

A stylized graphic in the background shows a hand with fingers spread, holding a globe. The hand and globe are rendered in light gray tones. The globe is partially obscured by the hand's fingers.

Towards sustainable development?

Summary of the Federal Report
on Sustainable Development

Task Force on
Sustainable Development

1999



The Federal Planning Bureau

The Federal Planning Bureau (FPB) is a public interest body.

The FPB conducts research on questions of economic, socio-economic and environmental policy. To this end, it gathers and analyses data, explores possible future scenarios, identifies alternatives, assesses the consequences of policy decisions and formulates proposals. It places its scientific expertise at the disposal of the government, Parliament, the partners of social dialogue, and national and international institutions.

The FPB disseminates the results of its activities widely. The results of its research are brought to the attention of the community and thus contribute to the democratic debate.

Under the law of 5 May 1997 regarding the co-ordination of federal sustainable development policy, the FPB is responsible for producing the Federal Report on Sustainable Development and preparing the Federal Sustainable Development Plan. The Task Force on Sustainable Development is the group of Bureau personnel who have carried out this assignment since January 1998, under the leadership and responsibility of the FPB.

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A. The first Federal Report on Sustainable Development

1. Five functions fulfilled by this first Federal Report

The law assigns at least three functions to Federal Reports concerning the implementation of sustainable development. To begin with Belgium's position must be described, for instance with the help of indicators (cf. C). The Report should then analyse the government's federal policy (cf. D). Finally, it should survey future prospects by evaluating current trends and expected developments in the light of pertinent assumptions regarding the different policy measures (cf. E).

As this is the first such report, The Federal Planning Bureau thought it useful to perform a thorough examination of two additional functions. The "operationalisation" of the concept of sustainable development, i.e. its translation into actual decision-making¹ or into precise actions or standards, requires a more detailed conceptual and institutional approach than the usual definitions of sustainable development. Accordingly, we suggest a methodological framework that makes it possible to work systematically and rigorously on the economic, social, environmental and institutional components of sustainable development (cf. B). On the other hand, the quality of participation of the other parties involved besides the government (i.e. civil society) plays a decisive part in the chances of a sustainable development project succeeding. It is for this reason that this report underlines the role played by major social groups (cf. F).

This report should not be confused with a sustainable development plan². Indeed, it includes no recommendations, no decisions and no strategy for a specific policy. Nonetheless, it formulates some ten findings, based on the material assembled in the course of applying these five functions (cf. G). These findings could for example help political decision-makers and civil society to reorganise their collective action and assist the process of decision-making in a manner which is favourable for sustainable development.

2. Federal home policy from 1992-1998 on matters of sustainable development.

Two options seemed in accordance with the requirements of a first Federal Report on sustainable development:

- to make this notion more operational, the report specifically focuses on a few major themes of sustainable development: eradicating poverty and social exclusion, protecting the atmosphere (climate changes and ozone in the troposphere) and marine ecosystems (dangerous substances, over-fishing...), and changes in consumption patterns;

1. See the OECD's comments on the difficulty of translating sustainable development definitions into practice. *The interim Report on the OECD. Three-Year Project on Sustainable Development*, 23 april 1999.

2. The compilation and execution of such a plan, for which the government bears ultimate responsibility, is provided for in the law of 5 May 1997 (see point B.4) in order to launch a sustainable development strategy at federal level.

- secondly, the report deals with federal home policy from 1992 to 1998, i.e. between the Rio Conference¹ and the end of the basic work on the report. This analysis will be followed by a study of Belgium's federal foreign policy in a further report. However, in line with the requirements of sustainable development, the topics will be systematically reviewed in an international context.

B. The concepts and institutions of sustainable development

1. Social, economic, environmental and institutional concepts

Society development is inferred by its living conditions changes. These changes affect and are affected by its potential for decision-making and for action. Various concepts of development have formed the basis for reflection and political debate over the last few decades, including debates in the international arena. "Sustainable development" arose as a concept in response to the critical nature of global problems in the areas of the environment and of economic and social development. The concept implies a concern for the quality of growth, not just for its quantity. It is generally defined with reference to the Brundtland Report (1987)².

Sustainable development means meeting present needs without endangering the capacity of future generations to meet theirs. Two concepts are inherent in this notion:

- *the concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given;*
- *the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and in future needs.*

Sustainable development thus aims to improve our living conditions, first of all by responding to the essential needs of the poor, and also by preserving both our technological and economic capacity to provide for present and future needs and our access to a wholesome environment today and in the future. These three components of change in the social, economic and environmental domains are often called the three "poles" or "pillars" of sustainable development (cf. B.3). With this approach, the emphasis is placed on the complementary nature of these components, and the need to achieve an equilibrium when they come into conflict with one another³.

The existence of a "fourth component" is also assumed: an institutional one (the state of our social organisation), whose inertia might block the progress of the other three but whose vitality might enhance it. The way it develops is a decisive factor for possible decision-making and action in the other three poles: changes are needed at every institutional level, from the most global to the most local, in order to achieve a sustainable development as adopted by the Rio Conference (cf. B4.).

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1. The commitments taken in Rio are :
 - The Rio Declaration.
 - Agenda 21.
 - The Framework Convention on Climate Change.
 - The Convention on biological diversity.
 - The Forest Declaration.
 2. Report published in 1987 by the World Commission on the Environment and Development (WCED), consisting of international experts and convened at the request of the United Nations, chaired by Mrs Gro Harlem Brundtland: *Our Common Future*, (1987) Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 3. OECD (1999) idem.

2. Five criteria for actions in the area of sustainable development

There exist numerous alternative definitions of sustainable development in addition to the one considered above. But they are all too abstract for any possible link between the general concept and the functions of this report (including policy analysis). In its study, the Federal Planning Bureau has identified five requirements (or criteria) for sustainable development actions which taken together, differentiate these actions from the classic actions in favour of development or the environment. The report defines them according to the five basic principles of the Rio Declaration:

- a worldwide dimension (the principle of *common but differentiated responsibilities*. *The developed countries acknowledge the responsibility that they bear in the international pursuit of sustainable development in view of pressures their societies place on the global environment, and of the technological and financial resources they command*);
- a long-term view (the principle of inter- and intra-generational equity: *The right to development should be fulfilled so as to equitably meet the developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations*);
- the integration of components (the integration principle: *the protection of the environment shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it*);
- the acknowledgement of scientific uncertainty: (the precautionary principle *(..) where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason to delay for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent the environment's degradation*);
- a shared and responsible approach (the principle of participation. *At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities, including information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities, and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes (...)*).

These five dimensions are naturally interlinked. Each of them applies both to social and economic activities and to the environment, while the third (and most exacting) one aims at their integration. The combination of these five dimensions with the components constitutes a grille for analysis. This (grille) makes it possible to reflect and act in the context of sustainable development projects without being in danger of privileging one aspect of sustainable development over the others.

3. Comprehensive model and thematic components of the report

The report gives information of a quantitative and, in broad measure, of a qualitative nature. The comprehensive model¹ adopted to handle this information stresses collective explanatory factors of development and their dynamic interdependence.

The collective aspects of sustainable development is treated as a priority, because it is necessary to outline a clear and stable framework (resulting from government policy and the actions of the major social groups) to enable individual citizens to exercise their responsibilities in a manner that is favourable to sustainable development. The dynamic interdependence of development factors is a central preoccupation of the model,

1. Comprehensive: by this is meant that all four of the sustainable development pillars of sustainable as defined in point B.1 are incorporated in the model.

because the phenomenons studied are primarily regarded as endogenous; i.e. originating from within the described processes.

The core themes of sustainable development developed in the report are treated according to this model and in the content defined by the chapters corresponding to each of these themes in of Agenda 21¹, in a way that differs from other development approaches in the following respects.

- Poverty is worsened by exclusion from currently accepted by. Lifestyles (whose consumption pattern is in fact partly unsustainable) and is often characterised by the impossibility for those affected by it of achieving integration by their own efforts. Fighting against poverty and exclusion depends on seeking out strategies including all areas of society, including the promotion of sustainable consumption patterns.
- Pursuing sustainable consumption objectives calls for more than just information campaigns. It also requires the introduction of new regulation and incentive systems reflecting mutual choices in the areas of environment and development and exposing consumers to the social costs of their own choices, both in their own country and in the rest of the world.
- As far as the atmosphere and the marine environment are concerned, the pressures on these environments and their degraded condition illustrate the interdependence between human activity and the state of the planet as well as the interaction between the various ecosystems. This interaction also means that integrated policies working upstream of these pressures are required.

4. Institutional framework

While it may be true that the United Nations represents the most complete and universal frame of reference for work done so far on sustainable development, the European Union (EU) and its member states have played and are increasingly playing a decisive role in this international process. In Belgium, the federal state, the regions, the communities and the local authorities have taken the first steps in this area. The workings of the decision-making process include two categories of institution (the public authorities and advisory bodies/ social dialogue forums) that draw up sustainable development policies at five decision levels.

These levels are the international level², the European Union, the national level (consisting of the Federal Government, the communities and the regions), the level of the provinces and that of the communes.

The law of 5 May 1997 which co-ordinates federal policy on sustainable development³ creates a clear structure within which future federal policy in this area will regularly feature on the political agenda for government, the legislative chambers, the ministries, the major social groups and the whole population. Indeed the law requires the biennial

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1. These sustainable development core themes correspond with four particularly important chapters of Agenda 21: chapters 3, 4, 9 and 17
 2. The current functioning of our institutions is set forth in the Report by first treating these five levels independently of one another, and then discussing the possibilities as regards collaboration. The intention is that the remainder to the report should be read with a good understanding of the main structures of the Belgian State, as the distribution of powers has a considerable influence on what the Federal State is capable of achieving.
 3. Moniteur Belge, 18 June 1997.

publication by The Federal Planning Bureau of a Federal Report on Sustainable Development. This report will in future contain an analysis and an evaluation of the Federal Sustainable Development Plan. Every four years, the Interdepartmental Commission for Sustainable Development (ICSD), in which all members of the federal government are represented by senior officials, will elaborate a preliminary draft version of the Federal Plan. This will include an action plan that shapes the political priorities for sustainable development in a concrete fashion. This preliminary draft will be submitted to the Federal Council for sustainable development (FCSD), and the population will be consulted at the same time. It will also be submitted to the legislative chambers and the governments of regions and communities. After considering the responses it receives, the ICSD will revise the preliminary draft into a draft version that is submitted to the government. On this basis, the government will then compile a Federal Sustainable Development Plan, covering several years. Each year, the members of the ICSD will compile a report about the state of progress of the plan for their respective government departments. The annual ICSD report and the biennial report by The Federal Planning Bureau will be communicated to all members of the federal government and the legislative chambers. This process will ensure transparency in the creation and implementation of federal policy, and the maximum level of participation of all concerned and interested parties.

C. Indicators for sustainable development

The description of the international and national situation for the various sustainable development themes of the report has been compiled using some 80 indicators and a large number of supplementary quantitative indications added to the text. By describing the comprehensive model more precisely with reference to the DPSIR approach (Drivers-Pressure-State-Impact-Response), we can focus attention on a causal link between major driving forces (D) and the pressure (P) exerted on the state (S) of the environment and society. According to this scheme consumption patterns are also regarded as driving forces (direction indicators) that affect the topics of poverty and social exclusion, the atmosphere and the marine environment. The latter are under pressure (pressure indicators) which causes them to evolve towards a particular state (state indicators). These changes then have a series of impacts on natural and human resources (impact indicators). The model is then rounded off with endogenous responses (response indicators) made by government(s) and the major social groups to reduce poverty and social exclusion, protect the atmosphere and the marine environment and change consumption patterns.

1. The international situation

World-wide consumption has considerably increased since the fifties, but this increase has been unevenly distributed between developed and developing countries. Consumption patterns today still differ greatly between these groups of countries, as shown by indicators such as access to drinking water, electricity consumption, and so on. Moreover, the consumption patterns of industrialised countries have a world-wide environmental and social impact. They thus affect not just the populations of the developed countries themselves, but also those of developing countries. Some of these effects are illustrated in the environmental and social themes of this report, such as poverty, the atmosphere and the marine environment.

The description of poverty given here, using not just monetary indicators but also indicators of quality of life (such as life expectancy and calorie intake per inhabitant) show that considerable progress has been made over the last few years to reduce world-wide poverty. However important disparities still exist, not only between developed and developing countries but also within these groups of countries. The human poverty indicator developed by the UNDP¹ for industrialised countries shows unmistakable poverty within these countries.

Two atmospheric phenomena have been analysed: the concentration of tropospheric ozone and climate changes. In recent years, the increase in the ozone concentration in the troposphere has mainly been localised in industrialised countries, with a doubling of the concentration over one century. Most industrialised countries have recently experienced more or less dramatic ozone episodes during the summer months, which are detrimental to human health and plant growth. As for climate changes, the considerable increase in the concentration of greenhouse gases, including CO₂, over the last 50 years, has apparently been responsible for a 0.3°C to 0.6°C increase in the average temperature. Although the problem is a world-wide one, the industrialised countries, though they represent only 20% of the world's population, nevertheless produce 60% of CO₂ emissions, and emission levels per inhabitant are much higher (six-fold) than those of developing countries.

For the marine environment, the description of the international situation refers to the case of the North Sea, a particularly productive ecosystem which has been heavily subjected to pressure from human activities, including those in its catchment area. Noticeable evolutions recorded as far as the North Sea is concerned include the gradual cessation of a number of types of pollution (including incineration, dumping and direct discharge), an encouraging but still insufficient decrease in air-borne deposits of a number of high-priority hazardous substances, a slight decrease in nitrogen dumping and, as a consequence, difficulties in combatting eutrophication², as well as the threat to stocks of many species of commercially valuable fish.

2. The national situation

Over the last 30 or 40 years, the factors influencing consumption patterns have included the reduction in the size of families, increased incomes, sociological phenomena (such as increasing individualism and an increase in the value placed on time), the evolution of infrastructures and the development of certain commercial practices (such as marketing and consumer credit). As a consequence, the volume of consumption has increased considerably and the structure of household consumption patterns has changed. Above all, expenditure has increased on services and on a series of non-primary goods and services such as transport, health care, culture and leisure, travelling and catering expenses, as well as finance services. These changes, together with greater access to health services, have generally contributed to better living conditions for those affected by them, and have had the effect of determining a certain "consumption standard" or consumption pattern. However, not everybody has the same access to this standard of living. Disparities have increased for instance between the savings capacity and quality of consumption of those with the lowest incomes and those with the highest incomes, and in terms of the distribution of consumption between younger and older families. The affluence of "older" families (i.e. over 60) is tending to increase, while that of "young" families (between 20 and 39) is tending to decrease. In addition,

1. United Nations Development Programme
2. Perturbations of the ecosystem functioning caused by nutrient enrichment.

some aspects of consumption patterns have a negative environmental impact due to increased use of natural resources and increasing quantities of waste. Changes in consumption patterns in the food, equipment and transport sectors also clearly illustrate these trends.

These consumption patterns have a normative impact on the integration capacity of those in society who have no access to them. That impact translates into the phenomenon of social exclusion and poverty. From a strictly financial viewpoint, the legal poverty level in Belgium corresponds to a minimum existence income level (minimex), which is the minimum legal income guaranteed by the State to people with insufficient means of existence. Since the early nineties, the number of such people has constantly increased (by 68% between 1990 and 1998). There were 80,000 such people in 1998, or 0.8% of the population. If we consider all minimexed people (children, dependents, etc.), those living on the verge of the legal poverty level represented 2.4% of the population in 1998. If one uses the empirical standards established by the EU, the level is higher: the number of people living in poverty is estimated to be 6.6%, while 13.9% live in insecure conditions. Poverty and social exclusion can indeed be observed and felt in various areas, such as consumption, employment, education and health. The increasing inequalities observed in the distribution of incomes and personal assets, the high level of low-income indebted households, the increase in unemployment and persistent inequalities in education are all factors that increase the risk of poverty. As far as health is concerned, it has been shown that people with low incomes have greater health problems, as a result of which they may be excluded from professional life.

The current consumption patterns are the source of numerous forms of atmospheric pollution (ozone and climate changes) and affect the marine environment.

- During the summers of 1989, 1990, 1994 and 1995, ozone concentrations often exceeded EU health protection limits. In 1994 there was an excess death toll of 1,226 people, 80.8% of whom were elderly people (aged 65 and over)¹, during a heat wave in Belgium between 27 June and 7 August, in which extreme temperatures were coupled with unusually high ozone concentrations. The main precursors of ozone are nitrogen oxide (NO_x), non-methane-containing volatile organic components (VOC_s), carbon monoxide (CO) and methane (CH₄). The first three of these gases are mainly due to emission from transport and industry, whereas CH₄ is mainly related to agricultural activities. From 1990 to 1996, emissions of NO_x, VOC_s, and CH₄ decreased, but these reductions seem to have been insufficient to prevent further ozone episodes.
- As regards the factors responsible for climate change, the three main sources of greenhouse gas emissions are industry (50%), the urban sector (17%) and transport (15%). Since 1983 a slight but persistent upwards trend has been observed in greenhouse gas emissions. Between 1990 and 1996, these emissions increased by 9.3% (+10.7% for CO₂). In the absence of appropriate measures and an appropriate policy, emissions in 2010 would be 22% higher than in 1990.

1. By extra deaths during the ozone episodes of the summer of 1994 is meant the difference between the actual number of deaths and the predicted number of deaths during the summer period. The predicted number of deaths is calculated on the basis of the number of deaths during the previous summers (1985 to 1993). The ozone concentration in the air, by contrast with other variables, is correlated with the extra deaths. *Impact des épisodes de pollution de l'air par l'ozone et des températures élevées sur la santé en Belgique*, Demuth Cl. e.a., CELINE-IRCEL, December 1996.

As regards the marine environment, a significant drop has been noted in the emission of those hazardous substances whose decrease has been regarded as a priority. However, these encouraging results should not conceal the fact that the reduction objectives agreed on during the North Sea Conferences are only intermediate objectives. Other hazardous substances which are not yet regarded as a priority are creating problems, and will be added to the list of the 36 priority substances. In this context, the increase in overall sales of pesticides in Belgium is worrying. The reductions recorded in the nutrient loads have been lower than expected. The case of nitrogen is illustrative: while there has been a large decrease in nitrogen emissions from industrial sources, agricultural and domestic emissions have only slightly decreased. As for fishing sector, although it seems of little importance macroeconomically speaking, it has a highly harmful environmental impact.

This set of indicators thus not only measures the state and evolution of economic, social and environmental factors in connection with the topics under consideration, but also suggests a series of mutual interactions based upon the DPSIR model (without necessarily being able to measure them quantitatively). This overview has thus drawn attention to a series of trends which must be reversed; the second function of the report is to investigate the responses that have hitherto been made to these issues by federal policy.

D. Federal sustainable development policy

The federal sustainable development policy conducted by the Belgian federal government from early 1992 to June 1998 inclusive may be described and analysed in two main steps:

- the first step situates federal policy measures in the national and international context specific to the studied theme;
- the second and longer step deals with the contents of policy for the four chosen core themes. It constitutes a description and an analysis, but not an actual assessment¹.

Regarding the policy goals for these core themes, the same difficulty of proceeding from the abstract to the concrete appears that we encountered in A.1. At present, many long-term sustainable development policy goals remain far too abstract with respect to the four themes. They relate to a *wholesome environment* and *human health* (environmental themes), *sustainable consumption* (changing consumption patterns) and *human dignity* (fighting poverty and social exclusion). Although it is hard to translate these policy goals into concrete measures, the policies related to these themes (core policies) are nonetheless described and analysed in sufficient detail to provide the reader of this first report an overall view of political progress since Rio.

1. Once a Federal Sustainable Development Plan exists, policy that has been conducted in order to achieve the plan's objectives will be evaluated in future reports.

1. The framework for federal core policies

The international context in which sustainable development policy measures are put in place differs for each topic:

- for efforts to combat poverty and social exclusion, there is an international framework and international commitments; these are binding in a political sense rather than in a legal one, however;
- by contrast, policy relating to protection of the atmosphere and the marine environment sits within an international framework that is strengthened by legally binding conventions such as Rio and its follow-up in the form of protocols such as the Kyoto protocol;
- as regards federal policy related to changing consumption and production patterns, the European and international context simultaneously encourages moves towards sustainable consumption, and brings restrictions via the current form of competition rules and the protection of individual consumers' rights and liberties.

During the past period a series of instruments have been introduced (e.g. the law of 5 May 1997, the Coordination Committee of the environmental international policy and the designation of an ambassador for the environment and sustainable development) which will enable Belgium in future to make more of a contribution to the development of this international framework aiming at sustainable development.

As regards domestic policy, the report makes a strictly analytical distinction between two main categories of policy:

- the “core policy” for each of the four areas dealt with in the report and
- the “supporting” policies, i.e. other areas of federal governmental policy with an indirect influence on the core policy. Thus, for instance, powers with regard to energy, transport and agriculture need to be used in order to successfully conduct an atmospheric protection policy.

A fundamental analysis of these two policy categories at federal level during a period from 1992 to 1998 makes it clear that federal policy as regards sustainable development for the chosen areas has three main functions to fulfil: co-ordination, regulation and support for the core policy.

a. Co-ordination, consultation and co-operation

The federal government has an important co-ordination role for both the core policies and the supporting policies. In the structure of a federal state, the federal, regional and community authorities have complementary powers for the implementation of a sustainable development policy. As far as social and environmental themes are concerned, the co-ordination of federal actions with those of the regions and communities has represented an important element of the efforts made up to now. Consultation structures have been created in the form of interministerial conferences or co-ordination structures between administrations and, in the case of efforts to combat poverty, a formula for permanent co-operation has been developed in the form of co-operation agreements.

b. Regulation

The federal government also has significant powers to give concrete shape to the core and supporting policies. Among other things, these involve defining the objectives of each type of policy and assigning the appropriate means for conducting it.

Although the ultimate objectives of the areas dealt with in this report are taken more seriously today than in 1992 (see point D), they have so far not been translated into adequate intermediate objectives that are scientifically and socially acceptable. Possible political interventions are situated both at core policy level (e.g. a minimum income level and product standards) and at supporting policy level (e.g. social security contributions and energy pricing).

c. Supporting core policies

Core policies develop within a more or less favourable context, depending on the support or lack of support provided by a series of other so-called "horizontal" or "transversal" policies. Among other things, the report highlights the potential role of the following four policy areas (the order in which they are presented bears no relation to their respective importance).

i. Scientific research

The federal government can stimulate research in matters falling within its areas of competence and orient it towards sustainable development. The report emphasises the sustainable development dimension that characterises the major "Scientific support programme for sustainable development policy" that was launched by the federal government in 1997, as well as certain previous research programmes.

ii. Budget

Budget possibilities largely define the federal policy's potential. Although there are certainly other factors that explain the low priority given to sustainable development projects, the budget latitude imposed by the Maastricht standards has to a great extent influenced the context in which the core policies studied in this report have been formulated and applied.

iii. The tax system

The federal government can use various types of tax instrument in order to achieve core policy objectives. The report shows that as far as environmental goals are concerned, the main measures that have been adopted involve a reform of the tax system for energy and transport. These measures have had an impact on energy consumption and on CO₂ emissions, but have failed to compensate for the world-wide fall in energy prices. There have been no major changes to income tax in favour of social redistribution since the reform of personal tax in the late eighties.

iv. Supervision and enforcement

The federal government has at its disposal significant supervisory and enforcement powers for existing laws. The police and the judicial system are areas of federal competence. The report shows that this function could be usefully reinforced, particularly for marine environmental protection.

2. Federal policy content

a. Combatting poverty and social exclusion

The Ministry of Social Integration was responsible for anti-poverty policy in the 1992-1995 government. In the 1995-1999 government, this portfolio was given to the Secretary of State for Social Integration, Environment and Security.

The government of 1992-1995 announced in its governmental declaration the drawing up of a General Report on Poverty (GRP). This GRP was made in collaboration with organisations representing people living in conditions of poverty. Under this same government, an act was introduced in favour of an Emergency programme for a more cohesive society. This law contained a number of measures including the introduction of the so-called integration contract for people with a minimum income level, the repeal of the law restricting vagrancy and begging, and increased financial involvement by the federal government in towns with an exceptionally high concentration of people receiving a minimum existence income level allowance (Minimex). The 1995-1999 government decided to adopt the GRP as the starting point for its own policy. This was largely developed during the course of four inter-departmental conferences for social integration (IDCSIS) – held approximately once a year from 1995 to 1998 – and a special ministerial council on poverty and social exclusion. These IDCSIS have adopted a series of measures proposed in the GPR. Finally, to give anti-poverty policy a more permanent character, a co-operation agreement was made between the federal government and the regions.

These anti-poverty measures, most of which were discussed in the IDCSIS, concern various sectors. In the health sector, measures were adopted to create easier access to medical care and reduce the individual financial cost for health care for certain categories of people (including those on a minimum income allowance). The pension policy had two simultaneous objectives. On the one hand there was the principle of equal treatment for men and women (via the application of EU directives on this matter) and on the other hand there was an attempt to reduce the foreseeable supplementary expenses associated with the retirement of the post-war “baby boom” generation. These two goals were achieved by pension system reform (measures being taken regarding the pension calculation system and the minimum entitlement per career year, among others). As regards employment, it is obvious that being in paid employment reduces the risk of poverty. Measures to stimulate the demand for employment and to improve the employability of the unemployed and measures affecting the labour supply were adopted. But although reducing social security contributions aims to increase employment (by reducing the wage cost), it can jeopardise the financing of the social security system, which represents a very important safety net against poverty. More and more people (temporarily) dropping out of the employment market for various reasons are receiving a social security allowance. Considering the potential financial difficulties for the social security system, this group of people remain at risk of poverty. It also seems that unemployed people or on a minimum income are increasingly being (re-)integrated into a non-regular employment circuit. While this may have positive aspects as far as efforts to combat poverty are concerned, the question is whether those people can be brought back into regular employment circuit, where the risk of poverty or lack of security is significantly lower. As far as justice and security are concerned, measures were adopted in the areas of placing children, security contracts and social contracts, legal aid and victim support. Significant measures were adopted by the federal government against excessive debt, and guaranteeing minimum energy supplies and minimum transportation services (including social fares), in the framework of its economic, energy and transport policies. Measures were adopted in the agricultural sector

in support of farmers whose incomes are insufficiently secure and which transfer certain agricultural products to charitable and other organisations. Generally speaking, measures were also adopted to simplify administrative documents.

It is impossible as yet to say how far these measures contribute to reducing and to the ultimate goal which is eradicating poverty and precariousness. Alertness is still called for. The problem of poverty cannot be contained within one specific competence or in a particular sector of society, and it confounds any attempt to compartmentalise it. Meanwhile, in spite of the political efforts being analysed in this report, combating poverty still remains a marginal concern for policy and socio-economic decision-

making¹. Making that combat a permanent policy option in all social and economic sectors is thus more desirable than ever.

b. Protecting the atmosphere

Protecting the atmosphere was mainly the responsibility of the Ministers, and later the Secretary of State, of the Environment. The fragmentation of powers (e.g. between federal and regional levels) made it necessary to create co-ordination and consultation bodies in order to practically organise policy. The policy considered in this report essentially relates to the emission of carbon dioxide (CO₂, the main gas responsible for the greenhouse effect) and of ozone.

A national reduction programme for the emissions of CO₂ (the CO₂ Programme) was adopted in 1994. Though ambitious in its objective (to reduce CO₂ emissions by 5% between 1990 and 2000) the highly uneven quantification of the adopted policy measures means that it is impossible to say whether the set objective has been achieved. No plan whatsoever was adopted for reducing emissions of other greenhouse gases. Moreover, given that most of the measures have not been implemented (as a result of the failure of EU plans for an energy/CO₂ tax), the 5% reduction will not be achieved. Nonetheless, co-ordination and consultation structures between the federal government, the communities and the regions were created to draw up and implement this programme. It was within the framework of these structures that the "Communication" for Belgium to the secretariat of the Framework convention on climate change was established.

A plan as addressing the problem of tropospheric ozone was also adopted and, unlike the CO₂ Plan, it was periodically updated. Decreasing the concentration of tropospheric ozone requires emissions of ozone precursor gases to be restricted. The objectives of this plan are either being met with difficulty (in the case of stabilisation of NO_x emissions) or probably not being met (in the case of the 30% decrease between 1990 and 1999 of emissions of volatile organic compounds (VOC_s)). In the case of VOC_s, however, Belgium is a signatory to an international binding agreement. Here again, all measures of the plan have not been carried out and there is no reason to believe that even if they had all been carried out they would have been sufficient to reduce VOC_s emissions sufficiently. There is no quantification of the expected result of these measures of the plan as a whole. This makes it doubtful whether this plan can achieve the ultimate goal of reducing tropospheric ozone and eliminating ozone episodes by 2005.

1. The Cabinet of the Secretary of State for Safety, Social Integration and the Environment (1997). Naar een kwaliteitsvolle maatschappelijk integratie. Nota van Algemeen Beleid (Towards social integration. A General Policy Document)

Measures aiming at a decrease in CO₂ emissions often also have the effect of decreasing tropospheric ozone, and vice versa. They are thus treated together in the following. The main measures were adopted in the energy sector. They involved – via the national infrastructure plan – promoting the production of electricity from renewable energy sources, helping rationalise the use of energy, and cogeneration. The changes in the electricity infrastructure (which are not covered in the national CO₂ programme) have also contributed to reducing CO₂ emissions. Measures have also been taken in the field of public finance, such as a special tax on certain energy products. The impact of these measures has been significant (according to calculations by The Federal Planning Bureau): CO₂ emissions have decreased by 1% in comparison with the level that would have been reached without these measures. Other supporting measures have been adopted in the areas of justice (improving the supervision of speed limits), health (decreasing dioxin emissions) and agriculture (limiting the authorized utilizations use of methylbromide). In the transport sector, the following measures are also contributing to the achievement of the objectives: catalytic converter premiums, support for the European process of reinforcing diesel vehicle standards, the management contract for the Belgian railways which calls for a 2% increase in supply and the limitation of tax deductions for the cost of transport by car between home and the working place. But all these measures, although necessary, have had an insufficient impact with regard to commitments in the area of atmospheric protection, and several promised and necessary measures have not been adopted. These shortcomings are the more striking in the transport sector: there are no tax incentives for buying low-emission vehicles, no tax differentials as regards external costs, no reinforcement of exhaust gas checks, no implementation of the STAGE 1 directive *regarding the limitation of the emissions from mobile fuel tanks*, no obligation for companies to draw up transport plans and no federal mobility plan.

Though ambitious by its goal, the atmospheric policy was not a political priority and was hindered by the lack of human and budgetary resources. A scientific support programme was launched, but its link with the political decision-making process has not yet been implemented. The reorientation of different federal policy areas (energy, transport, health care and employment) was insufficient to improve the state of the atmosphere. Other possible forms of support for the atmosphere policy from the tax system (even in the absence of a European tax system), justice and economy were also insufficiently exploited. Such a situation could be damaging in the long run, given that Belgium will have to bring about even greater reductions in greenhouse gas emissions in the future.

c. Protecting the marine environment

The Ministers, and later the Secretary of State, of the Environment were responsible for the marine environment protection policy. There is no concrete action plan for this area, but given the international nature of pressures on the marine environment, a series of international conventions and agreements constitute the framework for this policy.

Co-ordination between the federal government and the regions for the preparation and implementation of international conventions (e.g. commitments with regard to nitrogen and other dangerous substances and European directives regarding efforts to combat water pollution) has been improved. Co-ordination seems necessary for the application of certain existing international arrangements (e.g. the common European fishing policy), in view of the worrying condition of the North Sea. But improving co-ordination has not decreased the need to integrate protection of the marine environment into the overall framework of the other policies. Two targeted instruments which might prove useful for such integration have been developed:

- the quantification of sector-specific emissions for various hazardous substances. This illustrates the interdependence of economic and environmental aspects and could constitute an instrument in support of policy decisions to ensure compliance with international conventions for the reduction of emissions of priority substances;
- a legal framework for the protection of marine environment. The decrees providing for the enforcement of the law on protecting marine environment should allow for the development of sustainable management of marine areas under Belgian jurisdiction.

Policies regarding the economy, health, finance, transport, agriculture and energy all contain important levers which could impact pressures on the marine environment. Generally speaking, though, the integration of policy in these areas has been limited during the period under consideration. Protection of the marine environment has been taken little account of in economic policy; the few measures likely to reduce pressure on the marine environment were adopted out of considerations of consumer safety. Other indirect measures regarding hazardous substances were taken for health care reasons. Agricultural policy has introduced several measures which may make it possible to reduce pressure on the marine environment. The means allocated to these measures, however, were minimal compared with the general extent of farming subsidies. Additionally, agriculture uses a lot of pesticides and has not succeeded in reducing its dumping of nitrates in the water system. Worse still, tax policy has excluded agricultural pesticides from the application area of environmental taxes. Transport policy was mainly directed towards economic goals and did not take protection of the marine environment into consideration. This lack of integration goes hand in hand with a low level of monitoring activities and the failure to penalise environmental violations relating to the marine environment on the part of the judicial system. The need remains for increased collaboration between administrations and the public prosecutor's office and for the elaboration of a legal procedure policy with clear priorities. On this last point, establishing the evidence for a violation is often difficult and in reality leads to a situation where polluters go unpunished. As far as scientific research policy is concerned, a research programme was specifically dedicated to the sustainable management of the North Sea.

The marine environment, as the ultimate dumping place for most pollutants emitted as a result of human activities, is affected for better or for worse by most policies. Accordingly, a policy that lays the emphasis on protection "downstream" is unlikely to be effective. Improved integration and awareness of marine environment protection within other policy areas have been lacking.

d. Changing consumption patterns

The policy aiming at making consumption patterns sustainable is a new policy that is not assigned to a particular minister. It is more or less by default that it forms part of the tasks of the Secretary of State of the Environment, who is responsible for sustainable development policy. These factors may explain the fact that hitherto there has been no full-blown specific policy in this area. Different measures have been launched by different ministers to change consumer behaviour, including environmental taxes, a European environmental label, a commission for environmental labelling and advertisement and the introduction of an environmental management system in public departments, but there is no coherent, clear strategy in terms of objectives and means.

Other measures were taken by various departments to help change consumption patterns. Generally they seem inadequate to bring about a real change in the consumption of targeted goods and services. In health policy, the most significant measures related to the protection of consumers against dangerous substances in foods and efficient rationalisation of health care expenditure. In the transport sector some measures were taken to encourage the use of public transport, but there is no overall philosophy in this area as yet. As far as environmental policy is concerned, the adoption of a law on product standards, that was under preparation during these years, represents a legal instrument that may directly or indirectly contribute to a change in consumption patterns. Measures adopted in the context of energy and agricultural policy mainly aimed at making certain production patterns more sustainable, and this could indirectly have a positive influence on consumption. In the field of public finance, tax changes were introduced mainly with a view to encouraging more sustainable energy consumption and use of transport, but these changes have proved too restricted to bring about real changes in consumption patterns. Finally, in the field of economic policy extensive efforts were made to improve the protection of consumers' rights.

As a whole, indirect and community consequences associated with consumption patterns (such as environment pollution and lack of respect for employees' rights) have only been taken into consideration to a limited extent within policy measures adopted during the studied period. Yet such an integration is needed so that the citizens can benefit from a framework of economic signals and sufficient information to ensure that they carry out their individual responsibility for ensuring sustainable development (see point B.2.3).

3. The integration of federal policy

The OECD's observation that the integration of environmental preoccupations in sectorial policy is still in its initial stage in Belgium underlines the country's peculiar situation owing to its federal state structure¹. The distribution of powers makes it more difficult to devise sustainable development conditions in certain areas that require virtually permanent co-operation with the regions and the communities. This need for integration contributes to the occasional creation of complementary solidarity mechanisms between the federal government, federal entities and the local authorities.

But the method that has been adopted has also made evident the difficulty of integration of policy areas within the federal government. By distinguishing core sustainable development policy from policies supporting the core policy, it has shown that it is impossible for the former to achieve significant results without calling for considerable efforts of co-ordination and regulation from supporting policy areas. Confronted with such challenges, the federal government itself recognises the difficulty of integration. Among other things, it has recognised that in spite of all the preparatory work for a policy combatting poverty and social exclusion, the measures that have been adopted still remain marginal with respect to the big socio-economic decisions.

The co-ordination and integration mechanisms of federal policy were thus either insufficient in number or lacking in the logistical means to overcome departmental compartmentalisation. The Interdepartmental Commission for Sustainable Development (ICSD) created in September 1997 was an internal consultation mechanism conducive to increased integration. The most significant integration instrument is the

1. OECD (1998), *Environmental Performance Reviews - Belgium*. Paris, page 156.

four-year Sustainable Development Plan (see point B.4) prepared and monitored by this commission. However, if this remains the only answer, it will be insufficient.

To insure an integration of specific sustainable development policies, the distribution of federal departmental and ministerial powers should also reflect more emphatically than hitherto the central role of the sustainable development project as part of a series of problems. Hitherto, the environment and central responsibility in matters of sustainable development have been in the hands of one and the same member of the federal government team¹. Without this combination of powers, the lack of integration of environmental components in other policy areas would probably have been even more pronounced. However, this double competence would probably be turned to better account if it were in the hands of a minister with a more central function in the government².

E. Prospective

As required by the law, one part of this report deals with future prospects for sustainable development. The starting point here is the continued existence of numerous points of scientific uncertainty, as regards both the working of the environmental, social, economic and institutional systems and the ways in which these different systems interact. Scientific knowledge can of course contribute to reduce such uncertainties, but it will never eradicate them altogether. Moreover, a series of uncertainties regarding future collective action (including government policy) also results from differences of vision with respect to present developments and future risks. Uncertainty involves risks, which are perceived differently in society depending on one's perception of society's resilience, the environment's absorption capacity, the possibility of working out technological solutions in time and so on. These differing perceptions of the risks may be schematised in what is called "perspectives grounding action" by the Scientific Council for Governmental Policy (WRR) in the Netherlands³.

In models generally used for long-term projections, these perceptions are basically speaking only implicitly taken into account at best. However, if a model-based long-term projection should offer elements for a society-wide debate on future actions, the method used should take actual behaviour patterns into account as closely as possible with regard to the future and the possible risks, through explicit consideration of a series of "perspectives grounding action". Each of these is then used as the basis for relevant assumptions, which are treated as input for particular scenarios of community action (including government policy). The long-term effects of each of these scenarios can then be calculated with the help of global, "integrated" long-term models⁴. The point of such an exercise is to try to imagine the economic, social and environmental impacts that may result from given attitudes to particular risks ("perspectives grounding action"). This way of thinking makes it possible to examine the consequences of each of these perspectives and contribute to the debate in society on future actions. However, such integrated long-term models, which seek to explicitly take into account basic attitudes towards development issues, do not yet exist in Belgium.

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1. However, in 1995 certain aspects of sustainable development were assigned to the Minister for Scientific Policy and the Secretary of State for Development Cooperation.
 2. Most of the significant levers (taxation, energy, transport, agriculture and so on) for reducing pressure on the environment or applying a sustainable development policy are currently the responsibility of other, higher-ranking members of the government. This form of "formal subordination" of the environment and sustainable development with respect to other policy areas seems to reflect the priority assigned to the integration of the components of sustainable development.
 3. See WRR (1994). *Duurzame risico's: een blijvend gegeven. Rapporten aan de Regering 44*. The Hague: SDU
 4. Integration means that the interaction between the different models used is taken into account.

1. Outline of an integrated long-term approach

This report makes an initial attempt to outline what could bring such a modelling exercise to a reflection on sustainable development. In line with the choice of sustainable development topics in this report, the prospects have been defined on the basis of the perception of the risks imposed on society in connection with changing production and consumption patterns, of environmental risks for the atmosphere and the marine environment and of social risks connected with poverty and social exclusion.

Each perspective is thus the result of a different weighting of these economic, environmental and social risks. Three possible perspectives of action are schematised in this report:

- “Utilising”: in this perspective, environmental and social risks are regarded as rather low, while risks associated with making significant changes to production and consumption patterns are considered to be very high. Changing production and consumption patterns fundamentally in order to reach social and environmental objectives is thus regarded as undesirable. Policy will thus adopt a wait-and-see attitude in environmental and social areas, and basically count on the internal dynamic of economic activities to increase prosperity and deliver the necessary technological solutions.
- “Managing”: in this perspective, environmental and social risks are regarded as high. Risks associated with significant changes in consumption patterns are also regarded as high, while those linked with adjustments in production patterns are regarded as low. Accordingly, in this perspective policy is aimed at changing production patterns in order to attain environmental and social objectives. As far as technological development is concerned, policy emphasises the development of cleaner production technologies and materials.
- “Safeguarding”: in this perspective, environmental and social risks are regarded as very high, while risks associated with making significant changes to production and consumption patterns are considered to be rather low. A policy aiming at changing consumption and production patterns is considered to be acceptable in order to avoid environmental and social risks. As far as technology is concerned, policy is directed mainly towards reusing rare resources and renewable energies.

2. Elaborating perspectives within thematic scenarios

The three forms of perceptions of the risks defined above and the corresponding perspectives constitute a broad enough framework¹ for kicking off a debate within society. In what follows, basic assumptions are deduced for particular scenarios relating to the report’s core topics.

- Middle or long-term projections of consumption in Belgium (up to 2010) show a continued increase in consumption. Some trends within the factors that determine consumption and its elements (like the growth in per-capita income) indicate that there is room for manoeuvre to change consumption patterns. Examples, relating to subsoil water and food, for each of which three brief scenarios are sketched out, illustrate the diversity of possible collective actions (especially of a political nature) which might have an effect on consumption patterns.

1. Other types of configuration may of course be considered, such as those on the basis of a much more serious estimation of environmental risks than of social risks, or vice versa.

- The current projections for a series of driving forces indicators for poverty and exclusion show that these phenomena are not getting weaker. Different assessments of the social risks linked with poverty and social exclusion on the one hand, and the risks associated with adjusting existing systems (such as the social security system) and with calling into question our western ways of life (consumption patterns included) on the other hand, produce different scenarios for collective action (e.g. of political nature).
- As far as the atmosphere is concerned and more specifically for what regards CO₂ emissions decrease needed to tackle the greenhouse effect, projections made in a “business-as-usual” scenario points to a continuation of the present growth of these emissions in contravention of the Kyoto Conference commitments. The three scenarios for community actions (including political action) correspond to different perspectives in, among others, the following areas: climate change, the physical exhaustion of fossil energy sources, the development of production technology (e.g. regarding the safety of nuclear technology and the availability of sufficient renewable energy sources) and the adjustment of consumption patterns.
- As for the theme of marine environment, three scenarios are developed with respect to the dumping of hazardous substances, eutrophication and overfishing. Each of these scenarios also reflects different community actions in response to different assessments of the ecological risks in these three areas on the one hand and to the risks associated with significant changes in our production and consumption patterns on the other hand.

F. The role of the major social groups

Agenda 21 calls upon the major social groups (women, young people, immigrants¹, non-government organisations (NGOs), local authorities, employees, employers, scientists and farmers) to participate in the elaboration of sustainable development objectives and policies. Accordingly The Federal Planning Bureau took the initiative of devoting a specific part of this report to this point. This fifth part contains two main sections (to both of which the Federal Council for Sustainable Development (FCSD) has contributed).

- The first section concerns the view held by the major social groups of the concept of sustainable development and of policy in this area. It was based upon a limited survey, conducted within pressing time constraints.
- The second section consists of advice from consultative councils whose work is in the areas covered by the report, and examines the approach formulated up to now.

1. Agenda 21 talks about "indigenous peoples". These are taken into account in Agenda 21 because it relates to ethnic minorities who may suffer from discrimination as regards access to work, housing and respect for their religious and cultural particularity. In Belgium, this definition may be applied to the immigrant communities who will therefore replace the "indigenous peoples" in the typology of social groups dealt with in the federal reports based on Agenda 21.

1. Requests and views of the major social groups

In connection with the drawing up of this report, specific organisations representing these groups received a questionnaire asking them to describe their views on sustainable development, their standpoint concerning policy priorities required in order to achieve sustainable development, their actions in this area (participation) and the way in which their proposals were taken into account by the authorities (involvement). The groups represented in consultative councils expressed in their responses to the questionnaire their interest in the issue of sustainable development. Although the definition of sustainable development differs from one group to another and is not always based upon a precise text, what they call for, by contrast, are almost identical. They are as follows:

- Calls for more involvement for the major social groups in preparing sustainable development policy.
- Calls for a more coherent and better organised legal framework.
- Calls for instruments (environmental taxes, subsidies or sectorial agreements) to bring about changes in consumption and production patterns.
- Calls for the implementation of existing laws and signed conventions.

Major social groups also referred to specific actions they had taken in favour of sustainable development (publications, pilot projects, etc.) and to their investment in the consultation process. However it should be noticed that certain groups that were not part of the consultative councils (women, young people, and immigrants) were less interested in the questionnaire.

The FCSD responded to the same questionnaire as the major social groups. Its vision of sustainable development is based upon the international Rio texts and its participation includes awareness campaigns (including conferences and symposiums). The FCSD is involved in preparing specific policy measures and provides advices on topics related to sustainable development. Its advices are taken into account to differing degrees.

2. The advice of the major social groups on the areas of the report

The report contains an outline of the advice of the consultative councils (the National Labour Council, Central Economy Council, and the Consumption Council) on the themes of the report. The advice relates to working conditions, travel between home and work, employment status, environmental taxes, product standards, social labels, lending and indebtedness, and product information on labels. It shows that the integration of social and economic policy is at present further advanced than the integration of environmental and economic policy and much further advanced than the integration of environmental and social policy.

- Advices in favour of more integration of social and economic policy measures are very common, specifically as far as the activities of the National Labour Council is concerned. All groups and councils accept that social protection and economic measures should take the existing constraints from both sides into account. However some ideas, such as social labelling, though recommended by the advice councils and major social groups, are still at the preparatory stage in the law-making.

- As for the integration of environmental and economic policies, this is accepted better than before the Rio Conference. But environmental objectives are still regarded as subordinate to economic objectives. The decisive factors in any potential change in consumption behaviour are thus the financial costs that substitution products might entail. By contrast, the idea that economic policies should justify their environmental costs never figures in their advice.
- The issue of the integration of environmental and social policies did not elicit much advice. This type of policy measure, with simultaneous environmental and social objectives, depends to a large extent on the regions, the communities and the local authorities. For example, this is the case for environmental education and sustainable development education. But other links such as those existing between employment objectives and the environment have so far not been adequately explored either by the government or by the social partners.
- Last but not least, the integration of the three types of policies the FCSD is working on is a complex exercise. But, as the organ in which the most different kinds of sensitivity are brought together, the FCSD is best placed to encourage this integration.

3. Integration of the advisory function at federal level

On the federal level, the integration of consultation on the different components of sustainable development (environmental, social and economic) takes place within the FCSD. The composition of the other federal councils is limited to the traditional negotiation partners within the social dialogue, and they have no mandate as far as sustainable development is concerned. There is no co-ordination between their activities and those of the FCSD.

The amount and the complexity of the questions involved justify this segmentation of decision-making structures. But it could also be one of the reasons why no significant progress is being made in practice in the integration of policy measures and why there has been no discernible reinforcement of the role of the major social groups since Rio. Formulas must therefore be devised for enhancing the coherence between the activities of the different advisory councils as they formulate the viewpoint of civil society with regard to the numerous challenges of sustainable development which are common to the activities of these councils.

G. Towards sustainable development?

Two cautionary notes should be sounded with regard to the new approach developed by the report. Firstly, the subject matter is extensive, new and riddled with so many uncertainties that it is at this stage impossible to both make a comprehensive description for the various problems and properly evaluate the political responses made to them so far. Secondly, it is certainly not the intention to use currently available information to put those with political responsibility on trial retroactively for their past activities. This synthesis is thus offered as a preliminary response to the question posed in the title of the report, by stimulating debate on the future and supporting the preparation of decisions that will bring about more coherence and effectiveness in policy with regard to the areas considered.

The report reveals indeed that the actions conducted at federal level in Belgium during the period 1992-1998 on the core themes of this report only meet the requirements of sustainable development in an uneven fashion, and are for the most part insufficient, despite the progress that has been made at the institutional and conceptual levels.

Decision-making in recent years remained often characterised by:

- A failure to frame federal policy options within the context of the challenge of sustainable development for the entire planet.
- A lack of long-term view, resulting in a lack of mid-term objectives goals aiming at altering the course of current unsustainable trends within our present development, or, when such objectives do exist, a lack of means to achieve them.
- Difficulties with integrating the economic, environmental and social components of sustainable development and the various powers connected with the sustainable development project. These difficulties are due to lack of consultation and co-ordination, sometimes as a result of a lack of adequate structures, and sometimes because of existing bodies being inadequately staffed.
- A failure to take uncertainties regarding the long-term repercussions of our present development model sufficiently into account.
- Insufficient efforts to clarify development options on a participatory basis.

However, this report has shown that the transition process towards sustainable development:

- commits Belgium to a society-wide project whose challenges should not be underestimated at either the planetary level or more locally;
- implies the adoption of realistic intermediate objectives within a clearly defined long-term perspective, accompanied with the necessary means to ensure their achievement;
- requires improved integration of social, environmental and economic affairs, among others at the institutional level;
- recognises the existence of scientific uncertainties and aims at improved interaction between scientific knowledge and the management of serious and unavoidable risks;
- requires clarification, within a broad participation process, of the development options chosen by Belgian society.

The implementation of sustainable development can thus offer Belgian citizens new reasons for solidarity in the face of the responsibilities and, ultimately, the common goals shared by all inhabitants of the planet.

