



The Partnership between Kouga (South Africa) and Ilsfeld (Germany): Developing a climate change strategy in-house

Background and objective



External consultants often develop climate protection strategies for municipalities, which then end up in the shelf because their implementation does not match the capabilities of the municipality, the measures are too costly or there is little ownership in the departments of the municipality. Kouga municipality was able to successfully conduct the in-house development of a climate strategy. They followed a cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach, including various departments of the municipal administration. This was supported by a development advisor funded by the “Experts fund for Municipal Partnerships worldwide” between 2021 and 2023. It was a challenge to bring together and activate all these players and at the same time gain political support, but eventually this approach enabled an integrated and therefore feasible strategy.

Kouga is located in the Eastern Cape Province, about 70 km west of Port Elizabeth. Kouga's administrative unit was formed from formerly independent municipalities in the course of the last municipal reform and today has a population of around 130,000. The municipality must respond to a high level of immigration. Also, climate change in general and the permanent provision of drinking water in particular are seen as key challenges, which put a strain on the dominant economic sectors of agriculture and tourism. These challenges are addressed within the Climate Partnership between Kouga and Ilsfeld, Germany which was established in 2017 with a focus on water and energy.

Methodological approach



The first step required to develop a municipal climate strategy was to gain political support. Questions of hierarchies, responsibilities and impactful implementation methods had to be discussed in joint sessions with the mayor of Kouga. The second step was to identify relevant departments and their role in the development process. To foster an exchange between the different hierarchical levels and departments, several cross-sectoral workshops were held.

The workshops were organized by the mayor's office and the department for community services that works on the topics of environment and climate change. Furthermore, representatives from the departments for Infrastructure and Engineering, Integrated Development Planning, Disaster Management and Tourism took part. This was an important measure to gather valuable input from the perspectives of the various departments and to increase their ownership of the development process and, in the long term, its implementation.

For the concrete development the working group build on existing resources from the GIZ Project “Support for South Africa's climate policy” commissioned by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV) and the “Greenbook”, which provides the South African government with tools adapting settlements to the impacts of climate change. The strategy developed focuses on municipal management, responses to main climate change vulnerabilities as well as short-term measures that were identified throughout the process.

Once the new climate strategy was completed, the working group made sure it was included in the Integrated Development Planning (IDP), a method for South African municipalities to plan future developments that is of relevance for the municipality's budget.

After approval by the Council, Kouga Municipality hosted a two-day workshop to launch the strategy.



Implementation and challenges

In order to facilitate the implementation of the climate change strategy, a working group with various actors was established. In the beginning, however, many participants were hesitant: It was a challenge to get information out of the relevant departments, but also to bring the information to the people. Another challenge was changes in personnel, which occurred especially in the infrastructure department. Good organization and regular meetings helped to overcome these difficulties.



Outcomes for the target group and the involved stakeholders

The climate change strategy consists of three implementation lines. The first line focuses on mainstreaming climate change into the municipal management, the second line talks to responses to main climate change vulnerabilities and the third line lists short-term measures that were identified through the process. Several of these are already being implemented now such as tree planting and dune rehabilitation.

In case of South African municipalities an inclusion in the IDP enables climate adaptation measures to be taken into account in the municipality's future budget.

Additionally, the joint development of the strategy that involved different departments and stakeholders improved the cross-sectoral cooperation within the Kouga city administration and beyond, while at the same time creating more transparency and ownership.



Learnings and conclusions

One important learning has been that, in terms of monitoring, annual reviews for the implementation of the climate strategy need to be conducted. This allows for constant evaluation and appropriate modifications of the implementation.

Furthermore, writing an own climate change strategy within a municipality without the help of external consultants creates a lot more ownership and transparency among the civil society and the various departments involved than a strategy written by an external consultant. By involving a variety of different stakeholders within the administration and beyond Kouga managed to develop a unique climate adaptation strategy that is based on the needs of the local communities and the administration while taking into account the existing and potential climate challenges on the ground.

The early linking with other planning processes and budget planning in the municipality increases the possibilities of implementing the strategy.