapter shows that overall, the results achieved by dldp in the outcome areas are substantial and considerable. Nevertheless, as is common with the nature of institutional reform programmes, there is unfinished business, ongoing processes and potential gaps. Reform processes are often short of financing, subject to political shifts and strategic choices have to be made. Outcomes have therefore been consolidated in the form of knowledge sharing, continuation of support in new programmes, continued alignment and coherence in support of Albania's decentralisation and reform agenda. The ET cannot point to areas where dldp could have taken alternative "routes", the phasing and the internal changes of the programme were closely aligned with the national reform processes.

5. Tracing dldp's impact

Main questions

- To what extent have the expected impacts from the programme support materialised in the period after project completion?
- What has been the programme's contribution to achievement of these impacts?
- Have any unintended positive or negative impacts emerged after programme completion as a consequence of the programme?

In this chapter, the Evaluation traces dldp's impact after programme completion. The assessment is particularly grounded in the three in-depth case studies – and their respective contribution claims (see Table 1 in Chapter 2: Approach and Methods) – covering PFM, municipal solid waste management, and TAR through the Functional Area Programme.

5.1 Public Finance Management

The programme's strong relationships with local and national-level institutions, particularly the Ministry of Finance, created enabling conditions for policy influence and institutional adoption, which can be traced at the level of impact six years after programme completion. Dldp was regularly consulted by the Directorate of Inter-governmental Fiscal Relations[28] before budgeting guidelines were issued, and the programme's input was consistently incorporated into national policy processes. This relationship facilitated the scaling of local innovations to national standards.

Dldp's engagement in medium-term budget programming represented a paradigm shift in local financial management. The programme supported the elaboration of comprehensive MTBPs [29] in selected LGUs, combining strategy-related policy planning with financial planning in a performance-based programme structure. It also provided guidance for creating systematic and comprehensive versions of MTBPs that facilitated public communication and enhanced transparency in municipal financial management. The evaluation evidenced that the Ministry of Finance officially declared the Financial Planning Tool as the standard instrument for local budgeting and promoted its application countrywide to all 61 municipalities, representing unprecedented scaling of a locally-developed innovation to national standard practice.

Dldp's PFM component has served as a transformative catalyst for changes in the local financial management landscape, creating impacts across policy, legal, operational, and behavioural dimensions that continue to shape municipal governance throughout the country. The programme's strategic positioning and technical expertise enabled it to serve as a knowledge broker between local practice and national policy-making facilitating systemic changes that have become integral to Albania's governance framework.

At the policy level the impact is evident on the legal and institutional framework for local financial management. The programme played a pivotal role in developing the Law on Local Finances. The law introduced comprehensive standards for strategic planning, medium-term budgeting, performance-based resource allocation, and fiscal transparency that have

[28] dldp and HELVETAS (2014), dldp - End of Phase Report phase 2, p. 8.
[29] Pfäffli, S. (2013), SDPeMTBP approach of dldp as a contribution to the PFM reform at the local level in Albania, p. 7.

transformed the legal framework governing local financing management and continues to govern local financial management across all municipalities.

The Financial Planning Tool became the standard instrument for local budgeting, and was widely used by municipalities for their budget planning until recently. Additionally, the development of national training curricula for Strategic Development Planning, Medium Term Budget Programming, Financial Planning Tool, and Budget Execution and Evaluation created institutional capacity for ongoing professional development in PFM.

Operationally, dldp's PFM interventions has altered how local governments manage their finances. Evaluation evidence showed that municipalities that received dldp support demonstrated marked improvements in budget preparation and financial reporting, with the Ministry of Finance recognising that supported LGUs achieved the highest ratings at the country level according to PEFA assessment criteria.[30] The shift from annual, input-based budgeting to multi-year, strategic, and performance-oriented planning represents a transformation in municipal operations that has been adopted nationwide.

A limitation of dldp's PFM impact was the absence of a direct link between the programme's assistance and increased revenue generation at the local level. Desk research[31], statistical analysis (see Box 2), and interviews evidenced that dldp's interventions concentrated primarily on improving financial planning, strategic budgeting, and fiscal management practices rather than addressing revenue collection and tax generation capacity enhancement. The upstream-downstream disconnect also explains why dldp's assistance did not translate into increased revenue generation at the local level. One reason for dldp's limited attention to the increasing revenue generation of local government was the division of labour among donors: while dldp focused on financial management, USAID was targeting this area through its project on fiscal decentralisation in Albania.

Box 2 – Tracing dldp's impact on municipalities' Own Source Revenue

Using own source revenue (OSR) data covering Albanian municipalities in the period 2015 to 2020, a statistical regression analysis[32] was applied to measure the effect of dldp on PFM effectiveness. This analysis could not **detect a causal and statistically significant effect of dldp support on municipalities' OSR levels**. This finding indicates that dldp participation has not provided dldp municipalities with an advantage when it comes to their ability to generate their own revenue.

The Evaluation also conducted a withdrawal analysis of dldp closure on municipalities OSR levels, by applying a difference-in-difference quasi-experimental design to a set of similar control municipalities[33]. This allowed the Evaluation to detect whether any capacity gains from dldp support persisted, declined (indicating lack of sustainability), or converged with control municipalities once the intervention ended. **No statistically significant effect has been found** suggesting either that dldp's impacts were not a **unique** advantage compared to other non-dldp municipalities, or that the successor to dldp, the "*Bashki te Forta programme*" effectively had levelled the playing field between municipalities in Albania with different support histories.

30 Braho, A. (2014), Thematic Evaluation of Fiscal Package Support, p. 13.

31 Ymeraj, S. (2014), Revenue Predictability and Sustainability of Local Governments in Albania, p. 31; Braho, A. (2014), "Thematic Evaluation of Fiscal Package Support," p. 27.

32 A fixed-effect regression model for the period 2015 – 2020 was applied. The model controlled for both time varying and time-invariant confounders. The model is described in annex 2.

33 The method combined propensity-score matching on the municipality level and difference-in-difference estimation to casually evaluate the withdrawal effect of dldp on OSR levels. The model is described in annex 2.

5.2 Impact on municipal solid waste management

For dldp, solid waste management was as one of several strategic entry points to advance decentralisation in Albania. It is important to view the programme's achievements or contributions in this area within that context: dldp was not conceived as a technical, solid waste intervention, nor did it finance large-scale infrastructure. Rather, its focus was on strengthening municipal governance, planning and service delivery capacities under decentralised responsibilities. Dldp played a key role in developing and piloting models and tools for partner municipalities. Over time, these locally piloted approaches and tools have gained traction beyond dldp partner municipalities, influencing national frameworks and municipal practice.[34] The Evaluation has tried to trace the impact of these models – focusing on the cost calculation/ tariff setting approach and the model of inter-LGU cooperation – on the waste management sector in Albania today.

Dldp's model of cost calculation and tariff-setting filled a critical gap in planning and costing of waste management; and influenced the national methodology adopted in 2019, **providing a standard framework for municipalities across Albania**. Initially, dldp's methodology/model was been taken up by other development actors, such as GIZ, which adapted and applied it to the LGUs they work with.[35] Eventually, in collaboration with GIZ, the manual on service costing and tariff systems was institutionalised through a ministerial order issued by the Ministry of Environment, enabling its use by municipalities beyond those originally involved.[36] The model was reflected in the new national methodology for cost calculation and tariff setting for municipal waste services, which was approved in 2019. This national methodology intended to give all municipalities the same basis for setting tariffs, and to improve the tariff system in order to cover the expenses from waste management.[37]

It has been difficult for the Evaluation to trace the financial impact of the model on cost recovery in the waste management sector; but evidence suggests that while tariffs have increased, full cost-recovery is far from attained (see Box 3). According to dldp's own capitalisation efforts, the Model of Cost and Tariff in Local Waste Management (and the development of the associated manual) has contributed to increase revenues by 1.6% in 2017 (in comparison to 2016).[38] However, despite strides taken to address cost calculation, cost recovery and tariff collection, significant challenges persist in financing municipal solid waste management. Given the shortage of financing resources at the local level, the current municipal tariff system is not sufficient for the financing of separate collection and sorting activities, nor is waste treatment costs included in most cases. [39] Many municipal councils are reluctant to approve higher tariffs due to it being a political sensitive topic, thereby discouraging increases. Consequently, local governments tend to focus more on improving collection coverage and billing systems to boost revenues, rather than adjusting tariffs to reflect the actual cost of service provision.[40]

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34 Schläppi, E. (2012), SCO-A portfolio analysis and development in the domain of "decentralisation and regional development," p. 14.

35 Hatcher, C. (2018), "Learning and Knowledge Sharing in dldp," p. 28.

36 Titka, M. (2018), "Survey on the Waste Management and Administrative Services – Synthesis Report."

37 European Topic Centre on Waste Materials in a Green Economy (2021), Municipal waste management, Albania country fact sheet.

38 Hatcher, C. (2018), "Learning and Knowledge Sharing in dldp," p. 29.

39 United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. (2018), *Environmental performance reviews*, pp. 39–40.

40 European Topic Centre on Waste Materials in a Green Economy (2021), "Municipal waste management, Albania country fact sheet."

Box 3 – Tracing dldp's impact on costing and tariff-setting

The Evaluation has tried to **trace the impact of dldp's model on cost and tariff setting on municipalities' level of cost-recovery in the waste management sector.** The analysis draws on dldp's waste management surveys (baseline: 2011, endline: 2018), and external data from the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and the European Environment Agency.

Solid waste management in Albania has traditionally been underfunded: local "cleaning" fees have been low, and collection of those fees inefficient, leaving municipalities to subsidise garbage services from general funds. Under Albanian law, municipalities can levy a waste service fee (tariff) on households and businesses, as the municipality is responsible for financing the service and cost recovery (tariff setting).[41]

However, prior to 2010, many rural communes had either a token fee or none at all. The dldp baseline (2011) confirms that tariffs were a key constraint to the revenue system in dldp supported municipalities and communes, making it difficult to cover costs of waste management services. Around 33% of municipalities and 13% of communes surveyed had established appropriate tariffs for households, i.e., at a level corresponding to the service unit cost.[42]

Albania's Third Environmental review (2018) highlighted that waste tariffs in Albania typically are very low, and the collection rate was around 50%. While this signals an improvement compared to dldp's baseline, the report highlights that fees only cover cleaning of cities (collection, transport and disposal), and not recovery of waste nor supervision or aftercare of disposal sites.[43] The European Environment Agency (2021) likewise highlights that service tariffs usually only cover 20-40 % of the expenses generated by waste collection and treatment. The remaining funds are taken from the general budget of the municipalities.[44]

A further contribution of dldp was its work in piloting and promoting models of inter-municipal cooperation, which now form the backbone of the current national strategy. Dldp engaged experts from the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne to assess the costs of different waste collection and transport methods, developing reference scenarios and options for inter-LGU waste management planning and implementation. The study documented an average cost reduction for LGUs of around 40% when applying cost-optimised model.[45] Based on this study, the programme introduced and tested the concept of inter-LGU waste zones – enabling multiple municipalities to coordinate planning and service delivery in a cost-effective manner. While these pilots were small, they laid groundwork for the concept of regional landfills and cost-sharing, with indications of uptake by other actors (e.g., EU/KfW).[46] Eventually, the concept of inter-municipal/regional waste zones was institutionalised in *National Strategy on Integrated Solid Waste Management (ISWM) 2020-2025,* adopted in May 2020, which delineated 10 waste management zones.[47] The waste management zones were based on the rationale that regionalisation will enable access to larger infrastructure financing necessary to ensure compliance with EU environmental standards, and benefit smaller municipalities in terms of economies of scale.

41 Infrastruktur & Umwelt; COWI; and FLAG (2018), Sector Study for Investment Demand for Integrated Solid Waste Management in Albania.

42 Karakaçi, V. *et al.* (2011), "Baseline survey - On local governance in Shkodra and Lezha (Albania) implemented by Decentralisation and Local Development Programme (dldp)," pp. 89–91.

43 United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. (2018), *Environmental performance reviews*.

44 European Topic Centre on Waste Materials in a Green Economy (2021), "Municipal waste management, Albania country fact sheet."

45 Chollet, Q. and Grange (2012), Optimisation model of waste collection and transport in Albania.

46 The Shkodra-Lezha landfill at Bushat is an example that started earlier (2010) and has been serving multiple municipalities.

47 In line with the EU's regionalisation approach, the Strategy suggests 10 waste management zones – building on earlier feasibility studies and pilot experiences (KfW/dldp).

Finally, dldp has had a tangible impact on the expansion of service delivery: concretely the programme supported partner municipalities to extend services to an additional 172,000 persons. This expansion of solid waste management services was especially seen in newly amalgamated administrative units after the TAR and helped close longstanding service gaps between urban and rural areas. However, while service coverage has improved, the current challenge lies in improving the quality and sustainability of waste management. Progress on waste separation, recycling, and the development of sanitary landfill infrastructure remains limited and requires larger-scale investments that go beyond the financial scope of individual municipalities.

5.3. Impact of the dldp/FAP on TAR

On the territorial administrative reform, the impact of dldp was evident both as an independent initiative and through its integration with the STAR project.

By introducing the concept of functionality early in the TAR reform process, particularly using Northern Albania as an example, dldp shaped the national dialogue on administrative restructuring. The final legal adoption of the 61-municipality structure - down from 373 LGUs - demonstrated the success of donor-supported advisory services and SDC's strategic engagement through dldp and STAR. The ET concurs with Helvetas documents that dldp's had multi-level impact on TAR - from initial framing through studies in Northern Albania to influencing decision-makers on legislation. These efforts culminated in key policy shifts: the Law on Territorial Administrative Reform (July 2014), the Decentralisation Strategy (July 2015), and the Law on Local Self-Government (December 2015) [48].

Dldp was widely perceived as a neutral actor and a provider of professional, evidence-based technical advice. This neutrality and expertise contributed significantly to its impact on the TAR reform through concrete showcases of functional areas and policy dialogue. The contribution of Swiss technical experts and SDC's openness to conducting analysis at an opportune time was instrumental for impact. A key point was also the transition from dldp as the main instrument, to the STAR project, which offered comprehensive support in a donor consortium to the Government on TAR conceptualisation, capacity building and implementation. The ability of donors, including SDC, to collaborate effectively in a politically polarised environment was enabling for engagement with government and trust in the advice.

An adaptive approach allowed the programme to seize the opportunity presented by the 2013 elections to shift focus from local-level to national reform enhanced the impact. The FAP's engagement in functional area planning in eight LGUs, combined with dldp's experience since 2006, laid the groundwork for national-level influence (see Box 4 for a more comprehensive overview). Bushati notes that the programme's deep understanding of political realities and its strong network of decision-makers facilitated the formation of strategic alliances.[49]

Policy dialogues and technical assistance - led by the STAR project - were crucial in enabling Albania to formulate, vet, and legislate the TAR. Interviews indicated that dldp's support for an opposition-led alternative to the FAP proposal was considered a smart and impactful move. This action reinforced Switzerland's image as a neutral donor, not aligned solely with the Socialist Party's reform agenda.[50] Dldp's base in Shkodra, a Democratic Party stronghold, further underscored this neutrality. At the time, the Socialist and Democratic parties proposed 100 and 30 municipalities, respectively. The final consensus of 61 municipalities reflected a compromise.

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48 Steimann, B. (2018), "Changing Policies Beyond Policy Dialogue: A documentation and qualitative analysis of dldp's policy engagement and impact," p. 5.

49 Bushati, B. *et al.* (February 2020), "Unlocking territorial potential - Functional areas, local development and inclusive policy-making in Albania," pp. 7–8.

50 It is also worth mentioning that SDC supported a civil society initiative which also led consultations with the public, illustrating SDC's broad approach to ensure different actors were involved in the reform process.

Box 4 - Tracing the impact of the Functional Area Programme

The ET drew on *process tracing* to establish the relationship between FAP and the TAR, findings of which are summarised in this Box.

In Phase 2 of dldp, there was a "slack" period, most notably in 2012 and 2013 in relation to decisions to be taken on options for TAR, legislation and implementation. This affected dldp, which could not continue to work meaningfully with local planning. Dldp therefore took the opportunity to develop the Functional Area Programme, which was an intermediary programme within dldp aimed to test and explore territorial administrative reform options and incentivise new municipalities.

The functional area research of FAP became an important facilitator for the TAR. The research identified functional areas in Northern Albania, which showcased how functionality could be the basic concept for establishing administrative boundaries of new LGU clusters.[51] Steimann notes that initially the reform was a "*highly ambitious, but poorly conceptualised political reform project*". [52] With the functional area research on the table, dldp contributed to the TAR, as the decision-makers were able to lean on a concrete approach to redefining administrative borders, founded on functionality, rather than simply enlarging local government units. Steimann's conclusions are backed by Bushati, who notes that "*by supporting the design of the TAR and its methodological preparation based on functional areas, and its methodological preparation based on functional areas, dldp had a crucial role in the development of the national TAR law and its emphasis on equitable territorial development*".[53]

Dldp also designed an instrument – the Functional Area Programme - which aimed to build tangible experience through strategic planning/prioritisation tied to a grant scheme. This appear to have been less successful, and the documentation on dldp does not seem to capitalise on the grant schemes after their implementation in (2014-2015). One explanatory factor could be that the funding from dldp was 1.5. Mill €, but FAP/dldp received proposals from the targeted municipalities for around 40 mill €. There was both a reported mismatch between the priorities of the municipalities, and what dldp decided to fund (based on citizens' preferences).[54] It is not possible to trace impact of the grant schemes in the available documentation, which could be due to the grants to having a facilitating effect or that the ET was unable to "dig deep".

51 The research methodology was developed at the University of Luzern.

52 Steimann, B. (2018), "Changing Policies Beyond Policy Dialogue: A documentation and qualitative analysis of dldp's policy engagement and impact."

53 Bushati, B. *et al.* (February 2020), "Unlocking territorial potential - Functional areas, local development and inclusive policy-making in Albania," p. p 5.

54 Zürcher, D. *et al.* (July 7, 2015), Decentralization and Local Development Programme (dldp), Albania - Review of Functional Area Programme (and projects), p. Annex 2.

6. Alignment and coherence

Main questions

- How well do the achieved outcomes align with local and national policy frameworks and priorities?
- To what extent have the supported interventions been compatible with interventions of other actors in the same geographic/thematic context?

Given the nature of dldp as a governance programme, alignment and coherence – with national policies, reform processes, and institutional structures – emerge as a critical dimension of its achievements in terms of outcomes, impact, and sustainability.

During the lifespan of dldp, Albania's EU candidacy was the dominant driver of governance reforms, and therefore also a key factor shaping the programme. In 2006 Albania signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU, which entered into force in 2009, formally enabling the country to apply for EU membership. In 2014 Albania was granted official EU candidate status. The international community - including Switzerland - were strong supporters of the processes and aligned their development programmes and engagement with the standards and requirements in the EU accession agenda.

Decentralisation and strengthening local governance, including on financial management, are central to the EU accession process – and dldp has been well-positioned to push for- and seize momentum around its implementation. Solid waste management in dldp provides a good example of this. By the mid-2000s, the Government of Albania had begun articulating the need for improved waste management, largely driven by its EU integration ambitions and the requirement to align with EU environmental standards. However, while policy-level interest was growing, the national focus remained largely on compliance with infrastructure-heavy EU directives - particularly large-scale waste processing and disposal facilities. At that time, there was limited national or donor attention to the "soft" dimensions of waste management, such as local planning, service delivery, and capacity development. [55] However, with municipalities' responsibility for collection, transportation, and treatment of waste reaffirmed in the 2011 Law on Integrated Waste Management (Law No. 10463/2011), and the introduction of EU technical and environmental standards, the gap between national compliance and local implementation capacities became increasingly apparent. Against this backdrop, when others began to look at local waste management issues, dldp was ready to provide localised expertise; and when the EU, GIZ and SECO – three of the key donors in the sector – launched their new waste management programmes in 2016, they all took into consideration waste management issues at local level.[56]

When political momentum for territorial administrative reform presented itself, SDC worked closely with the government and other donors to ensure both alignment and coherence. For SDC this culminated in the continuation of dldp, but more so by the joining forces with others in a technical assistance project, i.e. the STAR. The STAR programme was set up as a multi-phase and multi donor initiative working with the Ministry of State for Local Government in the office of the Prime Minister to support decentralization reforms and not least TAR implementation. STAR was led by the Government of Albania, implemented by UNDP and supported by Sweden, Italy, Switzerland, USAID the European Union joined later). In the

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55 Steimann, B. (2018), "Changing Policies Beyond Policy Dialogue: A documentation and qualitative analysis of dldp's policy engagement and impact," pp. 16–17.

56 *Ibid.*

first two phases STAR established the legal and administrative basis for TAR and later supported the functionality of the new municipal structures.

With regard to external coherence, the major development actors besides SDC, include the EU, OSCE and donors (USAID, ADA, Sida and the UNDP). Dldp's interventions particularly on PFM demonstrated coherence with other actors' interventions – such as USAID Public Local Governance Programme (PLGP). [57.] A division of labour was established, where dldp focused on public finance management and expenditure aspects, while PLGP concentrated on fiscal decentralisation and revenue generation. Dldp also worked complementarily with the Swiss-Austrian supported Regional Development Programme (RDP) and the Council of Europe's project[58] on strengthening local and regional government structures, ensuring coherent support to Albania's decentralisation processes.

SDC played a critical role on coordination in the role of co-chair in the sector working group on decentralisation (others EU, USAID, OSCE, UNDP).

The internal coherence throughout dldp was established between SDC and the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO). PFM approaches were consolidated and expanded in the SECO-supported *"Local Finance"* project[59] which built upon dldp's established tools and methodologies while addressing new dimensions of local financial management. SECO currently focuses on advanced financial engineering, revenue optimization, expenditure analysis, and tax collection transparency. Meanwhile the sequential programme to dldp, "Bashki të Forta" expands the scope to include performance monitoring and social-sensitive budgeting[60].

57 Inter Cooperation (2010), dldp Project Document phase 2, p. 7.
58 Inter Cooperation (2010), "dldp Project Document phase 2."
59 https://financat-lokale.al/en/home-3
60 https://www.helvetas.org/en/switzerland/what-we-do/how-we-work/our-projects/europe/albania/albania-bashki-te-forta

7. Sustainability

Main questions

- To what extent have the outcomes achieved been sustained 3-6 years after project completion?
- Are the approaches, plans and tools developed still utilised by partners?
- To what extent have project outcomes been scaled up at the systemic level?

In this chapter, the Evaluation assesses whether outcomes (and impacts) achieved have been sustained, whether approaches, plans and tools developed still are utilised by partners, and whether dldp's outcomes have been scaled up.

The programme's PFM contributions have been durable and scaled. The Law on Local Finances continues to govern all 61 municipalities in Albania, providing a robust framework for local financial management which incorporates dldp's tools and approaches to strategic planning and medium-term budgeting. The Ministry of Finance has maintained – and plans to upgrade - the Financial Planning Tool provided by dldp into a more advanced tool, indicating its continued relevance.

The financial management transformation initiated by dldp has proven institutionally sustainable across political cycles and administrative changes. Municipal budgeting processes continue to follow the strategic, participatory, and performance-oriented approaches developed by the programme. Local governments maintain fiscal discipline practices learned through dldp interventions, with municipalities such as Shkodra sustaining their debt-free status achieved through improved financial management practices.[61] The cross-departmental approach to budgeting, transforming it from a finance department exercise to a strategic management tool, has been maintained across partner municipalities.

However, sustainability challenges also persist, particularly regarding the retention of individual PFM capacities and the continued deepening of practices. The potential loss of experienced staff within local administrations, exacerbated by political cycles and administrative changes, poses ongoing risks to the sustainability of built capacities. While institutions possess the necessary frameworks and tools, ensuring their consistent and sophisticated application requires ongoing attention and support, particularly in advancing from basic compliance to sophisticated performance-based financial management.

While service coverage has improved in waste management, the current challenge – in line with the EU accession process - lies in improving the quality and sustainability of waste treatment. Progress on waste separation, recycling, and the development of sanitary landfill infrastructure remains limited, but also requires larger-scale investments that go beyond the financial scope of individual municipalities (and of dldp).

On dldp's cost/tariff-setting approach in waste management, which informed national methodology adopted in 2019, **a persistent limitation is the poor quality of data on waste, service coverage, and financial performance**. Weak data systems undermine efforts to plan, cost, and monitor waste services effectively, and constrain the ability to fully assess programme impact. EU-funded report (2023) highlights persistent challenges with waste management, including low capacities of municipalities in line with new waste management methodologies.[62] Bashki te Forta includes solid waste management under outcome 2 –

[61] SDC (2020), Swiss - Albanian Partnership in Support to Decentralization and Local Governance, p. 8.

[62] Agency for the Support to Local Self-Government (2023), "Municipalities in the Process of Integration of Albania in the European Union - Assessment Report 2022."

performing, transparent administration – solid waste management system is established at municipal level according to national standards, and municipalities are trained to monitor their performance.[63]

The TAR reform was legislated (Law 115/2014) and the outcome of the 2015 local elections confirmed the 61 new local government units. Although the political sustainability seemed to be a major stumbling block at a certain point, the reform was resilient to political changes in the elections in 2017. The institutional sustainability of dldp's impact on the TAR was enhanced by shift toward the multi-donor STAR project implemented by UNDP. As discussed in Chapter 6, STAR was led and embedded in the government and provided expertise and capacity building with the ownership squarely being with the government according to interviews with senior Government officials. The STAR project continued until 2024.

At the institutional level, dldp's sustainability strategy showed significant success in anchoring capacity development tools and methodologies within national institutions, though implementation challenges have limited their full utilisation. The programme developed comprehensive curricula for the Albanian School of Public Administration (ASPA). On the other hand, some stakeholders interviewed by the ET highlighted ASPA's limited capacity to consistently deliver these training programmes, creating gaps between the availability of high-quality training materials and their systematic deployment across Albania's local government system. Dldp's successor, Bashki te Forta, addresses issues related to ASPA by establishing a dedicated Training Academy for Local Government.

63 Helvetas (2018), Bashki te Forta: Project Document for Phase I, 2018-2022.

8. Conclusions & lessons learned

8.1. Conclusions

Dldp started as a "classic" SDC decentralisation and local development programme, working in a limited number of LGUs. Through a bottom-up approach, the objective was to enhance capacities to deliver administrative and public services, paired with participation of citizens and capacity development. Gradually, dldp's adaptive approach resulted in a shift towards a strategic level engagement, systemic change, and national policy integration. The Evaluation has found the following the main outcomes at the time of programme completion:

Outcome Area 1: Capacities of Local Government on Strategic Planning, Administration and Financial Management.

Dldp significantly enhanced the strategic planning capacity of 29 municipalities, resulting in the delivery of Strategic Development Plans and Medium-Term Budget Programmes. These were fully compliant with national legal frameworks (e.g., Law No. 9936). Dldp's Financial Planning Tool (enabled performance-oriented budgeting and evidence-based resource allocation. It introduced innovations like the COFOG classification at the municipal level, transforming budgeting from input-based to strategic, medium-term planning.

Outcome Area 2: Improved Public and Administrative Service Delivery

Dldp played a gap-filling and catalytic role on municipal solid waste management, a previously underdeveloped area. It developed costing/tariff-setting methodologies and promoted inter-LGU cooperation, leading to expanded waste collection coverage and higher tariff recovery (though full cost recovery remains a challenge). Notably, waste service coverage in supported municipalities reached 80% or more, with Shkodra municipality outperforming national averages. Dldp also improved administrative services via One-Stop Shops and digital services, which enhanced access, citizen satisfaction, and internal coordination - especially in the context of territorial administrative reform.

Outcome Area 3: Knowledge Development and Institutional Anchoring

Dldp functioned as a knowledge broker, consolidating practical experience into tools, curricula, and platforms. It institutionalised capacity development through partnerships (e.g., ASPA), delivering training and coaching to 450+ municipal staff and embedding learning in national curricula. Dldp's four knowledge packages - covering PFM, solid waste, e-governance, and fund access - generally enabled capacity creation, use, and retention at individual, institutional, and systemic levels.

Outcome Area 4: Policy and Legal Influence

From Phase 2 onwards, dldp played a critical role in informing national policy. It directly influenced the 2014 TAR through its FAP. Dldp's tools and methodologies were adopted in national strategies, such as the National Integrated Waste Management Strategy (2020–2035). It contributed to fiscal decentralisation and PFM legislation, notably the Law on Local Finances (2017), aligning municipal budgeting with national frameworks through active policy engagement.

Outcome Area 5: Citizen Participation and Accountability

While citizen participation was most visible in the early phases, dldp embedded it across its activities. It improved communication and consultation mechanisms and supported women's political engagement, resulting in increased candidacies and leadership roles. Although accountability mechanisms were less prominent, dldp laid a foundation for longer-term impact, with stronger social contracts and citizen-state engagement, particularly continued under its successor programme Bashki të Forta.

With regard to impact trajectories and current impact the Evaluation can confirm the contribution claims. It was found that:

In **PFM** the impact trajectory included the paradigm shift in municipal financial management through Medium-Term Budget Programmes and the Financial Planning Tool. These innovations linked strategic goals with budget planning and performance tracking. Dldp's involvement also informed the national Law on Local Finances (2017). The programme impact today includes that Financial Planning Tool was institutionalised and became the national standard across all 61 municipalities; dldp was influential in shaping the legal framework and budgeting practices. Municipalities demonstrate improved financial management, and among top PEFA scores.

The impact also includes ongoing training supported by national institutions using dldp-developed curricula.

In **municipal solid waste management,** the impact trajectory included that waste management would strengthen decentralised governance and service delivery generally, focusing on planning tools and governance rather than infrastructure funding. It introduced costing, tariff-setting, and inter-municipal cooperation models. The programme impact today includes the national adoption of dldp's cost/tariff methodology (2019). Service expansion (172,000 additional people, addressing urban-rural gaps). Dldp also piloted and documented efficiency improvements via regional waste zones (up to 40% cost savings), which forms the basis of the current national waste management strategy and master plan. Nevertheless, tariffs remain underfunded and there are low collection rates.

In **TAR,** the impact trajectory included that dldp introduced the concept of functional planning as the basis for territorial administrative reform boundaries. This approach, tested in Northern Albania influenced national reform efforts and the legal consolidation of municipalities. The programme impact today includes the impact seen on major reforms: Law on TAR (2014), Decentralisation Strategy (2015), Law on Local Self-Government (2015). SDC/Helvetas is widely trusted for technical expertise and political neutrality. The balanced influence helped broker compromises in municipal restructuring, which was then further strengthened through transition from dldp to STAR project with expanded donor support, as the major facilitator for impact.

From a sustainability perspective, dldp's deliberate anchoring of tools, curricula, and methodologies in national institutions (e.g. ASPA, MoFE) ensured that reforms outlasted the programme's operational period. Nevertheless, sustainability risks exist due to institutional turnover and limited training capacity, particularly within national training institutions. Sustaining the gains made requires continued support, institutional strengthening, and integration with successor programmes - as is common with the nature of institutional reform programmes.

The success and sustainability of dldp can largely be attributed to its strategic alignment and coordination with Albania's EU accession process and national reforms. As a governance programme, dldp played a key role in translating high-level EU standards into local-level solutions, particularly in solid waste management and PFM. Collaboration with other donors and programmes - such as STAR, PLGP, and internally with SECO - ensured external and internal coherence. SDC acted as a coordinating and neutral actor in a complex donor landscape.

8.2. Lessons Learned

Linking decentralisation to a highly visible, citizen-facing service is smart. SDC frequently connects decentralisation and local development programming in country programmes to specific service sectors. This makes the benefits of decentralisation more immediate and tangible for citizens.

Strategic flexibility is essential for institutional reform. The programme adjusted its objectives and methods in response to contextual developments, emerging policy windows, and reform momentum. Dldp functioned not merely as a project implementer but as a facilitator and knowledge broker - linking local experiences to national reform agendas and building coalitions for change.

Facilitation, not implementation, builds ownership. By positioning itself as a neutral facilitator and technical advisor, dldp built trust with both national and local actors. Its role in supporting policy dialogue rather than imposing predefined solutions enabled broader buy-in and sustainability.

Capacities built must be safeguarded against staff turnover. Municipal staff trained by dldp have contributed to improved local governance, but political cycles and staff turnover risk eroding these gains. A system-wide approach to professionalisation and retention in local administration is needed.

Sequencing matters: from pilot to policy. Dldp's progression from piloting tools in local governments to scaling them nationally through policy and law reform demonstrates the value of a gradual, evidence-based approach to systems change. Structured learning and documentation facilitated this transition.

Long-term engagement supports deep reform. The 13-year duration of dldp allowed the programme to respond to shifting dynamics, consolidate gains, and support reform processes from inception to institutionalisation. Such long-term commitment is crucial for complex governance reforms.

Policy influence is amplified by neutrality and credibility. Dldp's non-partisan stance and evidence-based facilitation enabled it to impact high-level reforms like TAR. Building trust across political divides is essential to influencing structural reforms.

Strategic partnerships sustain reform momentum. The programme's impact was extended through coherence with initiatives like STAR, Bashki te Forta, and SECO. Building coalitions and aligning with broader donor strategies enhanced both sustainability and scalability.

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Annex 1: Programme objectives from Phase 1-Phase 4

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Program Goal Partner municipalities and communes, in close cooperation with citizens and civil society organisations, successfully plan, implement and monitor a comprehensive and balanced process of decentralisation and local development.	**Goal:** Capacities of municipalities and communes in Shkodra and Lezha are strengthened to improve regional development in Northern Albania and decentralisation reform at national level.	**Overall project objective:** Inclusive quality service delivery to citizens (men and women) is improved through strengthened capacities of local governments in Northern Albania, anchored dldp products at the national level and by contributing to a conducive legal framework.	**Goal:** Inclusive quality service delivery to citizens (men and women) is maintained through strengthened capacities and internal cohesion of reconstituted local governments in Northern Albania, anchored dldp products at the national and international level and by contributing to a conducive legal framework.
Objective 1: Strategic planning A broadly supported strategy and/or plan for local development - which meets criteria of coherence, governance, equity, gender and minority rights and takes full advantage of decentralised rights and responsibilities - is formulated and agreed.	**Outcome 1:** Municipalities and Communes in Shkodra and Lezha Qark have improved their governance structures, capacities and selected local public services.	**Outcome 1:** Partner municipalities have consolidated their planning, financial and administrative management capacities for quality service delivery as a response to territorial administrative reform.	**Outcome 1**: Partner municipalities have consolidated their planning and financial management capacities for quality service delivery as a response to developed policies (standards).
Objective 2: LGU services and administration Action plans and projects - contributing to improve the performance of the local governments in line with the local development plan - are identified, formulated, agreed in the Annual Support Agreement, (co-) financed and implemented, including service improvements as well as capacity building measures.		**Outcome 2:** Functional mechanisms are in place, through which dldp key products (support packages, curricula, standards, etc.) are accessible, used & disseminated by national actors.	**Outcome 2:** Developed knowhow (packages) and conducive policies that are anchored in the system trigger systemic changes.
Objective 3: **LGU financial management**	**Outcome 2:**	**Outcome 3:**	**Outcome 3 (new):**

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
The management of local finances in partner LGUs has improved; including local tax collection, access to central and regional funds and participatory budgeting mechanisms ***Revised into*:** Capacities of local governments in partner LGUs have increased in key areas of local governance and decentralization and new skills are applied in daily work.	Good practices are shared at national level in cooperation with strengthened associations,3 thus impacting law and policymaking and their implementation at national level.	dldp and its key partners contribute to a more conducive national decentralization policy and legal frameworks by feeding in systemic and structured learning	dldp documented results (technical and managerial) contribute to a structured learning and successful project closure.
Objective 4: Citizens' participation Effective mechanisms for citizens' participation are developed, introduced and consolidated in the partner LGUs.			

Annex 2: Analytical Approach and Data sources

This annex provides further explanation to the approaches and data sources presented in Chapter 2. The central approach of the evaluation was contribution analysis process, which is depicted in figure A3.1 below.

Figure A3.13: Contribution analysis process

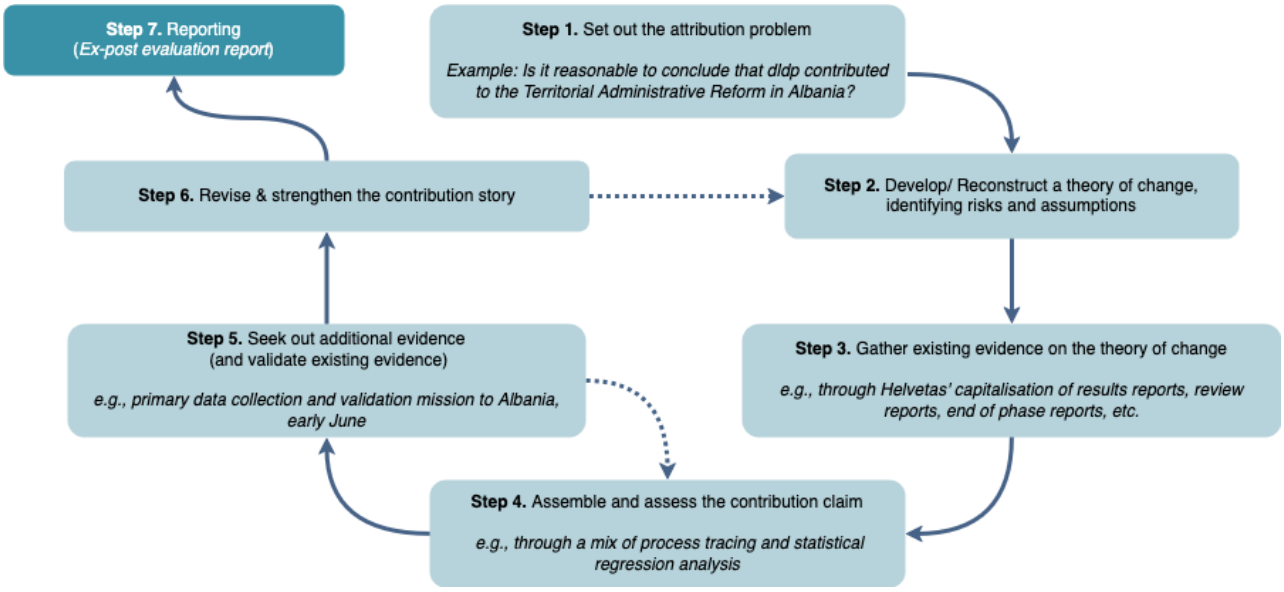


Figure source: ET compilation, based on and adapted from Apgar, M. et al. (2020), Contribution analysis for adaptive management.

When assessing complex governance and institutional reform processes, the **ET used process tracing to trace and validate** the causal pathways between dldp's interventions and observed outcomes and impacts. This analytical approach is a single case qualitative method that tests the hypothesised contribution stories developed as part of each case study. The credibility of the story is tested using different qualitative sources of evidence, developing a clear causal timeline is established, and testing rival hypotheses. This enables the evaluation to eliminate alternative causal stories explaining an outcome of interest, while simultaneously building evidence for the most plausible explanation[64].

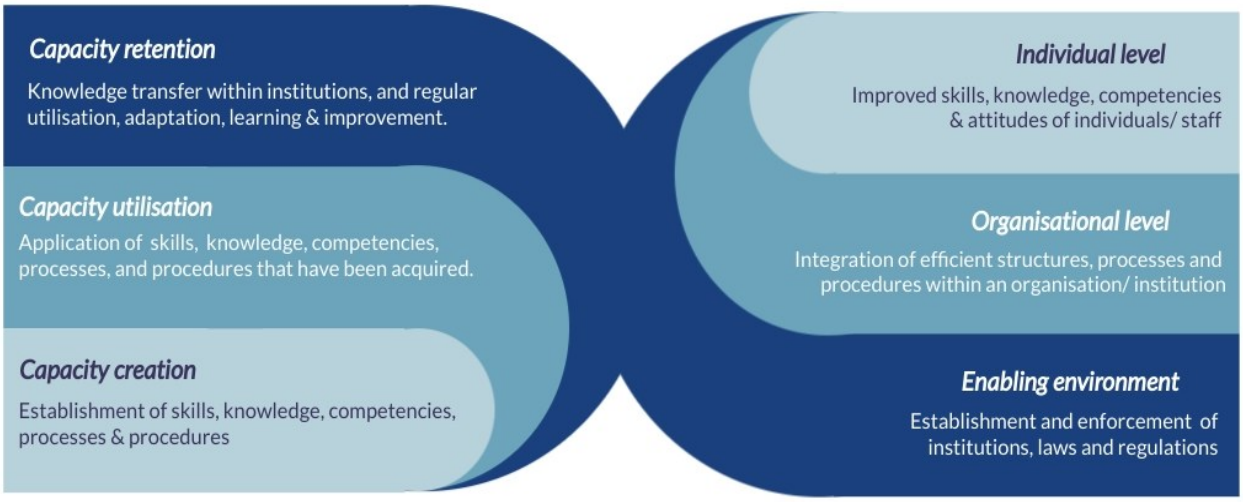
A particular benefit of using process tracing in the evaluation of dldp is its ability to handle cases where linear cause-effect attribution is difficult due to multiple actors, overlapping interventions, and dynamic contextual factors[65].

The main tool used by the ET to assess capacity development is the **capacity development assessment framework,** which is an analytical framework that takes into consideration various types and dimensions of capacity strengthening (Figure A-1) to capture the different levels at which results may have been achieved (i.e. *individual level, institutional level & enabling environment*) and evidence for the depth/sustainability of results (i.e. *whether capacities were created, utilised, and ultimately retained)*.

64 Ricks, J. I. and A. H. Liu (2018), Process-Tracing Research Designs.
65 *Ibid.*

The analytical framework looks not only at the 'hard' capacity needed at individual and institutional level, but also at the 'soft' capacity elements, such as change management skills and incentives, that are often overlooked but can be essential to ensuring that hard capacity will be utilised and retained.

Figure A-1 Capacity strengthening model



When conducting both contribution analysis, process tracing, and evaluating capacity development a series of **qualitative sources** formed the foundation of the evaluation. The evaluation team conducted **online and field interviews in Albania** with senior government representatives at national and municipal levels, SDC and Helvetas staff and partner municipality officials (Annex 2). These interviews were complemented by a **comprehensive document review** of dldp's annual reports, end-of-phase reports, mid-term reviews, capitalisation outputs, government policy documents, and external evaluations from similar programmes (bibliography). This multi-source approach enabled the evaluation team to **triangulate** claims through external sources, cross-reference findings across different stakeholder perspectives, and address potential recollection bias inherent in ex-post evaluations conducted several years after programme completion.

Due to the availability of temporal OSR[66] data on the municipality level, the ET applied a **regression analysis & difference-in-difference design** to statistically investigate the effect of dldp in the area of PFM covering all municipalities in Albania**.** This method utilises quantitative data and statistical modelling to create a counterfactual situation allowing the evaluation to test the causal effect of dldp while controlling for rival explanations. The analysis employed a two-step strategy:

1. Firstly, utilising the repeated observations of municipalities over time, a **panel regression model with year fixed effects** was employed to estimate the effect of dldp on OSR performance during the intervention period (2015-2019). The year fixed effects model control for common temporal shocks and trends that affect all municipalities in Albania equally in each year, such as national economic conditions, policy changes, or external economic shocks[67]. Moreover, the statistical model also included the change in population as a time-varying control to account for demographic changes within municipalities, along with time-invariant municipality characteristics, in the form of mean evaluation, coastline proximity, geographic size of a municipality, road density within a municipality, and number of companies.

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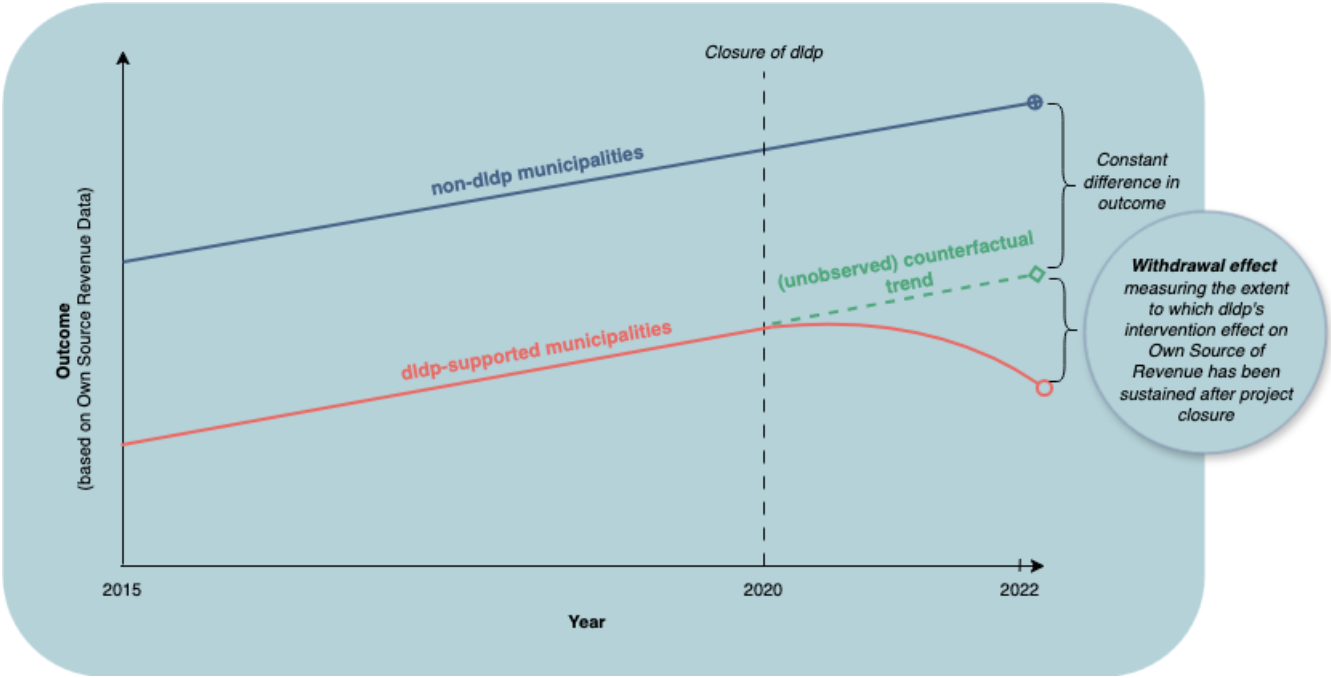
66 OSR data comes from the organisation Co-Plan who have collected data on local public finances, using financial data from the Albanian Ministry of Finance, which it has used to calculate OSR per capita for each municipality in Albania for the period 2015 to 2022. Data can be found in the following report: Co-Plan (2022), Status Report - Local Public Finances, pp. 110–111.

67 Cunningham, S. (2021), *Causal inference*, pp. 386–388.

2. Second, **a difference-in-differences regression model with propensity score matching** was applied to investigate the sustainability of dldp's results after withdrawal (programme closure) by comparing the trajectory of OSR between dldp and non-dldp municipalities before and after programme withdrawal in the period 2015 to 2022[68] (see figure A3.2 for an illustration). As a sensitivity test and in order to have a similar control group, propensity score matching was employed using baseline municipality characteristics from 2015, and thereby creating a matched-did analysis. The used characteristics is elevation, coastline proximity, geographic size, road density, population size, and OSR levels.

The approach enabled the evaluation to assess both the overall intervention effect and whether improvements were sustained after the closure of dldp. However, it is important to note that all 61 municipalities since 2020 are part of the Bashki Te Forta programme, thus the estimator will capture how former dldp municipalities perform relative to non-dldp municipalities in a context where both groups receive Bashki Te Forta support.

Figure 4A3.2: Difference-in-difference model for measuring withdrawal effects after dldp's closure



A3.1 Data collection

Data collection for the evaluation involved a mix of primary and secondary methods.

Primary data were gathered through face-to-face and online semi-structured key informant interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders. These included former implementers (Helvetas), SDC staff, central and local government representatives, civil society, and beneficiaries of dldp. The interviews/focus groups were intended to capture in-depth insights, experiences, and perceptions related to dldp's implementation, outcomes and ex-post impact.

[68] A similar method is applied in Schram, A. *et al.* (December 2015), The role of trade and investment liberalization in the sugar-sweetened carbonated beverages market ; Craig, P. *et al.* (March 2018), Making the most of natural experiments ; Katikireddi, S. V. *et al.* (July 2018), Effects of restrictions to Income Support on health of lone mothers in the UK.

Secondary data collection was conducted through a comprehensive desk review of existing reports, project documentation, policy papers and reviews/evaluations. In addition, the ET engaged in online information gathering to compile publicly available data and contextual information related to dldp and the broader decentralisation process in Albania.

To a large degree, the desk review and online information gathering was undertaken *prior to* the field visit (and the interviews/focus groups), with a view to validating emerging "contribution stories"/ ToC causal pathways that were established based on secondary documentation.

A3.2 Data sources and availability

SDC documentation: Official SDC documents constituted key documents used in the desk review. These included credit proposals, mid-term reviews, baseline surveys, half-yearly reports, and end of phase reports for each phase of dldp that provided valuable insights into how the programme has progressed, its impact, and lessons learned. A caveat with using this collection of documents as a prime data source was its tendency to focus on higher-level results and be biased towards conforming programme achievements. Moreover, notable document gaps existed at this point, especially in the latter phases.

Helvetas documentation: As part of its commitment to learning and accountability, Helvetas undertook a structured capitalisation of results process toward the end of the dldp programme (2020). This process involved the systematic documentation and reflection on key outcomes, innovations, challenges, and lessons learned across the program's various intervention areas. Drawing on internal monitoring data, stakeholder consultations, and thematic reviews, the capitalisation exercise aimed to document dldp's experience and contribute to institutional learning. The outputs of this process, including thematic briefs and synthesis reports, formed a key evidence base for this ex-post evaluation. It should be noted that this document collection inhibits the same problems as the SDC documents.

Stakeholder interviews: A key source for cross-validating claims made in both SDC and Helvetas documents was stakeholder interviews. The ET focused on interviewing diverse stakeholders across thematic areas with varying degrees of connection to dldp, minimizing bias and ensuring independent observations. Those to be interviewed were likely to have a recollection bias given the time elapsed since implementation. The ET addressed these limitations by source criticism and triangulating perspectives across different stakeholder groups, with special attention to individuals who maintained institutional roles throughout and after the program period.

Government, international and external documents: The evaluation cross-validated findings using three complementary documentation sources. Albanian government documents (laws, regulations, mid-term reviews) highlighted if dldp had contributed to LGU reform and to what degree. Utilising the involvement of other international donors related to dldp, the ET collected documents from these actors relating to the thematic areas being investigated. Lastly, external assessments from think tanks and similar sources were used to get an independent assessment on the achievements of dldp. Together, these sources enabled verification of key results and provided valuable contextual information.

Quantitative data: Official financial information on LGUs' financial performance came from the Albanian Government Financial Information System (Treasury System, SIFQ), which has been processed and made public by an SDC supported report[69]. This data source covered the period from 2015-2022, thereby only allowing to investigate LFU PFM performance after the TAR. Data on regional GDP per capita performance was provided by the EU ARDECO data programme[70], that was assessed to have a high degree of validity due to the EU accession program.

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69 Co-Plan (2020), Status Report - Local Public Finances.

70 EC and JRC / REGIO (2025), Nominal GDP per capita.

Annex 3: Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation Questions/Sub-questions		OECD DAC Criteria	Data collection		Analytical methods	Judgement criteria
			Data Source(s)	Method(s) of collection (menu)		
EQ 1	**What were the main achievements (outcomes) at the time of project completion?**					
	What were the main outcomes achieved at the time of project completion? *In how many LGUs are performance-based planning and budgeting systems functioning? Can these be traced to dldp?* *Can it be validated that solid waste management services were extended to rural and previously unserved areas. What is the current evidence?* (Persons served, Tariff collection rates, service quality.) *Solid waste: Are the pilot models in Shkodra, Koplik, and Pukë referenced as national cases? What is the tangible evidence?* *Is the rehabilitated dumpsite and formalized recycling activities (e.g., Roma community in Lezha) operational and how?*	Effectiveness	• End-of-project evaluation • EPROR • Annual reports • SDC staff at Embassy in Tirana. • Dldp/Helvetas staff in Tirana/ HQ • National/local stakeholders	• Document review • Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)	• Content analysis of key documents • ToC reconstruction	Actual development vs. ToC
1.2	What were the main internal and external factors contributing / hindering achievement of the project objectives?	Effectiveness	• End-of-project evaluation • EPROR • Annual reports • SDC staff at	• Document review • Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)	• Contribution analysis • ToC reconstruction	Actual development vs. ToC

Evaluation Questions/Sub-questions		OECD DAC Criteria	Data collection		Analytical methods	Judgement criteria
			Data Source(s)	Method(s) of collection (menu)		
			Embassy in Tirana. • Dldp/Helvetas staff in Tirana/ HQ			
1.3	In case any project outcomes were not achieved at the time of completion, have these outcomes been achieved ex-post?	Effectiveness	• End-of-project evaluation • External data sources	• Document review • Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)	• Contribution analysis	Actual development vs. ToC
1.4	Have any unintended results emerged due to the project support?	Effectiveness	• End-of-project evaluation • EPROR • Annual reports • National/local stakeholders	• Document review • Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)	• Contribution analysis	Actual development vs. ToC
EQ 2	**To what extent are the project outcomes still relevant and aligned with similar/related interventions?**					
2.1	How well do the achieved outcomes align with local level priorities (i.e. official priorities) and interventions? *Did the development of General Local Plans (GLPs) linked with Mid-Term Budget Programmes (MTBPs) establish impact, and are they sustainable?*	Coherence, Relevance	• Sub-national / local priorities, policies & frameworks	• Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with national/subnational stakeholders	• Content analysis of documents • Thematic patterns analysis of KIIs/FGDs	Extent to which local level outcomes have been institutionalised
2.2	How well do the achieved outcomes align with national policy frameworks and priorities?	Coherence, Relevance	• National priorities, policies & frameworks	• Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with national/ subnational		Extent to which national policy frameworks and

Evaluation Questions/Sub-questions		OECD DAC Criteria	Data collection		Analytical methods	Judgement criteria
			Data Source(s)	Method(s) of collection (menu)		
	Did the Functional Areas Study (FAS) influence the 2015 Territorial and Administrative Reform? And how?			stakeholders		priorities reflect project outcomes
2.3	To what extent have the supported interventions been compatible with interventions of other actors in the same geographic/thematic context? *What are the distinguishable features of dldp (attribution)? How and where are these visible?*	Coherence	• Primary and secondary documents • SDC staff at Embassy in Tirana. • Dldp/Helvetas staff in Tirana/ HQ • Other development partners (e.g., GIZ, CDI, AFD, Council of Europe, UNDP, USAID) • Open-source data	• Document review • Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) • Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). • Online information gathering.	• Content analysis of documents • Thematic patterns analysis of KIIs/FGDs • Process tracing • Quasi-experimental methods	Extent to which other interventions have been identified and linked to the SDC project (coordination, complementarity, non-duplication and continuation)
EQ 3	**To what extent have the outcomes achieved been sustained, scaled-up or replicated 3-6 years after project completion?**					
3.1	Are the achieved project outcomes still present 3-6 years after conclusion of the project? If not, why not?	Sustainability	• Primary and secondary documents • SDC staff at Embassy in Tirana; • Dldp/Helvetas staff in Tirana/ HQ • National and local level officials (e.g., Mayors in supported	• Document review • Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) • Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). • Online information gathering.	• Content analysis of documents • Thematic patterns analysis of KIIs/FGDs • Contribution analysis • Process tracing • Quasi-experimental methods	• Development or maintenance of results in outcome areas since project completion
3.2	Are the approaches, plans and tools developed still utilised by project partners and beneficiaries and if so, what factors enable or	Sustainability				Level of uptake of approaches and tools across formal institutions (laws,

Evaluation Questions/Sub-questions		OECD DAC Criteria	Data collection		Analytical methods	Judgement criteria
			Data Source(s)	Method(s) of collection (menu)		
	hinder their continuous application? *Can the capacity strengthening be traced at individual, organisational and enabling environment levels through the application of validated curricula on: waste management; cost and tariff calculation; performance-based planning, (integrated into ASPA's (Albanian School of Public Administration) regular training offer)?* (focus on 2016-2028/2020)		municipalities, local council members, etc) • Open-source data			policies, regulations) and informal institutions (social norms, customs, behaviour, capacities)
3.3	To what extent have project outcomes been scaled up at the systemic level?	Sustainability				Examples of scaling outside intervention area (e.g. from local to national level)
3.4	What strategies or factors have facilitated or hindered the scaling process?	Sustainability				Level of importance of internal and external factors
EQ 4	**How has the project contributed to strengthening of capacities and to what extent have these been sustained?**					
4.1	Which capacities have been strengthened (individual, organisational level, enabling environment)?	Effectiveness	• End-of-project evaluation • EPROR • Annual reports	• Document review • Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)	• Contribution analysis • Process tracing	• Individual skills development • Enhanced delivery of outputs (e.g.

Evaluation Questions/Sub-questions		OECD DAC Criteria	Data collection		Analytical methods	Judgement criteria
			Data Source(s)	Method(s) of collection (menu)		
						service delivery) • Policy and legal framework
4.2	Do actors continue providing training to beneficiaries, and if so, how and which actors? *Does APSA recognise the impact of dldp? What is the tangible evidence?*	Sustainability	• Primary and secondary documents • SDC staff at Embassy in Tirana. • Institutional partners – e.g., Albania School of Public Administration (ASPA) • Open-source data	• Document review • Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) • Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). • Online information gathering. • Outcome harvesting	• Content analysis of documents • Thematic patterns analysis of KIIs/FGDs • Process tracing • Quasi-experimental methods	• Invitations for training • Training programmes
4.3	What aspects, if any, of the training approach have sustained incentives and facilitated ongoing capacity building?	Sustainability				Extent to which some elements of the training show more traction than others
4.4	How have linkages (individual-organisational-enabling environment) evolved and how has the systemic level been influenced through these linkages?	Sustainability				Systemic changes due to capacity building
EQ 5	**Which impacts have been achieved after project conclusion?**					
5.1	To what extent have the expected impacts from the project support materialised in the period after project completion?	Impact	• Primary and secondary documents • SDC staff, Embassy staff, partners, and external thematic experts			Trends/development (expected) impact indicators

Evaluation Questions/Sub-questions		OECD DAC Criteria	Data collection		Analytical methods	Judgement criteria
			Data Source(s)	Method(s) of collection (menu)		
			• Open-source data			
5.2	What has been the project's contribution to achievement of these impacts?	Impact	• Primary and secondary documents • SDC staff at Embassy in Tirana. • Dldp/Helvetas staff in Tirana/ HQ • Other development partners (e.g., GIZ, CDI, AFD, Council of Europe, UNDP, USAID) • National/ Local stakeholders • Open-source data	• Document review • Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) • Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). • Online information gathering.	• Contribution analysis • Process tracing	The extent to which the project outcomes have been important for impacts
5.3	Has SDC's support served as a catalyst for further support / funding? If yes, how?	Impact	• Primary and secondary documents • SDC staff at Embassy in Tirana. • Other development partners (e.g., GIZ, CDI, AFD, Council of Europe, UNDP, USAID)	• Document review • Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) • Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).		Level of continuation/uptake by other development partners/government
5.4	Have any unintended positive or negative impacts emerged after project completion as a	Impact	• Primary and secondary documents	• Document review • Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)	• ToC reconstruction • Contribution analysis	Trends/development in impact indicators, that

Evaluation Questions/Sub-questions		OECD DAC Criteria	Data collection		Analytical methods	Judgement criteria
			Data Source(s)	Method(s) of collection (menu)		
	consequence of the project?		• SDC staff, Embassy staff, partners, and external thematic experts Open-source data	• Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Online information gathering.	• Process tracing	could be linked to the project support
EQ 6	**What were the potentials for replicability in the same geographical context or elsewhere?**					
6.1	Which specific elements or approaches are most feasible for wider replication and where? *Did the Functional Areas Study (FAS) influence the 2015 Territorial and Administrative Reform? And how?*	Lessons learned	• Primary and secondary documents • SDC staff, Embassy staff and partners • Open-source data • Research and other external data sources	• Document review • Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) • Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). • Online information gathering.	• Content analysis of documents • Thematic patterns analysis of KIIs/FGDs • Process tracing Quasi-experimental methods	Learning/ Knowledge sharing
6.2	What barriers for wider replication have been identified?	Lessons learned				
6.3	Were there any missed opportunities that could inform future interventions?	Lessons learned				
6.4	Did the project incorporate adaptive learning during implementation?	Lessons learned	• Primary and secondary documents • SDC staff, Embassy staff, partners, and external thematic experts		• ToC reconstruction	Level of adjustments in implementation approaches based on contextual changes

Annex 4: In-depth interviews (internal only)

Sampling strategy: The evaluation applied a mix of key stakeholder sampling and subsequently snowball sampling in order to cover different aspects of the programme.

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