CHANGING POLICIES BEYOND POLICY DIALOGUE

A documentation and qualitative analysis of dldp's policy engagement and impact

Zurich, January 2018

Bernd Steimann
Development Policy Coordinator, HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation

HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation | ALBANIA

dldp decentralisation and local development programme

Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC

CONTENT

Acknowledgements
The author would like to thank the whole dldp team in Albania for their excellent support before and during the research mission and for their great hospitality in Tirana. In addition, many thanks to all focus group participants and individual respondents for their availability, openness and patience. Faleminderit!

1. BACKGROUND AND MISSION OBJECTIVES

Since the national elections in 2013, which resulted in a very solid mandate for the new national government, Albania has undergone a series of fundamental political reforms transforming the form and function of local governments. Based on a Territorial and Administrative Reform which led to a fundamental reorganisation of municipalities, the national government then continued to release one reform programme after another, including a Decentralisation Strategy, a new Law on Local Self-Government, a new Law on Local Finances, as well as a number of sectorial reforms. Driven by a very strong political momentum and encouraged by international partners, the Albanian government realised these reforms at an impressive pace.

For local governments, this came both as an opportunity as well as a threat. On the one hand, many reforms had been overdue, the need for reorganisation more than obvious. On the other hand, the speed of reforms and the national government's determination came as a huge challenge, as municipalities were neither used nor regularly invited to voice their concerns and actively influence relevant policies and laws so far.

The SDC-funded Decentralisation and Local Development Programme (dldp) had been working with municipalities in the North of Albania for many years already when the local governance reform cascade got kicked off. Hence, the beginning reforms presented a unique opportunity for addressing some fundamental issues and concerns and for formulating meaningful laws and regulations along the needs and expectations of municipalities. At the same time, it meant a considerable responsibility for the programme to ensure that local stakeholders can make themselves heard and have a real say in these reforms.

Starting from 2013, the programme thus increasingly engaged in policy dialogue and advocacy at national level, advocating for locally owned and tested solutions and actively trying to link local and national debates. Since then, the programme has gathered considerable experience in policy influencing and has achieved impressive results. To date, however, dldp's policy engagement has neither been documented nor analysed in much detail.

This report's **objective** is therefore to

a) document dldp's policy engagement in selected thematic areas; and
b) analyse the programme's impact on selected policies and policy making processes.

For the sake of clarity and in view of the limited resources, the report focuses on three policy clusters:

- **Cluster A:** Territorial and Administrative Reform, Decentralisation Strategy, Law on Local Self-Government
- **Cluster B:** Law on Local Finances
- **Cluster C:** Waste Management

All three clusters were already documented in the form of case studies, yet not in a uniform manner and with a different level of detail in terms of advocacy approaches and impact. In a first step, this existing documentation has been analysed in order to identify missing information in terms of advocacy. In a second step, a five-days mission to Tirana in early November 2017 helped to collect the missing information through focus group discussions and individual interviews with involved actors, including programme staff, partners and allies (e.g. technical experts, municipalities, donor agencies), and respective target groups (e.g. politicians, representatives of ministries and departments; see annex for details).

2. ANALYTICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

In order to assess dldp's policy work and its impact on policies and policy making processes in Albania, the research for this report was split into three steps. The **first step** was to 'reconstruct' and document the respective policy processes and the programme's related activities *ex post*. What were the different steps and stages of the policy making process, what happened when, who was involved, who was partnering with whom, and how? In order to reconstruct as much information as possible, three focus group sessions were held with respective implementation partners, counterparts from ministries, thematic consultants, and other stakeholders. These joint sessions helped to reconstruct specific dates and activities and to double-check certain information. The respective policy processes were visualised during the focus group discussions, which allowed to highlight knowledge gaps as well as interlinkages between certain actors and processes. Some of the information obtained in these focus group sessions were then cross-checked in individual interviews with additional stakeholders.

The **second step** was to analyse and assess dldp's chosen strategies, approaches and methods for policy influencing, and to identify specific strengths and weaknesses. This was done in a structured manner by referring to the HELVETAS Advocacy Concept and the respective Advocacy Checklist. Guiding analytical questions were as follows:

- **Problem statement and proposed solution:** Does the programme have a clear understanding of the policy problem it wants to address, and can it offer a meaningful, practical, understandable solution?
- **Understanding of the external environment:** Does the programme have a solid understanding of the political-institutional context in which it operates? Is it aware of the main policies, laws, and rules relevant for the issue it advocates for? Does it know relevant decision-makers, and how they relate to each other?
- **Credibility / institutional standing:** Is the programme a credible advocate for the issue, and why? Does it have a solid institutional standing vis-à-vis its main target group(s)?
- **Identification of and outreach to target group(s):** Are the main target group(s) clearly identified, and does the programme have a meaningful strategy for reaching out to them?
- **Partner and alliances, roles and responsibilities:** Does the programme have strong, credible and legitimate partners for advocating on the issue? How are roles and responsibilities between partners distributed?
- **Identification and handling of opposition / framing of policy messages:** How does the programme deal with opposition and resistance? Is there a clear understanding of the opposition and its main arguments, and does the programme have a clear idea of how to handle it?
- **Methods applied and tone of voice:** Are the applied advocacy methods and the chosen tone of voice adequate in view of the issue, the political context and the programme's target group(s)?
- **Spaces explored:** Which spaces for dialogue does the programme use, and does it use them in an adequate, effective manner?
- **Use of evidence:** How does the programme generate and use evidence for policy dialogue? Is the evidence adequate; is it presented in a comprehensive way?
- **Theory of Change:** Does the programme have a clear vision of how the envisaged change should happen? Is there a strategic sequencing of incremental steps leading towards the ultimate objective?
- **M&E for advocacy:** Does the programme regularly review and readjust its theory of change and the approaches and methods applied? Is it able to flexibly react to changing circumstances?
- **Identification and management of advocacy-related risks:** Has the programme identified any advocacy-specific risks, and how does it deal with them?

Respective information was collected through focus group discussions as well as through individual interviews. For the sake of brevity, the following chapters will not discuss each and every of these aspects in detail for all three policy processes, but will highlight some of them.

The third step was to **assess dldp's policy impact** on specific policies, laws and regulations from a qualitative point of view. This was done through reference to the 5-step model of policy processes as proposed by the HELVETAS Advocacy Concept:

- **Shift in definition:** Relevant stakeholders – including those directly affected by an issue, the potential target audience and other stakeholders – have a better understanding of the issue (e.g. increased awareness at municipal level regarding shortcomings in communal service delivery)
- **Shift in behaviour:** The broad public, strategic partners, allies and primary stakeholders are able to speak more openly about the issue addressed (e.g. public debates and media coverage on challenges in communal service delivery)
- **Shift in engagement:** Concrete steps are taken to address the issue (e.g. the national parliament establishes a working group to start a legislative process)
- **Shift in policy:** Changes in the legal framework (e.g. the national parliament approves a new law on communal service delivery)
- **Shift in practice:** Concrete improvements for the primary stakeholders (e.g. enforcement of law through legal actions).

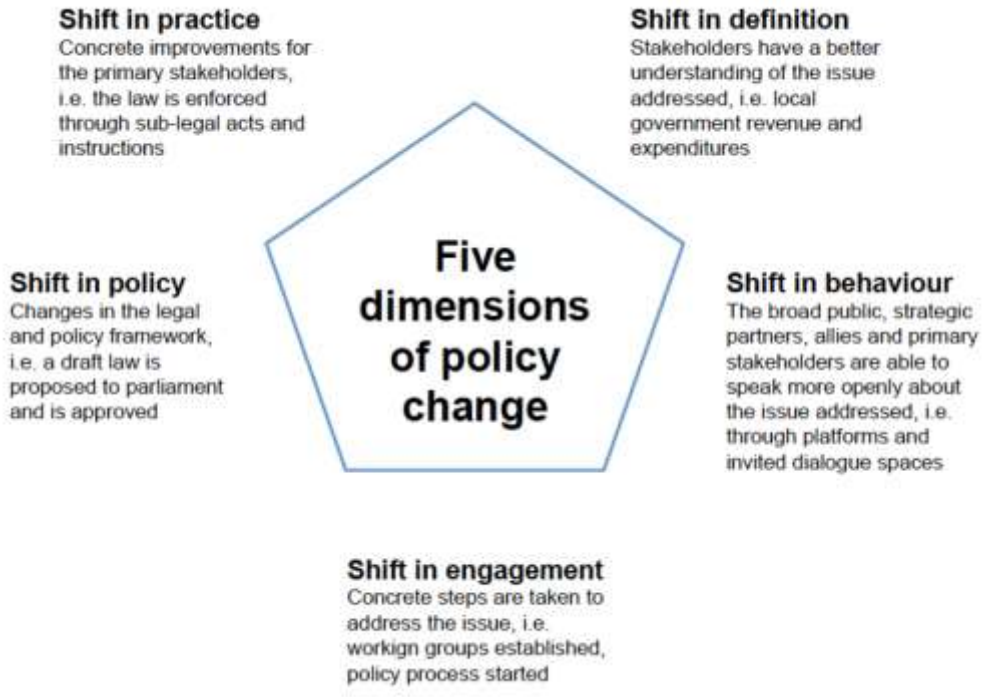

Figure 1: The five dimensions of policy change (HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, 2015; from Karakaçi and Byrne 2016)

Information regarding these five shifts was collected through focus group discussions as well as through individual interviews. In order to analyse dldp's specific contribution to and impact on the policy making process, the author tried to identify specific 'key moments' – i.e. dldp interventions that succeeded to 'make a difference' by generating or adding momentum to the way certain policies were debated, drafted, or implemented. This can happen in many ways: building external pressure, contributing highly relevant evidence, bringing in additional partners, or negotiating an agreement between different stakeholders – to name just a few. The three following sections show how dldp succeeded to do so several times.

3. CLUSTER A: DECENTRALISATION

This first cluster looks at three policy processes that are closely intertwined: The Territorial and Administrative Reform (TAR), the Decentralisation Strategy and the Law on Local Self-Governance ('Organic Law'). The TAR, initiated and realised by the Socialist Party-led coalition after its sweeping election victory in 2013, prepared the ground for subsequent legal reforms pertaining to local governance, including the Law on Local Finances (compare section 4). dldp fully embarked on this policy process in late 2013 when it began to promote its Functional Area approach to relevant decision makers at national level. In a nutshell, the programme's advocacy message can be summarised as follows: "The Territorial and Administrative Reform needs to be designed according to functional area criteria."

3.1 REFORM PROCESS AND THE ROLE OF DLDP

The table below outlines the major steps of the Territorial and Administrative Reform (TAR) process since 2013 and highlights dldp's role in this process. The major policy shifts identified in the last column are described in more detail in section 3.2.

Date	Policy Process	dldp: Activities, Role	Policy Shift
Jun 2013	The Socialist Party (SP) wins the national elections and a strong majority in the National Assembly. It declares the TAR a top priority to be completed before the local elections in mid-2015. There are no clear ideas, however, as to how the TAR shall look like.		
	The donor community signals strong support for the government's reform plans.		
Q4 2013		dldp starts its Functional Area Study (FA study) in dldp municipalities of in the North of Albania, with the support of national and international experts. As the government's plans regarding the TAR become more concrete, dldp decides to adapt the focus of the study to the needs of the upcoming reform.	**Definition** With the FA study, dldp adopts and tests a methodology, including a broad set of criteria for urban-rural development in agglomerated LGUs
	The National Government establishes a TAR Working Group	dldp is not (yet) part of the Working Group, but perceives its work as rather mechanic, top-down and devoid of real content	
Dec 2013	The Working Group learns about the FA study and shows vivid interest to learn more; the Minister of State for Local Issues asks dldp to publish first results to inspire the TAR process	dldp refuses to publish preliminary study results.	Working Group flags interest in the FA study
Feb 2014		dldp publishes the final results of its FA study, on the occasion of a study tour to Switzerland with members of parliament, mayors, and other experts.	**Behaviour** Key actors build ownership for the FA concept

		dldp provides the Working Group with the necessary information so that it can use the FA methodology for the TAR; later on, it supports a first round of local consultations in dldp municipalities	
	The National Parliament establishes an ad-hoc commission for the TAR. After initial cooperation, the opposition party pulls out and declares to boycott the whole reform.		
Apr 2014	(Partly) Based on the FA approach, the Working Group presents five different options for future administrative boundaries ('scenarios') to the parliamentary ad-hoc commission, which selects two scenarios for further discussion. A series of consultations with various stakeholders begins.		**Engagement** The WG applies the FA concept (partly) to develop concrete proposals.
	STAR (UNDP) supports the government with a country-wide TAR consultation.		
Jun 2014	Parliamentary hearings	dldp presents the FA study to both the ruling and the opposition party.	
Jul 2014	The parliamentary commission finally decides to reduce the number of municipalities to 61 and proposes the respective Law to the National Assembly.		
31/7/2014	The National Assembly approves the Law on the Territorial and Administrative Reform		**Policy** The approved law reflects the FA concept to a significant degree.
Q3 2014	The political opposition declares to appeal against the law before the Constitutional Court – eventually without success		
Q1/2 2016	Revision of the existing Law on Local Self-Governance; revision of the Election Code		
June 2015	Local elections; the Law on the Territorial and Administrative Reform gets formally enacted.		

3.2 DLDP'S POLICY IMPACT

dldp's impact on the Territorial and Administrative Reform (TAR) is probably close to the maximum of what civil society actors can wish for in terms of advocacy and policy influencing. As it is, dldp's Functional Area approach came as an early, very fundamental and desperately needed input into a highly ambitious, but poorly conceptualised political reform project. Thus, dldp managed to frame the TAR discussion at a very early, decisive stage of the reform process – thus having considerable influence on any subsequent discussions.

1) Shift in definition (framing of issues)

Through its Functional Area study in the North of Albania, dldp adopts and tests a conceptual approach and methodology for reorganising municipal services and communal space, including a broad set of criteria for ~~rural~~ development and planning. The study allows local stakeholders to develop a new way of addressing local governance issues. This helps them to broaden their perspective on

	regional and municipal planning and cooperation, and allows to de-politicise the debate through discussion of various alternative solutions based on a set of objective criteria. dldp's local and regional networking and dialogue around the FA study helps to build a joint understanding of issues and to agree on a joint position towards the national government.
2) Shift in behaviour (behaviour of decision makers)	National stakeholders in charge of the TAR flag early interest in dldp's work and the results of the FA study. They even urge dldp to publish preliminary study results so that they can be taken into consideration for the national reform process. However, the programme rejects to publish any premature findings. Instead, it invites national and local decision makers to a study tour to Switzerland where it combines the presentation and discussion of the final study results with field exposure and meeting with practitioners. Without any doubt, the study tour is a key moment for the further TAR process, as it allows relevant decision makers (including the political opposition) to familiarise themselves with the ideas and concrete manifestations of the functional area approach. Numerous actors (including from the Minister of State for Local Issues) acknowledge that the government was dedicated to run this reform, but was not clear as to what methodology it should use. dldp's proposal to use the FA methodology thus helped to fill a purely political debate with specific content, by introducing a set of criteria along which administrative boundaries could be redrawn (social, economic, historical, political).
3) Shift in engagement (political process)	Following the first study tour and the presentation of the FA study results, the Government Working Group decides to adopt the FA methodology for designing the TAR, i.e. for developing five different reform scenarios. These are then consulted and discussed with both national and local stakeholders. Although the FA methodology is not applied in a scientifically rigid manner (i.e. not as rigid as in dldp's FA study), it allows for the development of meaningful alternatives and thus for a real discussion among interested stakeholders. Even though the opposition party decides to boycott the whole reform process, dldp tries to maintain an open dialogue regarding the TAR and the FA approach with all political actors. Eventually, dldp even gets invited to present the FA approach in an opposition hearing.
4) Shift in policy (concrete laws, policies)	**Law on Territorial Administrative Reform (Jul 2014)** **Decentralisation Strategy (Jul 2015)** **Law on Local Self-Governance (Dec 2015)** The final reform with 61 new local government units reflects the ideas of the FA approach to a considerable degree. Even the opposition party, who rejects the whole TAR as a purely political programme, acknowledges the general direction of the reform and the idea to reorganise Albanian municipalities along a set of defined criteria as proposed by the FA study. Hence, the risk that the very basics of the reform would be toppled after a (at present unlikely) change of government seems very limited.

5) Shift in practice (follow-up on implementation)	Being aware of the fact that the TAR builds just the basis for further, more specific legal reforms, dldp continued to engage at national level by actively engaging in the subsequent discussions about the Decentralisation Strategy (approved July 2015), and the New Law on Local Self-Governance (approved December 2015), respectively. At the same time, dldp continued to support municipalities in the effective implementation of these new strategies and laws, e.g. by introducing an annual monitoring and best practice competition at municipal level.

Last but not least, several involved stakeholders acknowledged dldp's more fundamental influence and impact on the process of policy making *per se*. By introducing, explaining and promoting a solid, scientifically tested, and practice-oriented conceptual model for a national political reform process, dldp managed to significantly improve the quality of the political debate. This would not have been possible, however, without the strategic approach of SDC who intentionally supported two additional actors – STAR and StateWeb – promoting slightly different approaches on the TAR and on related policies and laws. The active provision of various alternatives forced relevant decision makers to consider different perspectives and positions which led to a broad political debate.

3.3 STRENGHTS AND WEAKNESSES

Offering a feasible and tested solution

It was certainly not dldp that pointed out the need for a territorial and administrative reform in Albania. Instead, numerous analyses and reports highlighted the necessity of a spatial and administrative reorganisation in the country, even long before the programme began. However, it was dldp that came forward with a meaningful approach once the national government initiated the reform, hence proposing a feasible, comprehensible conceptual guideline to a very delicate political process. Thus, the solution proposed by dldp was not a concrete reform scenario as such, but rather a 'recipe' or guideline for decision makers to develop their own scenarios. The fact that dldp introduced the FA approach as one possibility amongst others certainly helped to improve its acceptance by various decision makers, including the political opposition. Finally, the fact that dldp and its expertise never got 'hijacked' by either one of the major political parties shows that the programme had a good sense for political sensitivities and related risks (see below).

"The idea of functional areas was exactly what the government was looking for without knowing it – a gift from God."
Ministry representative

Making best use of a supportive political-institutional environment

dldp certainly profited from a generally supportive political-institutional environment at the onset of the reform process. Not only was the new government highly committed to push these reforms; but there was also a very strong sense of agreement among other key actors in favour of the TAR, including many relevant donor agencies such as the EU, USAID, SIDA, Italian Cooperation, or SDC. Hence, the challenge for dldp was not to push the reforms as such, but rather to position itself in a highly dynamic process. Having conducted the FA study at the right time, the programme was ready and willing to grasp the opportunity of the upcoming reform and to invest the necessary resources, even though this was not part of programme's original plans. Yet thanks to its longstanding engagement in local governance issues, the programme already had a solid understanding of political realities at various levels and had established many valuable contacts with key decision makers – which allowed to build relevant contacts and alliances for support.

Building on a solid institutional standing

Conducting the FA study together with municipalities as well as local and international experts certainly helped to improve the programme's institutional standing and credibility vis-à-vis relevant political actors at local and national level. As it is, dldp's engagement in the TAR process did not come out of the blue, but seemed like a logical continuation of its longstanding engagement on local governance issues in the North of Albania since 2006. Even though the region was regarded as 'opposition territory' after the national elections of 2013, dldp's strong commitment and solid ground experience, including cooperation with local decision makers and practitioners, certainly added to the programme's credibility and legitimacy at national level. The programme further strengthened this position through its active role as a 'knowledge broker', transferring and interpreting knowledge and expertise across various levels and interest groups (cf. Karakaci & Byrne 2016). Another aspect that helped to maximise dldp's impact on the TAR process was its active positioning as a somewhat neutral technical expert. The programme always tried to position itself as a neutral actor who does not take sides, but offers 'professional' advise based on solid evidence and expert knowledge. This subtle manoeuvring in a highly polarised political context worked pretty well – after all, dldp managed to maintain contact even with the opposition, despite its fundamental rejection of the TAR.

Creating 'neutral' space, facilitating, and brokering knowledge

dldp's first major contribution to the TAR process was the study tour to Switzerland where it presented the main findings of its FA study to a group of Albanian decision makers from different levels and political parties. It was certainly a good decision to present and discuss the study results on 'neutral ground', as it helped to de-politicise an otherwise highly politicised debate. One member of the opposition party who joined the study tour but later on supported his party's decision to boycott the TAR stated that: "The study tour was very fruitful. The discussions we had in Switzerland were quite the opposite from what happened later in Albania." Back in Albania, it was however beyond the power and influence of dldp to facilitate a depoliticised debate. Nevertheless, by adopting the role of a facilitator and a knowledge broker that transfers and interprets knowledge across levels and between stakeholder groups, the programme managed to keep the TAR process more or less along the main ideas of the functional area approach.

Slowing down the reform

Talking about potential weaknesses, some government officials involved in the TAR criticise that dldp was comparatively slow in coming up with new evidence and inputs. As a matter of fact, the programme always double-checked with local and external experts before positioning itself on issues of concern. While this iterative process of validation and positioning is one of dldp's key characteristics, some politicians and public servants got annoyed when they had to wait for new inputs and feedback. Repeated consultations with local stakeholders turned out to be rather time-consuming – a worthwhile investment from the programme's point of view to ensure real participation, yet too slow from an Albanian politician's perspective. However, dldp managed to strike the right balance between too slow and too fast, as the overall feedback from both local and national stakeholders is very positive. Anyway, from an external point of view, the TAR was still pushed through at an impressive speed.

4. CLUSTER B: LAW ON LOCAL FINANCES

This second analytical cluster looks at dldp's role in and impact on the process eventually leading up to Albania's new Law on Local Finances. Following the Parliament's approval of the Territorial and Administrative Reform, the Decentralisation Strategy, and the Law on Local Self-Governance, the Albanian government officially launches the reform of the Local Finance Law in early 2016. At that time, dldp cannot only build on longstanding experience and expertise regarding local finance management, but is also fully into national policy dialogue, with well-established networks at all levels, and is thus ready to fully immerse itself into this new reform process. In a nutshell, dldp's main advocacy message can be summarised as follows: "A meaningful Local Finance Law must cover both the revenue and the expenditures side."

4.1 REFORM PROCESS AND THE ROLE OF DLDP

The table below outlines the major policy steps regarding the Law on Local Finances since 2006 and highlights dldp's role in this process. The major policy shifts identified in the last column are described in more detail in section 4.2.

Date	Policy Process	dldp: Activities, Role	Policy Shift
2006 – 2009		**dldp I** starts to work with municipalities in the North of Albania, with a focus on local budget planning; at the same time, it establishes close ties with the Ministry of Finance	**Definition** Long before the legal reform, dldp builds local awareness and competence regarding public finance management
2008	The parliament approves a new **Organic Budget Law,** regulating local public finance management (expenditures side; eventually amended in June 2016)	dldp analyses the law, concluding that it neglects key issues for local governments	
2010-2013		**dldp II** continues with a focus on linking strategic development planning and financial planning at local level. The programme continues its dialogue with national partners, including the Ministry of Finance	
2010/11	The national government initiates a Regional Development Fund		
2012	The local governance programme PLGP (USAID) starts to work with municipalities in Southern Albania, with a focus on fiscal decentralisation	dldp starts a 'PEFA-like' exercise in Shkodër municipality, covering the period 2012-14 (finalized in 2015)	
Jul 2014	The parliamentary approval of the Territorial and Administrative Reform (TAR) creates new momentum for the preparation of a new Law on Local Finance		
Jul 2014	The Government approves the New Decentralisation Strategy		
Dec 2014	The National Parliament approves the new Law on Local Self-Governance ('Organic Law')		
2015		dldp conducts a 'PEFA-like' exercise in three dldp municipalities (Shkodër,	**Behaviour** Even though not all actors

		Durrës, Lezhë) to create evidence regarding local capacities and needs in terms of public finance management; results are shared with a wide range of stakeholders, including MoF, WB, IMF, Seco, USAID, EU, and UNDP	agree, dldp succeeds to enrich the ongoing, revenue-oriented reform debate by an expenditure perspective
2015	PLGP does a survey on other countries' experiences regarding local finance		
Early 2016	Official launching event for the reform of the Local Finance Law Establishment of a Technical Working Group (MoF, municipalities, development partners, PLGP, dldp) Establishment of an Experts Group (PLGP, dldp, external and local experts) PLGP assumes the thematic lead for revenue-related aspects	dldp joins both the Technical Working Group and the Experts Groups, assuming the thematic lead for public finance management (i.e. expenditure-related aspects)	**Engagement** dldp manages that expenditure aspects are formally taken into consideration during the reform process
Mid-2016	A first draft law gets presented and discussed	dldp validates each new draft of the Law with its local Centres of Competence dldp initiates an e-discussion platform for 61 LGUs	**Engagement** dldp ensures constant validation with local stakeholders
Autumn 2016	The final Draft Law gets presented to and discussed with key development partners, including WB, IMF, and Seco		
	IMF mission to Albania	IMF invites dldp to present its proposal for the new Law on Local Finances, including the results of the 'PEFA-like' exercise: IMF signals support for dldp's position for a full-fledged law	
		Exchange with SECO and WB on the scope of law	**Engagement** WB and SECO agree on a law including expenditures, but argue for a 'basic first' approach (unlike the government's ambition to meet international PFM standards)
Late 2016	MoF assumes the lead to take the Final Draft Law through the inter-ministerial and parliamentary process	MoF consults dldp to discuss and assess comments from other line ministries	
Mar 2017	The draft law gets discussed by the Council of Ministers		
Apr 2017	The National Parliament approves the **New Law on Local Finances**, a wide-scope law regulating both revenues and expenditures		**Policy** The new law reflects dldp's key asks regarding public finance management
Mid-2017ff	MoF starts to draft 12 sub-legal acts required for effective implementation of the New Law on Local Finance	dldp provides technical / expert support to the MoF on five sub-legal acts	

4.2 DLDP'S POLICY IMPACT

Without any doubt, dldp had a major influence on the concrete content of the Law on Local Finances. Without the programme's targeted and very persistent advocacy for a wide-scope law, the new law would hardly cover both revenue and expenditure aspects of local government finances. Hence, dldp's role in this particular law making process was quite different from its earlier engagement on the Territorial and Administrative Reform (TAR; see section 3), where the programme had no direct influence on the final outcome of the reform, but had rather provided and promoted a conceptual guideline for discussion. This time, however, dldp was very clear from the beginning as to what it would consider a good Local Finance Law and what not, and pursued that goal in a very strategic and committed manner until the very end.

1) Shift in definition (framing of issues)	Long before the reform of the Law on Local Finance begins, dldp engages on local government finance in the North of Albania, including building awareness for international good practice in local government finance legislation. The programme's concrete engagement with and support to municipal bodies as well as its ongoing exchange with the Ministry of Finance help to prepare the ground for the programme's later engagement in the law making process.
2) Shift in behaviour (behaviour of decision makers)	Amongst other programme activities and continued advocacy work, the results of the 'PEFA-inspired' exercise conducted in the North of Albania in 2015 help to create momentum for expenditure aspects also at national level, so that they are eventually taken into consideration for the legal reform process – even against the will of powerful actors such as PLGP (USAID) who advocate for a law with a focus on revenues only.
3) Shift in engagement (political process)	In early 2016, the government officially creates a Technical Working Group as well as an Experts' Group. dldp assumes the lead for expenditure-related aspects, while PLGP assumes the lead for the revenue side. The fact that expenditures are considered so prominently for the drafting stage can be seen as a direct outcome of dldp's advocacy for a wide-scope law. Subsequently, dldp engages a wide scope of actors in the law-making process, actively builds ownership and alliances at national (MoF) and local level (LGUs), as well as with some key donors (IMF, SDC). Last but not least, the programme ensures local engagement and ownership through several rounds of consultation and validation with local partners in the North of Albania.
4) Shift in policy (concrete laws, policies)	The National Parliament approves the new **Law on Local Finances in April 2017** – a wide-scope law as advocated for by dldp throughout the whole legislative process
5) Shift in practice (follow-up re. implementation)	dldp shows continued commitment to providing support for the implementation of the new law by supporting the Ministry of Finance in the preparation of several sublegal acts, as well as through continued capacity building support to municipalities.

4.3 STRENGHTS AND WEAKNESSES

Solid institutional standing and credibility
When the work on the Law on Local Finances began, dldp already had a solid institutional standing regarding local governance and municipal finances. On the one hand, this was due to the programme's longstanding working experience with municipalities in the North of Albania; on the other hand – due to its already established contacts with national level actors. This means that dldp did not have to start from scratch in terms of technical knowledge and networks, but could take things from where they were at the time. The fact that the Ministry of Finance actively reached out to dldp for advise on various occasions seems to underline this excellent institutional positioning. Just like for the TAR process, however, the national elections of 2013 and the resulting power shift might easily have jeopardised the programme's standing vis-à-vis national decision makers. With hindsight, the geographical expansion of the programme area in the course of dldp II thus proved crucial for improving the programme's legitimacy in the national policy dialogue – without it, dldp could easily have been sidelined as 'opposition ally'.

Building alliances, handling opposition
One of the biggest challenges for dldp's advocacy on this law was probably the ongoing disagreement regarding its scope, i.e. PLGP's fierce resistance against the inclusion of public expenditure-related aspects. In principle, PLGP argued that this would create redundancies with the existing Organic Budget Law (approved in 2008), whereas dldp was determined to come up with a coherent, wide-scope law that would cover all relevant aspects from the perspective of municipalities. Hence, once it assumed the formal thematic lead for expenditure-related aspects, dldp began to strategically advocate within the Ministry of Finance by seeking early thematic discussion and exposing staff from various departments to experiences from abroad. By doing so, dldp managed to build broad support within the MoF for its ideas and proposals regarding public expenditure – a support that eventually proved crucial when the MoF had to take hard decisions. Finally, dldp grabbed the opportunity of an IMF mission to Albania in 2016 to secure top-level support for an integral Law on Local Finances. Together with SDC's facilitation, this eventually helped to overcome resistance from PLGP (USAID).

"As for the Law on Local Finances, dldp was very stubborn."
(USAID representative)

Using evidence, framing messages
One of the most intriguing moves of dldp in this advocacy campaign was its somewhat creative use of PEFA, a globally recognised methodology for assessing public financial management performance. While dldp was neither capable nor formally entitled to conduct an official PEFA-exercise, it decided to do a 'PEFA-inspired' exercise instead in order to assess the respective performance in programme municipalities. The encouraging results were then used to reframe dldp's main message in regard to the question as to whether the new law should incorporate expenditure aspects ('Local government units are fully capable to adhere to a wide-scope law'). By referring to evidence generated according to a widely recognised analytical framework, and by reframing its original policy message in PEFA terminology, dldp managed to convey its key message to actors it would never have been able to convince otherwise, including the IMF.

Straining others' patience, relying on external expertise
As for the TAR process, some of the involved stakeholders at national level bemoaned that dldp would at times have strained their patience with repeated rounds of local consultations. Determined to push through these reforms as fast as possible, some government representatives might not have been ready for such systematic inclusion of local voices. However, making local voices and concerns heard in the course of these reforms was a fundamental dimension of dlpd's theory of change on which it would not compromise. The final outcome of the reform and the reportedly solid ownership at municipal level seems to prove dldp right in this matter,

Another critique raised by representatives of USAID refers to the external expertise dldp relied upon. Even though they acknowledged the quality and relevance of the Swiss expert's inputs, some observers would criticise that dldp 'only' facilitated but had no own finance experts positioned in Albania – unlike PLGP who seems to have had their own experts in Tirana.

5. CLUSTER C: WASTE MANAGEMENT

dldp's policy work on waste management is somewhat different from the two previous examples in the sense that it is less about advocacy *per se* rather than about a systemic way of working. In this case, dldp's main focus was never on the policy – which already existed but obviously needed improvement – but on a systematic 'anchoring' of various aspects of effective local waste management at different levels of the political-institutional system. Policy change was just one avenue in this endeavour, and apparently not even the most important one. The example thus shows how advocacy and policy dialogue can (or even should) go hand in hand with other forms of engagement, including building local capacities, ensuring uptake of key concepts and approaches by relevant institutions, and strengthening human resources in the system.

5.1 REFORM PROCESS AND THE ROLE OF DLDP

The table below outlines the major policy steps regarding waste management in Albania since 2010 and highlights dldp's role in this process. The major policy shifts identified in the last column are described in more detail in section 5.2.

Date	Policy Process	dldp: Activities, Role	Policy Shift
prior to 2010		dldp supports municipalities in the North of Albania in preparing local waste management plans	**Definition** Improved understanding among local stakeholders regarding practical solutions for effective waste management
early 2011	With the support of the EU, the government elaborates and eventually presents a Draft National Waste Management Strategy, setting very high standards for local waste management		
	AAM and AAC facilitate local level consultations of the Draft Strategy; however, only few recommendations from the local level are taken into consideration	dldp supports the local consultations facilitated by AAM and AAC	
Mid-2011	The government formally adopts a New National Waste Management Strategy	dldp perceives the New Strategy as highly ambitious, EU-driven and not adjusted to local needs and capacities; it identifies the need for concrete tools which can help municipalities to implement the Strategy	
2011ff		In collaboration with municipalities, the local	

		Centres of Competence, the Pool of Experts, and with the support of international experts (CSD), dldp starts to develop a series of concrete tools and guidelines regarding municipal waste management. - Cost and tariff calculation guideline - Do-it-yourself manual on local waste management	
Sep 2011	The National Assembly endorses a New Integrated Waste Management Law		
2011/12	The Ministry of Environment initiates a series of national roundtables and conferences to discuss specific aspects of local waste management	dldp together with the EU support the MoE in organising and facilitating these national events; dldp uses them to discuss local level issues and to promote the tools, manuals and guidelines developed with municipalities	**Behaviour** National actors are sensitised for local needs and learn about concrete solutions
	The EU decides to broaden its focus regarding waste management to the local level		
Jun 2013	National elections; the Socialist Party-led coalition comes to power and kicks off a series of fundamental reforms		
Mid-2013		dldp organises a study tour to Switzerland for national-level actors in waste management	**Behaviour** National actors are sensitised for local needs and learn about concrete solutions
2013	The MoE establishes two formal bodies: - Inter-Ministerial Group on Waste Management (IMG) - National Advisory Working Group (meets 4x/year; municipalities participate directly, not through associations)	dldp actively supports both groups with technical advice	
2014	The MoE prepares a Draft Policy on cost and tariff setting in waste management	dldp supports the MoE in developing the draft policy, with active reference to its respective work at municipal level	
2015	The new law on Local Self-Government for the first time mentions minimum standards, affordability and performance-based management service delivery	dldp organises a second study tour to Switzerland for national and local actors in waste management (MoE, MoF, service providers, local actors)	**Behaviour** National actors begin to apply decentralisation principles in the waste management sector
		dldp develops a benchmarking system and two specific tools (performance-based planning;	**Practice** Local actors start to use

		monitoring model) breaking down the new Organic Law on the waste management sector, which eventually get applied by six dldp municipalities	jointly developed tools for local waste management
		Together with the Albanian School of Public Administration (ASPA; under the Prime Minister), dldp develops four teaching modules on integrated waste management	
2016	EU, GIZ and Seco launch new waste management programmes, all of them taking into consideration also the local level		**Engagement** Donors shift their waste management priorities to soft issues at local level
late 2016		dldp organises another study tour to Slovenia for (inter)national and local actors in waste management (MoE, GIZ, and others)	
2017	The MoE with the support of GIZ starts to revise the National Waste Management Strategy with the declared aim to make it more realistic and responsive to the needs and capacities of municipalities	GIZ contracts the dldp-initiated Pool of Experts to assist with the Strategy Revision	
Sep 2017	The Socialist party (without coalition) gets reconfirmed through national elections; a new Minister of Environment takes office	dldp exposes the new minister and the deputy minister responsible for waste management to dldp evidence and practice	**Engagement** Waste management gains momentum at policy level; dldp practices are at the core of the government's action plan 'Clean Albania'
Nov 2017		dldp formally passes on its support function to the Inter-Ministerial Group and the National Advisory Working Group to GIZ, but continues to provide inputs on demand	
Dec 2017	MoE and GIZ present a first Draft of the revised strategy		**Policy** Through the Pool of Experts, dldp ensures indirect influence on the content of the revised strategy

5.2 DLDP'S POLICY IMPACT

1) Shift in definition (framing of issues)	In the course of its programme work with municipalities in the North of Albania, dldp is developing tools and guidelines for effective local waste management in a participatory manner. This helps to improve local stakeholders' understanding of practical solutions for effective waste management and prepares the ground for their latter involvement in policy-related processes. At the same time, dldp helps others to look at waste management not only through a sectorial lens, but also from a decentralisation and governance perspective.
2) Shift in behaviour (behaviour of decision makers)	Through the (co-)organisation of several national and regional platforms and conferences as well as study tours to Switzerland and Slovenija, dldp helps to sensitise (inter)national actors for local needs and allows them to learn about concrete solutions for effective local waste management. The fact that local and (inter)national actors, municipal and ministerial staff take part in these study tours allows for mutual learning and an improved understanding of each other's needs and concerns. After the approval of the new Organic Law in 2015, the study tours also help decision makers to interpret decentralisation principles from a sectorial perspective, and to apply them accordingly (e.g. in the waste management sector).
3) Shift in engagement (political process)	As it is, the Inter-Ministerial Group on Waste Management and the National Advisory Group might well have been established without dldp's contribution. Waste management had been debated for long, yet mostly with a national perspective and with a focus on 'hard' (infrastructure) issues. It seems that dldp's efforts to raise awareness for local concerns and for 'soft' (management) issues eventually succeeded to alter the focus of relevant actors regarding waste management in Albania. After all, 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.
4) Shift in policy (concrete laws, policies)	While dldp was not directly involved in the elaboration of **the first revised Strategy Draft presented in December 2017**, the programme had at least an indirect influence on its content. On the one hand, this happened through the close and constructive exchange with GIZ in the months and years before which eventually contributed to GIZ' increased focus on local issues. On the other hand – through the strategic strengthening and positioning of the 'Pool of Experts', a group of Albanian waste management experts who would continue to promote and advocate for dldp's key principles and approaches regarding local waste management even beyond the programme's existence. Due to its solid institutional standing and excellent reputation, the 'Pool' got eventually contracted by GIZ to assist with the revision of the Waste Management Strategy. According to a high-ranking ministry official, bringing in the Pool's local expertise would help to ensure that the new Strategy was much more realistic and useful than the previous one.

5) Shift in practice (follow-up re. implementation)	Unlike in the previous two examples – TAR and Local Finance Law – 'practice' here refers less to the implementation of a new policy or law (in this case the revised National Waste Management Strategy, which is still being elaborated). Instead, practice' is more about the institutionalisation, promotion and application of certain principles, approaches and tools that were developed long before the current strategy revision began (see 5.3 for dldp's 'anchoring' approach).

5.3 STRENGHTS AND WEAKNESSES

Successful occupation of a thematic niche

Unlike with the previous two policy processes described above, the initial momentum for dldp's main concern was very low in this case. Neither the national government nor any of the main donor agencies had a real interest in the soft aspects of waste management, Instead, the national debate was focusing on EU standards and large infrastructure for waste processing and disposal, while it more or less ignored the concerns about local waste management. Under these circumstances, dldp might well have failed if it had tried to advocate for local needs and concerns at national level right away – there was simply not enough interest, and the programme had too little leverage to change the course of the debate at that time. However, dldp continued to work at local level, developing practical solutions, reflecting them in the new policy framework for the local level (Organic Law), and promoting them step by step to concerned ministries and other stakeholders at higher levels. Thus, the programme successfully managed to occupy a thematic niche and to build (once more) a solid reputation and institutional standing. When others began to look into local waste management issues, dldp was already there, ready to provide local and international expert knowledge and able to present practical and tested solutions. The programme's longstanding cooperation with the municipality of Shkodër – and more recently with the municipality of Dibra – proved particularly valuable in that process. Many actors would visit 'dldp communities' to learn about the validity of different tools – and to get impressed by local ownership.

"dldp really helped us to understand what's happening at local level."
Former IMWG coordinator

Systematic exploration of multiple spaces

In order to promote tested solutions and bring local concerns to the attention of higher level officials and of relevant donors, dldp made use of many different spaces for dialogue. The provision of technical assistance to the Inter-Ministerial Group on Waste Management (IMG) as well as to the National Advisory Working Group seems to have been a very important initiative, as it helped to advocate for soft issues regarding waste management and to facilitate a meaningful dialogue between different actors. According to a former IMWG coordinator, the technical support received from dldp was absolutely crucial to fully understand the sector's challenges as well as its relations with wider governance issues, including local budgeting, taxation, tariff setting, citizen participation and many more. This engagement got seconded by (co-)organising and participating in national waste management roundtables and conferences, as well as study tours abroad. The latter again helped to bring together decision makers and experts from different levels, expose them to new concepts, and facilitate an open discussion on 'neutral ground'. The strength of dldp's approach lies in the fact that it used these spaces in a strategic and targeted manner, with the clear aim to advocate for management issues of local waste management. Furthermore, its solid technical expertise allowed the programme to make itself somewhat indispensable for national decision makers who had only little knowledge about respective issues.

Anchoring principles, approaches and tools within a system
Unlike in the two other policy processes, influencing a new policy, law or strategy (in this case the New Waste Management Strategy) was not the programme's main objective in this case. Instead, dldp was more looking for a thorough institutionalisation, promotion and application of certain principles, approaches and tools that were developed locally – long before the current strategy revision began. This 'anchoring' happened in three different ways. First, through the co-development of several ASPA teaching modules on local waste management – ensuring that all public servants get acquainted with some of dldp's basic principles and ideas in terms of waste management. Second, through the participatory development of tools and approaches at municipal level – ensuring solid local ownership and day-to-day application by local administration. Third, by encouraging (and at times also supporting) former programme partners and staff to take public positions, be it in key ministries or as mayors of municipalities – ensuring that at least part of the programme's DNA lives on in public administration and government.

Weakness: Thematically broad, lack of focus
The only weakness brought up by several respondents pertains to dldp's thematic breadth. Programme partners and donor representatives alike commented that the programme often juggled many different issues at the same time, thus sometimes losing focus. However, while effective advocacy is usually all about focus and a clear message, it seems that dldp chose the right approach, the more so as its engagement on waste management was anything but a 'typical' advocacy campaign. The abovementioned systemic 'anchoring' of principles and approaches would hardly have been possible with a narrow focus on one single advocacy message.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

There is no doubt that dldp played a significant role in several major political reforms in Albania in recent years. Making best use of a considerable political momentum and an often enabling and supportive institutional environment, the programme repeatedly succeeded to add value to ongoing or emerging political debates. It did so by providing much-needed conceptual support, technical assistance and advise to relevant decision makers, by facilitating processes and brokering knowledge between various (and often starkly different) groups of stakeholders, and by presenting evidence in a way different target groups could understand. By doing so, dldp repeatedly managed to redirect or even twist a political debate, or to add a new qualitative dimension to an existing discussion. Examples include the careful and well-considered introduction of the Function Area model, which eventually influenced the whole Territorial and Administrative Reform process; or the programme's very strategic and determined advocacy for a wide-scope Local Finance Law. Hence, dldp's main qualities in terms of policy influencing and advocacy can be summarised as follows:

Solidly rooted, analytically strong
dldp was always ready to grasp good policy opportunities – but only did so where there was an obvious link to and opportunity for the programme's concrete work with municipalities. This resulted in a solid institutional standing and a high credibility, as dldp proposals were known for being locally tested and owned. At the same time, the programme actively sought to bring in external, international expertise where necessary, and invested a lot in scrutinising the political-institutional context and in understanding the arguments and positions of others. Thus, dldp was able to show openness towards other ideas where reasonable and useful – but it was also very determined once it was sure the best solution was found.

Promoting local partners, building strong alliances
Following the same bottom-up logic, dldp applied an inclusive approach by actively promoting local decision makers and experts in the policy process. The programme repeatedly sought to establish new spaces for dialogue (or protect existing ones), and actively used them to facilitate a meaningful dialogue across levels and regions. While some of these spaces were temporary in nature (roundtables, conferences), others were eventually institutionalised (e.g. Pool of Experts). Several respondents mentioned dldp's commitment to local partners as the main distinctive factor if compared to other INGO or donor initiatives. At the same time, dldp invested a lot in building broad alliances at national level. Instead of working with top-level decision-makers only, the programme sought to convince lower tiers of ministries and departments, too. At least in the case of the Local Finance Law, this strategy was a key to success.

Aiming at systemic change beyond policy change
It may seem odd – yet the most distinctive characteristic of dldp's policy engagement is probably that policy change was hardly ever its main objective. Instead, dldp aimed at changing systems, in which policies and laws are just one dimension besides others. This is best illustrated by the waste management example, but gets equally reflected in other engagements. Influencing the main regulatory framework (i.e. a policy, law, strategy) was never the programme's sole objective. Instead, dldp focused on 'anchoring' key principles and approaches within the system: through by-laws and regulations, through capacity building modules for public servants, through practical tools for municipalities, as well as through individuals in key functions in politics and public administration who 'do things the dldp way'. It is the strategic and intelligent combination of these different dimensions that add up to dldp's significant policy impact.

ANNEX

References

- **Byrne, S.** (2017) Learning and knowledge sharing in dldp: review and outlook. Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation. Tirana and Bern, February 2017.
- **Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation** (2015). Helvetas Advocacy Concept. Zurich and Bern, 2015.
- **Karakaçi, V., Byrne, S.** (2016) Brokering knowledge for policy. A case study on dldp's role in drafting a new law on local government finance in Albania. Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation. Tirana and Bern, December 2016.
- **van Hout, R.** (2014) From a project approach to a national strategy: capitalisation of a local governance & advocacy project. Sharing experiences from dldp's functional area study & its impact on the territorial reform in Albania. Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation.
- **Zürcher, D., Bühler, J., Quku, S.** (2015) Decentralization and local development programme (dldp), Albania. Review of functional area programme (and projects). Tirana, July 2015.

List of respondents

Workshop with dldp team	Valbona Karakaçi, Erton Kashta, Arben Kopliku, Erida Dobrushi, Elvin Hoxha, Rikard Luka, Lili Hajdari, Mirsa Titka	

Cluster A: Territorial Administrative Reform and decentralization		
Focus group	Enea Hoti	Formes adviser to the Minster of State for Local Issues
	Fatlum Nurja	PLGP/USAID expert
	Eduart Cani	dldp service provider
	Saemira Gjipali	Gender expert supporting dldp
	Erton Kashta	dldp staff
	Lili Hajdari	dldp staff

Mr. Blendi Çuçi	Former Minister of State for Local Issues, actually Member of Parliament, Socialist Party
Mr. Gent Strazimiri	Member of Parliament, Democratic Party
Mr. Artan Hoxha	European Business University, promoter of discussion platforms for TAR
Mr. Vladimir Malkaj	UNDP Project Manager, supported establishment of STAR project
Mr. Blendi Bushati	Development expert supporting dldp
Mrs. Voltana Ademi	Mayor of Shkodër

Cluster B: Law on Local Finances		
Focus group	Fran Brahimi	Ministry of Finances and Economy
	Ornela Shapo	Finance Expert, supported dldp
	Emilia Koliqi	Muncipality of Shkodër
	Elvin Hoxha, Erton Kashta	dldp staff

Mr. Erion Luçi	Deputy Minister of Finances
Mr. Kevin McLaughlin	Chief of Party, PLGP/ USAID
Mrs. Evis Sulku	World Bank
Mrs. Linda Spahia	IMF

Cluster C: Waste Management Strategy		
Focus group	Lediana Karalliu	Ministry of Environment
	Redi Baduni	Formerly dealing with waste management in Ministry of Environment
	Eduart Cani	dldp service provider
	Konals Gjoka	Environment expert supporting dldp
	Fatbardh Kuçi	Muncipality of Shkodër
	Arben Kopliku	dldp staff

Mrs. Ornela Çuçi	Deputy Minister of Environment
Mrs. Oliana Ifti	Former Deputy Minister of Environment
Mrs. Maren Kneller	Head of Development Cooperation, German Embassy
Mrs. Elda Bagaviki	Program Officer, SDC Albania