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Understanding and Managing Development

BELGIAN FEDERAL REPORT
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

2000-2004

A BRIEF PRESENTATION



Sustainable Development

The most frequently quoted definition of sustainable development is taken from the book *Our Common Future*, also known as the Brundtland Report, published in 1987: **“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”** (p. 43).

The concept became well-known through two United Nations conferences. The first, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (or UNCED, informally named The Earth Summit), was organised in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The second, the World Summit on Sustainable Development, took place in Johannesburg in 2002. The latter underlined that sustainable development requires **“poverty eradication, changing unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development”** (*Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development*, A/CONF.199/20, paragraph 2).

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The Federal Report and its Context

The third federal report, entitled *Understanding and Managing Development: Belgian Federal Report on Sustainable Development 2000–2004*, was published in December 2005. The report and its supplement containing indicators, running to some 275 and 125 pages respectively, are available in French and Dutch. The report deals with changes in living conditions and government policies. It introduces the TransGovern model to represent the interrelations between the driving forces and the capital assets of development. This model is a tool for analysing changes in living conditions and for identifying pressures. The report selects twenty pressures that are impediments to sustainable development. The document further examines Belgian sustainable development policy and strategy and lays the foundation for elaborating sustainable development scenarios using the backcasting technique. Finally, it recommends a gradual move towards sustainable development by a better implementation of sustainable development principles.

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The Belgian federal reports are part of the **legal framework for sustainable development policy**. This framework was created by the *Act of 5 May 1997 on the Co-ordination of Federal Sustainable Development Policy*. The act introduced a federal plan for sustainable development and a federal report on sustainable development. The four-yearly **plan** determines measures to realise a sustainable development. The two-yearly **reports** have three missions. They must analyse and assess both the existing situation and the policy that is conducted and, as a third mission, describe development expected in the case of unchanged policy and according to some other relevant scenarios. →→



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The act commissioned the **Federal Planning Bureau** (FPB) – a public institution that studies economic, social and environmental policy issues – to draw up the report. The act also established the **Interdepartmental Commission on Sustainable Development** (ICSD) and the **Federal Council for Sustainable Development** (FCSD). The main ICSD mission is to prepare the plan and monitor its implementation. The commission also acts as a deliberative body. The FCSD is the advisory body on sustainable development matters. Its members represent civil society organisations.

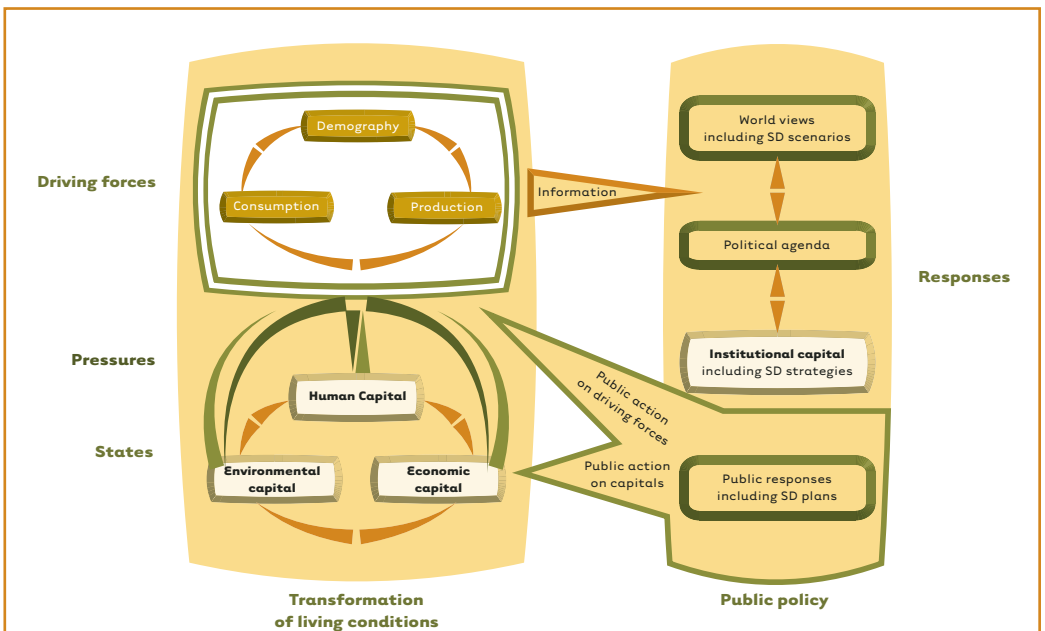
The **Task Force on Sustainable Development** (TFSD) is the FPB team that, among other tasks, draws up the reports under the direction and the responsibility of the FPB. The FPB has published **three** federal **reports** so far, the first in 1999, the second in 2003 and the third in 2005. Meanwhile the government has adopted **two** sustainable development **plans**, the 2000–2004 plan and the 2004–2008 plan.

The TransGovern Model

Understanding and Managing Development: Belgian Federal Report on Sustainable Development 2000–2004 deals with changes in our living conditions, with government policies and with how both are interrelated. The report presents the **TransGovern model** for organising economic, social, environmental and policy information and argues that transdisciplinary information can help to govern development. TransGovern stands for **transformation of living conditions through governing**.

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The TransGovern model links the **transformation of the living conditions** of a society (the left box of the illustration) with **government policies** (the right box of the illustration). It also clarifies the relationships between the determinants →→



of living conditions and the relationships between the policy constituents. The model is a **novel combination of several existing models**. Firstly, it makes use of the DPSIR framework (Driving forces, Pressures, States, Impacts, Responses). Secondly, it utilises the triangular model of interactions between human, environmental and economic capital. Thirdly, it adds to these models a public policy module. This policy module, which was elaborated in the first (1999) and second (2003) federal reports on sustainable development, contains the institutional capital.

The living conditions of a society depend upon human, environmental and economic resources or *capital assets*. In the report the **human capital**, or the state of the population, is subdivided into three elements: the *standard of living, health and knowledge*. The **environmental capital**, or the state of the environment, encompasses *natural resources* (water, air, land and minerals) and *biological diversity* (or all living beings). The **economic capital**, or the state of the economy, contains on the one hand *physical and technological capital* and on the other hand *financial assets*. To these three capital assets the report adds **institutional capital**: the set of organisational, legal and social structures of a society. Institutional capital plays an important role in government policy.

The report considers three **driving forces** of development: human processes and economic activities in the areas of demography, consumption and production.

- 1 | **Demographic dynamics** concern the characteristics of human populations such as size, structure, density and their variations.
- 2 | **Consumption patterns** have to do with changes in people's habits in using goods and services to meet their needs.
- 3 | **Production patterns** refer to changing practices in creating these goods and services.



The three sets of driving forces exert **pressure**, or have an influence, on the human, environmental and economic capital assets. They bring about changes in the states of these capital assets. The effects can either be positive or negative. Furthermore relations exist between and within the capital assets; this can cause a sequence of effects. Finally there are **feedbacks** from the capital assets. They have an impact on the driving forces.

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Public policies are needed to manage the pressures and to improve the living conditions of society, which is a sustainable development policy objective. Other actors than the authorities – civil society organisations and the business community – also have a role and responsibility in this; however, their responses are outside the scope of this report. The report, which focuses on the federal government responses, shows that government policies can act on capital assets as well as on driving forces. The political responses depend on the information on living conditions that the authorities receive. Because of a lack of knowledge and the existence of uncertainty and risks, this information will always be insufficient to support all government responses. The way this imperfect information is dealt with is subject to world visions and risk perceptions. These visions and perceptions are subjective as they are influenced by norms, values and political priorities. The state of the institutional capital also determines a society's capacity to implement government policies.

Transformations of Living Conditions

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The 2005 federal report

The 2005 federal report on sustainable development applies the TransGovern model to describe, analyse and assess the **existing situation**. For that purpose it identifies **twenty pressures** characterising the development of our society. The report shows for these twenty concrete examples that the driving forces are putting pressure on the capital assets. It underlines that the pressures have their origins in human activities; they are not destiny. The report highlights that if current trends persist, these pressures will be impediments to a sustainable development of society.

The three main criteria used for the selection of the twenty pressures were their severity, significance of their inter-generational aspect and their federal dimension:

- 1 | Do current trends threaten to significantly reduce the stocks of human, environmental and economic capital?
- 2 | Do they have a long-term impact as a slow burn, that worsens only gradually but that may be very costly or impossible to put right if action is left to a very late stage?
- 3 | Are they at least partly within federal government competences? → →



“If current trends persist, these pressures will be impediments to a sustainable development of society.”

Twenty Pressures: driving forces that exert pressure on the capital assets						
Demographic dynamics	Population growth	1		2		
	Household structure	3				
	Population ageing	4				5
Consumption patterns	Dietary patterns		6	7	8	
	Household appliances			9		
	Passenger transport			10		11
Production patterns	Product development	12 13	14		15	16
	Production organisation	17	18	19		20
	Standard of living					
	Health					
	Natural resources					
	Biological diversity					
	Physical and technological capital					
	Financial assets					
	Human capital					
	Environmental capital					
	Economic capital					

As regards **demographic dynamics**, the report explains that *population growth* puts pressure on the standard of living and natural resources. Likewise *changes in household structure* put pressure on the standard of living and *population ageing* does so on the standard of living and financial assets.

Concerning **consumption changes**, the report examines *dietary patterns*, which put pressure on human health, natural resources and biodiversity. It also goes into *household appliances*, which exert pressure on natural resources, and *passenger transport modes*, which affect natural resources and physical and technological capital.

With regard to **production changes** the report pursues the questions of *product development* and of the *production organisation*. Examples of the first are shown to be putting pressure on the standard of living, health, biological diversity and physical and technological capital. For the latter, the report brings up evidence of impacts on the standard of living, health, natural resources and physical and technological capital.

The report shows that a number of these pressures end in poverty, impaired health, environmental deterioration and economic problems. For example, it goes into the impacts of the following pressures: the growing percentage of single-person households, the long-distance transport of food, the increased use of private cars and air travel, the acceleration of product replacement, the worsening of employment conditions, etc.

“*The progress of Belgium
towards sustainable development
is highly uncertain.*”

The 2005 report has a **supplement**, a separate volume with **44 sustainable development indicators**. It checks whether developments are on the right track to reach general goals and specific targets — as far as these are available. Fifteen indicators show a trend in the direction of meeting their goal, nine are with no significant change and six move away from their goal. Of ten indicators with a specific target, only one has met the target; nine are not expected to do so if they continue their current trend. In general, the results are best for economic indicators, moderate for social ones and relatively weak regarding the environment. On the basis of this data the report arrives at the conclusion that the progress of Belgium towards sustainable development is highly uncertain.



Belgian Federal Development Policy

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A **strategy** is a co-ordinated set of processes for improving decisions and their effectiveness. As sustainable development is a learning process, a **sustainable development strategy** contains mechanisms for assessment and participation. It also pays attention to uncertainties and to interactions between the short and the long term as well as between here and elsewhere in the world. In the TransGovern model the strategy framework is part of the institutional capital.

A **plan** is the decision-taking part of a strategy. It is made up of decisions. In the TransGovern model the plan is included in the government responses to transformations of living conditions.

Understanding and Managing Development examines the federal **policies conducted** for the driving forces and capital assets of development by looking closely at the first two sustainable development plans. The report concludes that 71% of the 662 measures of the **2000-2004 plan** are on their way to being implemented. In comparison with the 2004 audit score of 56% this is noticeable progress. The federal report suggests that the monitoring exercise helped the implementation score to go up. According to the 2005 audit two thirds of the measures in progress have been or are being executed and a quarter are in preparation. The report also monitors the measures thematically and according to the type of policy instrument used.

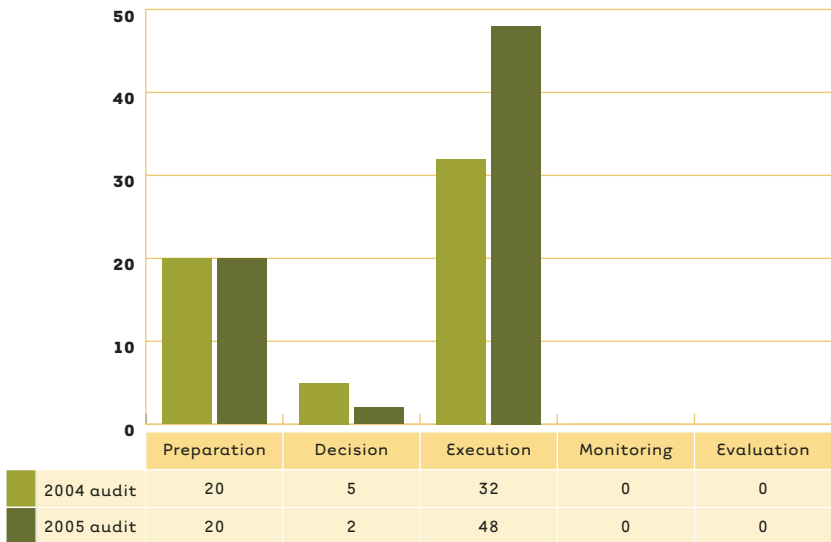
As regards the **2004-2008 plan**, the 2005 report does not monitor its implementation, but analyses its contents. This plan presents 354 measures covering the six issues of the European Union sustainable development strategy: poverty

Sustainable and Strategy

and social exclusion, ageing, public health, natural resources, climate change and clean energy, and transport. The report finds that more than half of these measures originate from the first sustainable development plan and from the 2003 Belgian government's coalition agreement. This raises the question of the political strategy behind the sustainable development policy. →→

Implementation of the 2000-2004 Plan

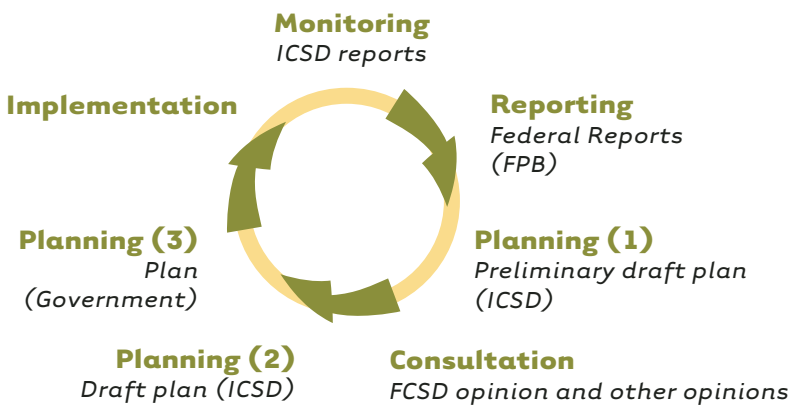
Measures in progress, by stages of decision making, in %



Total number of Plan measures **622**
 Measures in progress 2004 audit **349 (56%)**
 2005 audit **443 (71%)**

Sustainable development decisions preferably fit in a sustainable development strategy. The Belgian federal **strategy** is framed by the *Act of 5 May 1997 on the Co-ordination of Federal Sustainable Development Policy*. The act established a strategic process consisting of the following stages: reporting, planning including a consultation of the population, implementation and monitoring. Successive policy cycles, each containing these stages, generate improvements in decision making. The report *Understanding and Managing Development* points out that the present sequence of a new plan every four years and a report every two years does not provide the optimal connection. It suggests improving the linkup by alternating the reporting focus: a first report could assess the implementation of the preceding plans; the next report could prepare the next plan with a foresight exercise.

The Belgian federal four-yearly Sustainable Development Strategy Cycle



Moreover the report draws attention to some changes that have occurred in the preparatory process of the two preliminary draft plans. These result mainly from two facts. The first is the establishment of the Federal Public Planning Service (PPS) Sustainable Development in 2002. The second is the composition of the ICSD. Since early 2004, the commission has been reinforced by including government members' representatives from within their strategic services as well as civil servants and experts from public services.

As regards the link with previously decided policies or plans, the 2005 report comments on the measures in the 2004 preliminary draft plan that were copied from the 2003 government's coalition agreement. As 40% of the preliminary draft plan measures were in that category, the question is whether it can be meaningful to call for people's opinion on these measures since they have to be implemented in any case. The report answers in the affirmative because the consultation gives the opportunity not to reject, but to complete or adjust these specific measures. Yet the report stresses that it makes no sense to consult people on a specific sectoral plan that the government already has decided on. →→

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“Successive policy cycles, each containing these stages, generate improvements in decision making.”






Understanding and Managing Development lists the changes made to the preliminary draft plan in the final plan. The latter comprises some 40% more measures; it is differently structured and pays more attention to the global dimension of sustainable development. All this results from the public's response as well as from political negotiation. Furthermore, the report underscores the significance of data collection for learning from experience. Thus the next plan can take advantage of the lessons in the federal reports and the ICSD reports, the FCSD opinions, parliamentary and governmental documents, etc. Most of these recognize, for instance, that clear information on the state of the previous plan and a more readable text for a broader public are recommended as conducive to the consultation.

Sustainable Development Scenarios

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The sustainable development reports have to describe the **development expected** in case of unchanged policy and according to some other relevant scenarios. Concerning this third mission, the third report mainly prepares the way for the fourth one, which is to be published in 2007. For this, *Understanding and Managing Development* explores the **backcasting** scenario technique. A backcasting exercise starts from the definition of a desirable future, possibly substantially different from the present day. It then goes into the ways to reach that desired situation. Therefore, policy responses are central in backcasting. Backcasting, which looks back from the future to explore the conditions of transition towards a desired situation, is opposed to forecasting, which extrapolates today's trends into the future.

The 2005 report visualises a desirable future — a world in sustainable development or developing in a sustainable way — by means of the main sustainable development **goals and targets** endorsed by the international community. It puts forward objectives regarding poverty eradication, protection and management of natural resources and changing unsustainable production and consumption patterns. The report takes these from the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the *Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development*, the *United Nations Millennium Declaration* and →→



“The report visualises a desirable future – a world in sustainable development or developing in a sustainable way – by means of the main sustainable development goals and targets endorsed by the international community.”

the *Millennium Development Goals*. The report considers a time horizon of **2050**, as the societal transformations involved are structural and require a very long-term perspective.

The 2005 report presents some elements for constructing scenarios for **Belgium** implementing these goals and targets. It illustrates the first steps of the **backcasting exercises** related to six different pressures with targets and action proposals. The population ageing pressure, for instance, calls for measures concerning old-age pensions, public finance and employment. The pressure of feeding patterns leads to, among other things, campaigning for balanced diets and a food pricing policy that tends to promote health. The problems related to the conveyance of passengers could be tackled by measures encouraging public transport.



On the road to a sustainable development, achieving various interlinked objectives simultaneously and considering institutional changes are definitely the most important challenges. To take up these challenges in backcasting exercises, specific, measurable and time-related targets are needed. To avoid things never getting beyond good intentions, indicators giving information about economic, social and environmental trends are vital. They help discussion and judgement of situations and changes. Therefore the report is supplemented with a table of **44 sustainable development indicators**. Such a table could grow into a real sustainable development dashboard, but that requires a societal debate and a set of indicators covering a wider range of issues.

Applying Sustainable Development Principles

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Understanding and Managing Development clearly explains how Belgium has started to implement the sustainable development commitments endorsed at the Rio de Janeiro and Johannesburg Summits. However, there is still a long way to go. Great efforts will have to be made for development to become sustainable. The report recommends gradual improvements by, in particular, better implementation of three sustainable development principles.

Firstly, **integration**. The three sustainable development components — economic, social and environmental — have to be better integrated in government policies. A model such as TransGovern can be a helpful tool for discussing and planning this integration. Another tool for promoting integration is the sustainable development impact assessment. It has to be applied to important specific decisions before they are taken. This instrument, which is under construction, will be available in the near future.

Secondly, **precaution**. This principle has to be taken into account when dealing with uncertainties and long-term risks, especially where there is a threat of serious or irreversible damage. The best-known example is climate change. A precautionary approach is also relevant in coping with the long-term budgetary impacts of population ageing.



The heart of the matter is to anticipate correctly the combined pressure of several issues.

Thirdly, **participation**. For this, the 2005 report recommends the development of participatory exercises regarding sustainable development scenarios. It proposes a back-casting exercise starting from goals for 2050 in which stakeholders and experts are involved. The resulting scenarios will be a substantial input for the next, 2007 federal report on sustainable development.

“Belgium has started to implement the sustainable development commitments endorsed at the Rio de Janeiro and Johannesburg Summits. However, there is still a long way to go. Great efforts will have to be made for development to become sustainable.”

Acronyms

FCSD	Federal Council for Sustainable Development
FPB	Federal Planning Bureau
ICSD	Interdepartmental Commission on Sustainable Development
PPS	Federal Public Planning Service
TFSD	Task Force on Sustainable Development
TransGovern	transformation of living conditions through governing
UN	United Nations
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

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References

Reports

The Belgian federal Reports on Sustainable Development are available in French and Dutch on the FPB web site: <http://sustdev.plan.be/> > Publications > Others.

The following documents are available in English:

- *Towards Sustainable Development? Summary of the Federal Report on Sustainable Development;*
- *A Step towards Sustainable Development? Federal Report on Sustainable Development 2002: Executive Summary;*
- *Understanding and Managing Development: Belgian Federal Report on Sustainable Development 2000-2004. A Brief Presentation* (the electronic version of this brochure).

Plans

The Belgian federal Plans for Sustainable Development are available in English on the ICSD web site, at <http://www.ciddd.be/> > Publications or <http://www.icdo.be/> > Publicaties:

- *Federal Plan for Sustainable Development 2000-2004;*
- *Federal Plan for Sustainable Development 2004-2008.*

Act

The Act of 5 May 1997 on the Co-ordination of Federal Sustainable Development Policy is available on the FPB web site:

<http://www.plan.be/> > The Institution > Presentation.

FCSD

Information on the FCSD, mainly in French and Dutch, is available at

<http://www.frdo-cfdd.be/>.

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ICSD

Information on the ICSD is available in French and Dutch at

<http://www.cidd.be/> and <http://www.icdo.be/>.

PPS Sustainable Development

Information on the PPS Sustainable Development is available in French and Dutch at

<http://www.sppdd.be/> and <http://www.poddo.be/>.

TFSD – FPB

Information on the TFSD is available on the FPB web site:

<http://sustdev.plan.be/>.



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BELGIAN FEDERAL REPORT ON
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT 2000 - 2004
A BRIEF PRESENTATION

The Belgian federal reports on sustainable development are drawn up to help the Belgian authorities to *act locally* while *thinking globally*. The sustainable development concept became well known through two United Nations conferences, organised in 1992 and 2002. From 1999 onward the Belgian federal reports started exploring systematically the very large sustainable development domain.

The third report, entitled *Understanding and Managing Development: Belgian Federal Report on Sustainable Development 2000-2004*, was published in December 2005. The report deals with changes in living conditions and government policies. As a tool to analyse these changes, it introduces the TransGovern model. The report selects twenty pressures that are impediments to a sustainable development of society. The 2005 report contributes to the learning process that is embodied in the Belgian federal sustainable development strategy. It recommends a gradual move towards sustainable development by a better implementation of sustainable development principles.

This brochure is a brief presentation of the third report.