

Opinion on the participatory development of a Sustainable Development Scoreboard for Belgium

- **Own initiative**
- **drafted by the Scientific Research Working Group**
- **approved by the General Meeting on February 19, 2004 (see Annex 1)**
- **original language: French**

1. Summary:

1.1. Objectives and content of the opinion

- [a] To guarantee the dynamic of sustainable development, Belgium needs to draw up a national scoreboard. This scoreboard must include a number of key indicators that will make it possible to determine whether Belgium is moving towards sustainable development. Development of the scoreboard must involve authorities from different levels of power, citizens, civil society and the administrations. This project combines several strategic objectives:
- making sustainable development more concrete for the population and for civil society,
 - giving new impetus to cooperation between the regions, communities and the federal authority in matters of sustainable development, with a view to stimulating a national sustainable development strategy,
 - meeting our international obligations in terms of indicators.
- [b] In this spirit, the FCSD (Federal Council for Sustainable Development) drew up this opinion with the aim of achieving three results:
- providing an analysis of possible scenarios for putting together a national sustainable development scoreboard, based on examples from other countries,
 - proposing a concrete procedure at national level, with particular attention to the participation of the public and of civil society,
 - making suggestions on how to structure a scoreboard project, including the themes on which it would be organised.

1.2. Examples from other countries

- [c] A first part of the opinion looks at the main themes of the research commissioned recently by the FCSD on participatory processes and sustainable development indicators¹. After outlining the main points of Rio, Aarhus and Johannesburg in matters of participation, the opinion examines national experiences in putting together sustainable development scoreboards, in particular the Finnish and German examples, with a view to drawing conclusions for Belgium. The different participation arrangements are also described.

¹ The full text of the research report is available on the Council's web site: <http://www.frdo-cfdd.be>

1.3. A procedure for putting together a sustainable development scoreboard

- [d] For a national sustainable development scoreboard to exist, all the different levels of power (federal, regions and communities) must be involved, while respecting the autonomy and competences of each. The FCSD suggests making a coordination committee responsible for implementing the procedure. This committee, comprising representatives of local, regional and federal authorities, will propose an initial draft scoreboard with the support of a committee of experts. The public and relevant advisory councils will be consulted on the draft.
- [e] The FCSD proposes the following participation arrangements:
- o Without ruling out other possibilities, the FCSD suggests that a citizens' forum be organised to provide for public participation. The recommendations made by this forum will be forwarded to the coordination committee, the advisory councils involved and the different parliamentary assemblies.
 - o Advisory councils with experience in sustainable development matters will participate in a subsequent stage. Their opinions will be transmitted to the coordination committee.
- [f] Based on the recommendations of the citizens' forum and the opinions of the advisory councils, the coordination committee will draw up a final proposal for a sustainable development scoreboard.
- [g] The FCSD considers that follow-up of the process and information as it unfolds are two key factors to its success.

1.4. What structure for the sustainable development scoreboard?

- [h] In the final part of its opinion, the FCSD suggests ways of structuring the sustainable development scoreboard. The main elements are as follows:
- o the indicators that will make up the scoreboard must respond to scientific, social and political criteria,
 - o a three-pillar structure seems to have the widest support, although other possibilities exist,
 - o interactions between the three pillars must be transferred to the scoreboard.
- [i] In all cases, it is vital to take into account:
- o the international dimension,
 - o the long term and concern for future generations,
 - o the institutional dimension.

2. Introduction

2.1. A sustainable development scoreboard is vital

- [1] The FCSD has been studying sustainable development indicators since 2001. So far, this work has given rise to two opinions adopted on April 16, 2002: the (framework) opinion on sustainable development indicators and several paragraphs of the first Preparatory Opinion for the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (paragraphs 41 to 45 and 9.1 to 9.6).

- [2] In these opinions, the FCSD stresses the important role of indicators in promoting a sustainable development policy. They are essential tools for communication, information and policy diagnosis and follow-up. There are currently no sustainable development scoreboards in Belgium, whether at national or federal level. Initiatives are nonetheless being taken that could contribute to the development of such a scoreboard, for example, the Central Economic Council's work to draw up a list of indicators to measure the Lisbon strategic objectives².
- [3] The FCSD considers that the process of drawing up a national sustainable development scoreboard can serve as a basis for a national sustainable development strategy. Belgium made an undertaking in Johannesburg to build a national sustainable development strategy in the run-up to 2005.
- [4] A sustainable development scoreboard would be made up of a set of relevant, comprehensible and communicable indicators, with the aim of reflecting society's progress towards achieving sustainable development, based on a policy and objectives.

2.2. Participation is a key to success

- [5] In addition, the FCSD states in paragraphs 45 and 46 of its Opinion on sustainable development indicators that *"because they are destined to become tools for communication and public awareness, indicators are a democratic challenge. A debate on indicators can help widen the social basis of sustainable development and lead to greater awareness among citizens and civil society. This responds to the requirement of being democratic, because it will heighten the interest and legitimacy of the indicators and of sustainable development for citizens and civil society. The importance attached to participation in this process must be enhanced, since one of the functions of participation is to create awareness of the challenges of the major issues on which decisions must be taken by democratic bodies."*
- [6] The FCSD also states in paragraph 43 of its (first) Preparatory Opinion for Johannesburg that the choice of indicators and thus of priorities must be sufficiently transparent and that such transparency can be assured by participatory processes. These processes are therefore an important element adding to the societal and political relevance of sustainable development indicators.

2.3. Research to nurture debate

- [7] The FCSD announced in the same Opinion that it was considering examining further this question in the coming months so as to be able to make concrete suggestions for building a positive dynamic between participatory processes and the drawing up of a list of major sustainable development indicators in Belgium. Accordingly, the FCSD financed a research project on the role of participatory processes in drawing up sustainable development indicators. This research was conducted jointly by the *Institut du développement durable* (IDD) in Ottignies and the *Centrum voor duurzame Ontwikkeling* (CDO) of Ghent University. It was brought to conclusion in April 2003³.

² See the Central Economic Council's web site: <http://www.ccecrb.fgov.be>

³ The full text of the research report is available on the Council's web site: <http://www.frdo-cfdd.be>