

Final Evaluation of 'Omzet met Impact' Programme

Case study report

IT Services from Africa

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Abbreviations

FTSF	Fair Trade Software Foundation (https://ftsf.eu/)
IMVO	<i>Internationaal Maatschappelijk Verantwoord Ondernemen</i> (International Responsible Business Conduct)
IRBC	International Responsible Business Conduct
MVO	<i>Maatschappelijk Verantwoord Ondernemen</i> (Responsible Business Conduct)
MVO NL	MVO Nederland
NEVI	Dutch Network for Procurement, Contract- and Supply Management (https://nevi.nl/en/over-nevi)
RVO	<i>Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland</i> (Netherlands Enterprise Agency)
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIB-scan	Sustainable and Inclusive Business scan
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference

1. Introduction

This report describes the main features, activities and results of the IT Services from Africa project, also known as ‘Software made in Africa’. This project is one of the 12 projects that are co-financed by MVO Nederland’s ‘Omzet met Impact’ (‘Business with Impact’) programme. Implementation of this project started in various African countries in 2020 (see Section 2). The report furthermore assesses the project in terms of its effectiveness and impact (Section 3), its relevance and sustainability (Section 4), as well as its additionality and leverage (Section 5). Conclusions are presented in Section 6.

“Software made in Africa is a collaboration between MVO Nederland and 5 Dutch-African software companies, started in January 2019. The companies develop software for both African and European customers. Dutch companies hiring tech professionals from Africa are contributing to the development of the African middle class. Through the project ‘IT services from Africa’, MVO Nederland links parties that want to do business in a socially responsible way with the African IT sector.” (Translation of Dutch text in MVO Nederland 2020a).

2. Brief description of the project

The aim of the IT Services from Africa project is “to promote Fair Trade principles among these 5 Dutch-African companies and to introduce these principles as a benchmark in this growing sector” (MVO Nederland 2020a). There is substantial demand for these IT services (see e.g. Van Harreveld 2021) and apparently there is growing interest among Dutch companies in IT offshoring to Africa (MVO Nederland 2020c).

A Quickscan or brief Sustainable and Inclusive Business scan (SIB-scan) was made for the project in February 2019 (MVO Nederland 2019a). It identified lack of technical and/or soft skills, power cuts and Internet interruptions as some potential risks. It furthermore indicated that mitigation of these risks can take place by testing for, and providing training in, technical and soft skills, using solar power to prevent failures during power cuts, as well as using mobile data during internet interruptions. The Quickscan also identified various (RBC) risks in Ghana, Kenya and Uganda, such as corruption and human rights violations. Likewise, the following IRBC risks of IT offshoring were identified with the IMVO Risk Check tool:¹

- The trade in data can lead to discrimination in relation to credit, employment, insurance, mortgages and decisions, which can have a disproportionate effect on vulnerable population groups such as minorities and low-income groups.
- Network administrators often work long, stressful hours.
- RSI is common among call centre and information services operators.
- Work-related stress is also a significant risk.
- There is a risk of brain drain.

Three campaigns to prepare the project were planned in the Netherlands in the second quarter of 2019. Their purpose was to find Dutch companies willing to buy software from Africa. In one of the interviews for this evaluation it was explained that in the case of IT Services for Africa the polling of interest among companies was brought forward in the process (and that that was one of the learnings of the project).

Furthermore, presentations were held at NEVI purchasing day and the National Sustainability Congress in the second half of 2019. In that period also a code of conduct was developed and there were talks with the Fair Trade Software Foundation (FTSF) about cooperation.²

The project formally started on the 1st of January 2020 (MVO Nederland 2020b: fn. 6). It is a relatively small project and has an experimental character. The approach of the IT services from Africa project –

¹ PowerPoint presentation of MVO Nederland at National Sustainability Congress 2019.

² Results framework of MVO Nederland.

unlike that of most other MVO Nederland projects – is to establish “a commercial relation and value chain and generating employment which is much better remunerated”.³

The software coalition, including Incentro, Competa, Trinity, Tunga and R&D Ethiopia, was formed in the first half of 2020. MoU's were signed with all five companies. Ten fair software offshoring principles were formulated and published online (see Box 1). The principles are in line with those of the Fair Trade Software Foundation, but are also based on the risk analysis made for the project, for which also the MVO Risk check tool was applied.

Box 1: 10 Ethical Principles 'IT from Africa'

1. Decent jobs.
2. Fair payment.
3. No corruption.
4. Good working conditions.
5. No forced labour.
6. No discrimination.
7. Diversity.
8. Knowledge transfer.
9. Freedom of association.
10. Respect for the environment.

A new coalition member African Digitals was added later in 2020.⁴

It was the intention to collaborate with the Dutch office of the US IT training provider Global Knowledge (MVO Nederland 2020a:12) to organize (additional) training of African software developers.

The project should have been completed in Q4 of 2020, but was extended to 2021. A LinkedIn campaign for IT Services from Africa was held in Feb/March 2021, while an online meetup on IT Services from Africa was held on 29 April 2021 (Tilstra 2021b). Over 50 participants registered for this meetup.⁵ Three clients of Incentro, Trinity Software Center and African Digitals shared their experiences with outsourcing IT to Africa.

The project is expected to contribute especially to two SDGs: 8 (decent jobs and economic growth) and SDG 4 (education and training), see MVO Nederland (2020b).

The IT Services from Africa project is mainly financed by the Business with Impact programme to cover hours of MVO Nederland staff and out-of-pocket expenses.

3. Effectiveness and impact

This section addresses the evaluation questions with respect to effectiveness and impact. General evaluation questions addressed in this section are:

1. Have the **activities** described in the proposal of the project been **carried out**?
2. Have the **goals and targets** described in the proposal been **reached**?
3. Were the **assumptions and trajectories** described in the ToC proven to be **correct**?

No separate Theory of Change (ToC) or results chain was developed for the IT Services from Africa project. As one interviewee put it: “The proposition was simple. Modest goals were defined, mainly at output level. It is relatively easy to show risks at that level”. Hence, there is only the general Theory of Change of the ‘Business with Impact’ programme (see e.g. MVO Nederland 2020a). Some key assumptions listed in the general ToC of the Business with Impact Programme that are relevant for the IT project are:

- Companies are willing to collaborate.
- Companies will scale up/replicate if commercial success has been demonstrated.
- More knowledge about IRBC leads to more sustainable trade and investment.
- IRBC Tools are useful for companies to identify risks and opportunities in value chains.

Although most goals are defined at the output level, there are also some envisaged outcomes and it is expected that the project will contribute to the achievement of some SDGs, which can be classified as impact.

One of the interviewed stakeholders defined two goals at the outcome level:

³ Stakeholder interview.

⁴ Results framework of MVO Nederland.

⁵ Data provided by MVO Nederland.

1. Increase the opportunities for IT services from Africa among Dutch companies and organizations that purchase IT services, in order to raise awareness and transfer knowledge; and
2. (derived goal) for companies like Trinity Software Center, Incentro, etcetera to encounter fewer prejudices and thus bring in new business.

It seems that the companies quickly agreed on the goals of the project, but had many discussions on its scope.

The planned activities and intended results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: A results chain of the IT Services from Africa project

Software made in Africa	
Impact	Enhanced sustainable trade in IT services from Africa and decent employment created in African countries, by adhering to the 10 principles for responsible international business in the IT sector
Outcome	Promote Fair Trade principles among the 5 participating Dutch-African companies in the ITC sector and to introduce these principles as a benchmark in this growing sector (<i>The five Dutch-African software companies with which MVO Nederland cooperates want to set a sustainable standard in the sector before large international purchasing organisations rush into the 'uncontrolled' African market</i>)
	Increased awareness of the potential of the African IT sector for outsourcing of IT services by Dutch companies
	Business cases developed/Increased number of business relationships for sustainable trade in IT services from Africa
Output (2020)	Published and signed manifesto Fair Trade Software
	Software made in Africa website launched
	Social media campaign and appearance at The Next Web or comparable industry event
	Pilot training in Ghana and Uganda (Q1,2 2020); African software developers trained
Activities (2020)	In 2020, MVO Nederland wants to issue a joint procurement manifesto with guidelines for promoting IRBC in software development outsourcing to Africa. These include combating exploitation, paying a competitive salary, promoting opportunities for women and young people and training underprivileged talent.
	Publish the ethical principles of trade in software to make the opportunities, risks and control measures known to Dutch (potential) buyers of software made in Africa.
	At least 2 and possibly 4 members of the project team want to work together to train (more) software developers in Africa according to the principles of the manifesto (i.e. Uganda, Ghana and possibly Kenya). To this end, the project team is working together with the Dutch office of Global Knowledge, an international trainer of software developers.

Source: Based on MVO Nederland (2020a). *Annual Plan 2020*

3.1 Effectiveness

Relevant evaluation sub-questions in the ToR addressed in this section are:

1. How much **ownership** of the projects lies with the SME's and with MVO Nederland?
2. To what extent did the project result in **lasting trade/investment relations** between the Dutch SME's and the local trade partners?
3. To what extent were **other stakeholders**, such as civil society, **meaningfully included** in the development and execution of project?

In addressing these sub-questions, reference will be made to the earlier-mentioned general questions:

1. Have the **activities** described in the proposal of the project been **carried out**?
2. Have the **goals and targets** described in the proposal been **reached**?
3. Were the **assumptions and trajectories** described in the ToC proven to be **correct**?

The Dutch-African companies that are participating in the project feel that they in the end are responsible for the envisaged results of the project, but are still dependent on MVO Nederland as far as far as several project activities are concerned – and especially in terms of the coordination of the project.

The SME's in the project are Dutch companies with a local branch in Africa, but these branches were already established prior to the start of the project. There is some evidence that the project contributed to the establishment of commercial relations of the Dutch-African companies with other Dutch SMEs.

The main stakeholders of the project are MVO Nederland and the members of the software coalition. Another stakeholder is the Fair Trade Software foundation. In Ghana, the foundation Maxim Nyansi is

involved in training provision of local software developers. Furthermore, in Q2 of 2019, discussions were held with two IT training providers about their potential involvement in the project. In the end, it was decided to involve the Dutch office of Global Knowledge in the project.

Most activities planned for 2020 were implemented, though there were some delays because of COVID-19. The Software coalition, including Incentro, Competa, Trinity, Tunga and R&D Ethiopia, was being formed in Q1-Q2 of 2020. Some other activities, such as the organization of meetings, had to be postponed to 2021. One activity that turned out to be not feasible was to involve the office in the Netherlands of Global Knowledge for the provision of training of African software developers.

Results achieved at the output level are:

- Software coalition formed; MoU's signed with all 5 participating companies
- 10 ethical principles formulated and communicated (see Box 1). The principles are in line with those of the Fair Trade Software Foundation. The principles and references were published online.
- Presentation to NEVI
- Presentation 'IT from Africa' at National Sustainability Congress 2019
- A new coalition member (African Digitals) was added in Q4 of 2020.⁶
- LinkedIn promotion campaign (February 2021)
- Webinar 'Meetup IT from Africa' (29 April 2021)

In the online meetup, three clients from Incentro, Trinity and African Digitals shared their experiences with outsourcing IT to Africa.⁷

One interviewee observed that output such as presentations and the webinar of 29-04-2021 is very clear and easy to determine, but that it is more difficult to precisely determine the outcome of the project. Notwithstanding this difficulty, there is no doubt that the presentations, LinkedIn campaign and webinar have contributed to an outcome such as "changing the image of Africa that exists in the Netherlands" and increased awareness that there are capable IT professionals in Africa to which IT services can be outsourced. From the interviews it is also clear that the Dutch-African SMEs in the project have developed sustainable business cases for the supply of fairtrade IT services.

MVO NL had contact with training provider Global Knowledge, a US company with office in Nieuwegein, the Netherlands. MVO NL asked Global Knowledge for a quotation. It was the idea to develop a business case for training in Africa. Global Knowledge drafted a business case together with Trinity Software Center in Ghana, but it turned out that it was financially not feasible. One of the interviewees pointed out the interest of Global Knowledge in becoming involved in the project might be classified as an unexpected result, but that at the same time, a negative unexpected result is that the financing for their involvement could not be arranged.

While generally the project seems to have been effective, a comment made by a representative of one of the participating companies is that a shorter project might have been more effective, because with less time between meetings of the network members it would have been easier to keep the momentum.

⁶ This company was approached by one of the other companies and asked whether it would be interested in joining the coalition (interview result).

⁷ MVO Nederland (n.d.). Results framework.

3.2 Impact

This section focuses on the project's impact.⁸ Impact refers to results within the project's sphere of *indirect influence*. The relevant evaluation sub-question in the ToR is: "To what extent can project results be seen as (potential) contributions to the SDG's?"

According to MVO Nederland's *Annual Plan 2020*, the project's potential contributions to SDGs are:⁹

- *fair working conditions and sustainable economic growth in Africa* (SDG 8)
- *training of new IT-talents in Africa* (SDG 4).

At the same time, the 10th principle refers to the environment, so there is potentially also a contribution to SDGs 13 and 15.

According to Tilstra (2021b): "The principles are aimed at creating fair jobs and (further) training young people in IT. In addition to the on-the-job training that the IT professionals receive through the Dutch-African companies, Trinity Software Center and Tunga develop teaching programmes for young IT professionals. Trinity even focuses on young talents from disadvantaged families." For a testimony of two successful IT professionals, see Tilstra (2021a).

Trinity Software Center offers the training courses via a special foundation, the *Maxim Nyansa Foundation*. Tunga is a platform of freelancers with a pool of 350-400 persons. Training is provided in a separate branch. Training does not guarantee participants a job, but if they are good enough they can enter the pool of freelance personnel. Training focuses on people with a distance to the labour market. In comparison, Incentro hires people (and thus aims at creating employment opportunities, especially people with larger distance to the labour market) and provides them on-the-job-training. It furthermore aims at generating turnover (providing IT services to especially Dutch companies and providing cloud services to local companies) and designing impact software for the African market (such as software for farmers). Trinity Software Center designs impact software too, e.g. an app for Foundations for Farming in Zimbabwe and the Oadwini mobile accounting app for small enterprises in Ghana.¹⁰ It is difficult, however, to determine to what extent such higher-level results can be attributed to the project.

One of the interviewees mentioned that it is "too early to quantify impact in terms of turnover", but is of the opinion that "it has been proven that there is potential for growth". Another interviewee recognized that it is not yet possible to define results in terms of turnover or number of decent jobs. It was explained that it is also more difficult to define such results in the IT sector than in an established sector such as textiles or coffee and that the project did also not have the ambition to achieve such results. Instead, the ambition was more modest and was mainly to make the concept known.

Nonetheless, increased awareness in the Netherlands of the potential of African countries as source countries of IT services can be expected to contribute to the above-mentioned SDGs.

4. Relevance and sustainability

This section assesses the IT Services from Africa project in terms of development relevance and sustainability of the benefits of the project.

⁸ The adjusted OECD/DAC definition of impact is "The extent to which the intervention has generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects.", see OECD/DAC (2019).

⁹ MVO Nederland (2020a).

¹⁰ See [Foundations for Farming | Feeding the Nations](#), and [Odwadini Mobile App – Control your money \(odwadiniapp.com\)](#).

4.1 Relevance

This section aims at assessing how relevant the project has been in terms of (expected) project impact versus identified challenges. As it is still too early to measure impact, and therefore to determine what the ex-post development relevance is, here the focus will be on expectations.

Stakeholders that were interviewed are unanimous in considering that the project is very relevant from a development perspective, as it addresses mismatches in the African labour markets of IT specialists and shows the potential to generate fair trade in IT services and generate decent and well-paid employment for graduates in IT from African universities. To the extent that such graduates come from poor households, the project can contribute to improving the living conditions of these households.

4.2 Sustainability

OECD/DAC (2019) defines sustainability as the “extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue, or are likely to continue.” This definition includes “an examination of the financial, economic, social, environmental, and institutional capacities of the systems needed to sustain net benefits over time.” This section will look at the dimensions of sustainability relevant for the project and address the following question from the ToR: “to what extent is the project suitable for **upscaling**?”

One of the stakeholders interviewed emphasized that the IT Services for Africa project does not fit well into the focus of MVO Nederland and relatively little attention was paid to the project. This stakeholder explained that there are no possibilities for MVO Nederland itself to continue with the project once the Business with Impact programme ends.

In the interviews it was generally expressed that it will be difficult to continue as an independent small group of companies. Other sources of financing to continue project activities have not (yet) been sought. Though it is expected that not much financing is required. (The financing required in the experimental phase of the project was basically for covering the hours of the MVO Nederland project coordinator and for marketing.) Financing of follow-up activities would especially be required for a promotion campaign to upscale the project and for training of people in Africa.

It is interesting to note that one of the interviewees is very optimistic about the sustainability of the project: “there’s high potential for sustainability because the need is there and the resources to meet that need can be organised.” But there seems to be need for a party like MVO NL. As one company representative remarked, “we need to invest in the pre-competitive phase, but that is not for the profit business to focus on but rather other leverages” The need for investment is also clear from the following statement of another interviewee that “you have to communicate long and consistently on a subject to get it noticed”.

5. Additionality and leverage

This section covers the two related issues of additionality and leverage of the project.

5.1 Additionality

ToR evaluation sub-questions addressed in this section are:

1. To what extent was **cooperation with RVO helpful** in the development and financing of actual projects?
2. To what extent would the SME’s that are part of these projects, have taken **similar** actions related to the identified RBC risks and sustainable business opportunities **without this programme**, and how dependent were the SME’s on MVO NL throughout the projects?

According to the Annual Plans (MVO Nederland 2018; 2020a), no specific resources were earmarked for the IT project in 2019, while a total of 34,240 Euro was budgeted for 2020 (Table 2).

The project did not receive any financial contribution from the Enabling Environment pillar of Business with Impact programme. That could have been the case if involvement of Global Knowledge in the provision of training had been feasible.

Table 2: MVO NL Budget for the IT Services from Africa project

	2019	2020
Personnel cost		€ 30,610
Various Out-of-pocket expenses		€ 3,630
Total	€ 0	€ 34,240

Source: MVO Nederland (2018, 2020a). Annual Plans 2019 and 2020

The interviewees agree that the contribution of MVO Nederland from the Business with Impact programme was additional. This concerns the financial contribution – the contribution of MVO Nederland to cover hours and out-of-pocket expenses – for the promo campaign on LinkedIn, presentations, webinar and networking. All interviewees emphasize the importance of the neutral role of MVO NL in the project. As one company representative explained, the companies in the network could have implemented the project themselves, by getting together and organizing activities, but in practice that would not have happened. It is good to have a neutral party like MVO NL to organize the activities.

5.2 Leverage

Leverage of the project in terms of ‘the ability to influence behaviour beyond the applicant’ or ‘the influence of Dutch policy on various actors’ (see IOB 2019: 16, 25) can be seen as the extent to which behaviour of various actors in the project (or of actors beyond the project) is influenced. There is no doubt that the actions of the MVO Nederland staff involved in the project influenced the behaviour of other project stakeholders. But there are also examples of influence beyond the project areas.

The project definitely has had leverage. But that needs to be communicated (better). The participating companies are now more known in Africa. Interviews were held in local media in which it was explained that they aim at development goals and apply ethical principles. One of the companies has developed a tool to test the 10 principles (not yet launched) – to measure satisfaction of staff.

The companies involved in the project are different from companies such as Facebook, Twitter, Andela, because of the principles that they apply. This way they become more known. There is however no influence yet on curricula of other training providers. That was to be part of the third component of the project.

Leverage in terms of influence on procurement behaviour of public organizations in the Netherlands seems to be still very minimal. In the words of one of the interviewees: “when it comes to large tenders for the provision of IT services, there is very little in the way of corporate social responsibility in procurement policy”.

6. Conclusions

Broadly speaking, the envisaged activities of the project have been implemented, though with some the delays caused by the COVID-19 crisis. Most expected output has been achieved.

It is not yet possible to define results in terms of turnover or number of decent jobs. Nonetheless, increased awareness in the Netherlands of the potential of African countries as source countries of IT services can be expected to contribute to the results at impact level.

The project is considered very relevant from a development perspective, as it addresses mismatches in the African labour markets of IT specialists and shows the potential to generate fair trade in IT services and generate decent and well-paid employment. It is expected that this will also contribute to improving the living conditions of poor households.

MVO Nederland played an important facilitating and coordinating role. At the same time, the companies in the network consider that they have ownership and feel a responsibility for generating result.

Without the (financial) contributions from the Business with Impact programme it would have been difficult to do what has been done.

The project definitely has had leverage, though there appears to be a need to communicate that (better).

There is general agreement that there is need for pre-competitive action and a neutral party like MVO Nederland for up-scaling of the project. Follow-up financing has however not yet been secured.

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Van Harreveld, Mark (2021). *IT'ers vanuit Afrika inhuren voor klussen in Europa en de VS: 'Dit is veel leuker en levert professionals uit Afrika meer op' (Hiring IT professionals from Africa for jobs in Europe and the US: 'This is much more fun and gives professionals from Africa more benefits')*. Published on LinkedIn, 25 apr 2021.

Appendix 1: Stakeholders interviewed

Name	Position	Organisation
Rahel Boon-Dejene	Managing Director	R & D Ethiopia
Dennis de Weerd	CEO	Incentro, Kenya
Ernesto Spruyt	Managing Director	Tunga, Uganda
Frans Tilstra	Sustainable business developer	MVO Nederland
Diana van der Stelt	Sales Representative in the Netherlands	Trinity Software Center
Irma van Leeuwen	Monitoring & Evaluation Officer	MVO Nederland
Petra Veeneman	Manager Business with Impact Programme	MVO Nederland

Appendix 2: Ethical Principals of the IT Services from Africa Project

The companies work according to 10 principles for responsible international business in the IT sector. The members of the 'IT services from Africa' project stand for:

1. *Creating decent jobs.* IT services from Africa' stimulates the development of a knowledge economy in emerging markets.
2. *Fair payment.* Employees and freelancers receive fair salaries that are at least equal to the prevailing wages for their position in the local market.
3. *No corruption.* Members of 'IT services from Africa' comply with local laws and regulations and do not engage in corruption.
4. *Good working conditions.* Employees are offered a safe, clean and healthy workplace. Freelancers are given control over their workplace and are offered help to improve it whenever possible.
5. *No forced labour.* IT Services from Africa' rejects all forms of forced or compulsory labour.
6. *No discrimination.* IT services from Africa' is committed to fighting discrimination and promotes equal pay, equal rights and equal (secondary) working conditions for all employees and freelancers, regardless of their gender, race, sexual orientation, religious or political beliefs, physical limitations or age.
7. *Diversity.* IT services from Africa' promotes as much diversity as possible in the workplace and strives to offer employment to people distanced from the labour market.
8. *Knowledge transfer.* IT services from Africa' invests in training for employees and freelancers and makes education in 'soft skills' and 'hard skills'/technical skills available on reasonable terms.
9. *Freedom of association.* IT services from Africa is committed to freedom of association and collective bargaining for all employees and freelancers.
10. *Reducing environmental impact.* IT services from Africa' aims to reduce the carbon footprint of remote working as much as possible.