



Belgian Federal Council for Sustainable Development (FRDO-CFDD)

Second advice for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg

- **Requested by Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt in a letter dated 29 April 2002**
- **Prepared by the Sustainability Strategies Working Group**
- **Approved by the General Assembly on 18 June 2002 (see Annex 1)**

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1. Introduction

- [1] The main aim of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg is to foster the accelerated application of the Rio Conventions and Agenda 21. For that reason, in its preliminary advice for the World Summit, the FRDO-CFDD primarily focussed on the federal government's policy on sustainable development in Belgium. If our country does its Rio homework at national level, its authority to do so all the more in the international arena will be all the stronger.
- [2] In this second advice for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, in line with the prime minister's request, the Council will place greater emphasis on the contribution made by civil society in the context of partnerships or the so-called 'Type 2 outcomes' of Johannesburg.

2. Political commitments for sustainable development

- [3] The Council proposes that Type 1 outcomes (especially the "Political Declaration" and the "Action Programme") should be the most important result of the World Summit in Johannesburg. Partnerships (Type 2 or voluntary commitments) must not be allowed to take the place of these political agreements. They may only underpin and complement actual political commitments. These define the framework within which economic, social and environmental activities can develop in a sustainable manner. The Council wishes to stress that the different actions undertaken by various *stakeholders* already entail providing specific support for initiatives promoting sustainable development. Sustainable development is a growing concern of organisations, companies and individuals, and the fundamentals and principles of sustainability are being steadily integrated into new projects.
- [4] However, the Council regrets the quantity of energy devoted to Type 2 projects in the course of preparatory international negotiations, without yielding any clear practical results. This could be to the detriment of the investment required in more specific political commitments. Care has to be taken that no partnerships arise that are a form of *window dressing*. Organisations entering into partnerships must conduct a policy that is aimed not merely at making their marginal activities, but also their core activities sustainable.

Win-win-win initiatives by themselves will never succeed in turning around the trend towards an increasingly less sustainable world unless the associated projects are framed within a sustainable political framework. Accordingly, the Council values the efforts made by the Belgian federal government in the preparatory negotiations to arrive at firm political commitments. The Council hopes that these efforts will be continued in the run-up to the World Summit and then at the World Summit itself.

- [5] The Council also hopes that the Action Programme and the Political Declaration in Johannesburg will take account of a number of new international requirements regarding sustainable development. Among other things, the Council highlights the importance of a more democratic organisation in the context of the globalisation of the economy and also the need for more resources to finance development. But in addition to these newly arising international needs, the inconsistencies in today's policy must also be addressed. For example, the Council underscores the harmful consequences for sustainable development of some subsidies and of the privatisation of public goods and basic services in a number of countries. In its preliminary advice for the World Summit in Johannesburg, the FRDO-CFDD set out some policy proposals for a number of these problems. The Council also refers to the decisions taken last year (Brussels, 14 June 2001) at the symposium it organised entitled "Rio+10: the gulf between commitments and policy" (see the proceedings and the FRDO-CFDD website).



3. Partnerships

3.1 The concept of (Type 2) partnerships

- [6] In the Council's view, partnerships for sustainable development between various social actors are extremely important. These partnerships can make the most of the creativity and dynamism displayed by the respective social organisations. They can also produce results within a relatively short space of time. Partnerships are specific consequences of the concept of sustainable development and are open to all. These initiatives can sometimes serve as catalysts for a better policy on sustainable development. In many instances they play an exemplary role both for society and for the government.
- [7] The Council believes that when it comes to entering into partnerships, a maximum effort has to be made to achieve win-win-win situations. However, it must be acknowledged that such a triple-win situation will not always (immediately) be possible. As stated in the Federal Plan on Sustainable Development (paragraph 67), in the short term conflicts may arise between the three pillars of sustainable development. A measure or project that is beneficial for one pillar may be disadvantageous to one or two others. Nonetheless, the Council's plan and members point out that the effects of projects and partnerships on sustainable development have to be viewed in the long term and on a wide scale. When this is done, various projects and partnerships will succeed in improving the situation within all three pillars simultaneously and in a balanced manner.
- [8] Although stand-alone partnerships with a triple-win effect can be of great interest, they tend to be few and far between. Accordingly, no policy on sustainable development can be limited to such partnerships. As a result, the Council deems it important when estimating potential gains not to limit the considerations to any single delimited project. The benefits for society as a whole and in the long run must be taken into account.
- [9] At the same time, the Council emphasises that partnerships for sustainable development consisting of two of the three pillars can also prove extremely valuable without the third pillar losing out in any way.
- [10] Instead of talking about a win-win-win situation, the Council prefers to talk about the integration of the three pillars of sustainable development. As stated in the Federal Plan for Sustainable Development (paragraph 25), the FRDO-CFDD finds that 'sustainable development has to systematically link the social, economic and environmental concerns together with a view to taking them up in coherent strategies'. At the same time the Council would like to emphasise that the environmental and social pillars should really be shored up, albeit without hindering sustainable economic development.
- [11] The members of the Council are of the opinion that partnerships for sustainable development do not necessarily have to involve entirely new projects. Existing projects which undergo renewal from within and are as a result geared more strongly to sustainable development, should be regarded as of equal value. The FRDO-CFDD also thinks it is important that existing partnerships are not just being *relabelled*.
- [12] Not only may the interests of the various partners within a partnership clash; there may also be an imbalance of power between them. The Council believes it is important that the parties in question do not shy away from or deny the existence of any conflicts that arise.

3.2 Criteria for good partnerships for sustainable development

- [13] What follows is not an exhaustive list of criteria, but a number of viewpoints and guidelines that the Council finds very important. In the Council's view, the international WSSD guidelines negotiated at Prepcom 3 and 4 are interesting (the partnerships in question are complementary to Type 1 outcomes and contribute to the further application of Agenda 21; the principles underlying the Rio Declaration and the *Millennium*



Development Goals, were drawn up on a voluntary basis, entail a participative structure and are being developed and extended in an open and transparent manner; they are also new and boast great value added where sustainable development is concerned; they are characterised by integration of the three pillars; they are of international relevance with a view to the participation of local communities (*bottom-up*); are certain of their funding; they have clear, specific goals and a timeframe; and they have an internal mechanism for following up (monitoring) the progress of the project). The Council also finds the following fundamental aspects important, these views being based among other things on the decisions taken by the workshops on partnerships that were organised during the symposium on 'Sustainable production and consumption: a shared responsibility' (Brussels, 24 April 2002) (see the proceedings and the FRDO-CFDD website).

- [14] [i] The various partners within a partnership must strive for complementarity. Partnerships imply a multidisciplinary approach to a specific issue;
[ii] Dialogue: there must be communication between the various *stakeholders* so as to limit prejudices and gain a clear picture of the intentions and commitment of the respective partners;
[iii] Communication on cooperative efforts with the general public is also important: sustainable development must be talked about in a manner that can be readily understood because it is of importance to everyone;
[iv] Transparency: all partners within a partnership must conduct an open policy: whether companies, NGOs, trade unions or governments, the partners must also take responsibility and be liable for their actions ('accountability');
[v] The various partners must be recognised as equals and care must be paid to ensuring that those relations remain on an equal footing;
[vi] All partners must take their responsibility for the project's success.
- [15] The Council would also like to point out that a close eye has to be kept on the application of the guidelines for Type 2 partnerships that are presented on the UN website. The members of the Council fear that otherwise some countries will present large numbers of Type 2 projects as an alibi for the lack of not formal political commitments. The FRDO-CFDD also notes that where the application of guidelines is concerned, a distinction always has to be made between the international, national and local levels. It is also generally true that for lists of model projects, like the WSSD list, clear, robust criteria have to be applied. After all, they are intended to have a demonstrative effect. On the other hand, projects which *stakeholders* do not put forward for an official list may also make a valuable contribution to sustainable development.

3.3 Specific examples or partnerships

- [16] Where specific examples of Belgian projects are concerned, the Council refers to a list of projects on sustainable development that was submitted to it by social organisations in the context of an information and publicity campaign run in preparation for Johannesburg. That list was complemented by partnership projects that were put forward at the recent symposium on 'Sustainable production and consumption: a shared responsibility'. This overview will be sent separately to the prime minister and be available for consultation by any interested members of the respective governments.

The Council would like to point out that it had no time to perform an in-depth analysis or go and see the presented projects for itself. Apart from that, the Council tends towards the belief that it is not the appropriate body to officially screen these projects, since some of its members are themselves involved in them. The Council wishes to avoid serving as both judge and party to the proceedings at the same time.

3.4 Problems and obstacles with partnerships

- [17] Sustainable development does not yet form a general framework for all governments. As a result, some projects are prone to unfair competition, for example from government subsidies for non-sustainable activities.



Some policy choices on sustainable development will bring with them sometimes painful changes and entail certain target groups losing out. The government must take its responsibility in this connection via reconversion programmes.

Many partnerships, including in an international connection, take shape in projects run at local level. In a number of instances the local governments are not at all – or insufficiently – involved, even though they have significant expertise and could in some cases contribute resources.

- [18] On the basis of its own experience as a platform for cooperation between various *stakeholders*, the Council would like to point out a number of obstacles, firstly between different social actors, and secondly between social actors and the government.

[i] In some cases the social groups involved are of different sizes, exert unequal clout, are not equally strong or well-known and are mismatched in terms of their resources. This being so, care must be taken to ensure that the various partners are all fully involved.

[ii] Sometimes there is mistrust between the different actors owing to an insufficient exchange of information. Getting to know each other and becoming aware of each other's problems helps to promote mutual trust, even though such a process takes time.

[iii] The various partners may on occasion differ in their interpretation of what the desired or optimal integration of the economic, social and environmental pillars is, and cooperation may be hampered as a result. Sometimes a partnership is also undermined by the attempts made by one partner to dominate the initiative.

[iv] Some social groups find short-term effects (an immediate payoff) more important; others longer-term effects.

[v] One observation that holds true for all actors is that there is a need for *capacity building* to realise sustainable development programmes and projects.

3.5 The government's role in partnerships

- [19] Governments themselves can also participate in certain partnerships. However, care must be taken to ensure that they continue to serve the general good. Policy on basic services, such as education, health care and public transport, or to do with the provision of environmental services, such as supplying water and waste management, must remain the government's responsibility.

- [20] Expert follow-up and evaluation of the Johannesburg partnerships must be guaranteed, among other things with an eye to promoting the quality of such initiatives and with a view to being capable of learning for future partnerships. At the international level, the *Commission on Sustainable Development* (CSD) would appear to be the appropriate body to ensure this. If the Belgian federal government intends to draw up a national list of model partnerships, it would appear appropriate when testing quality to call upon an expert public or scientific body. As stated above, the Council believes it should not be borne in mind as a candidate itself.

- [21] At the same time, the FRDO-CFDD believes the government should support good Belgian pilot projects where necessary and promote them as *good practice* at international level.

- [22] Finally, the Council believes that if the government regards the various social actors as an important and essential link in the conceptualisation and realisation of a policy on sustainable development, it should also develop a vision regarding the contribution made and role played by these actors within that policy. If the *stakeholders* are merely involved in policymaking on an ad hoc basis, continuity and coherence will suffer as a result.



Annexes

Annex 1. Number of members present and represented with voting rights at the General Assembly on 18 June 2002

3 out of 4 chairman and vice-chairmen

T. Rombouts, A. Panneels, R. Verheyen

all 6 representatives of the non-governmental environmental protection organisations

A. Cliquet (Birdlife Belgium), G. De Schutter (Inter-Environnement Bruxelles, IEB), G. Lejeune (World Wide Fund for Nature, WWF), R. Moreau (Greenpeace Belgium), T. Snoy (Inter-Environnement Wallonie, IEW), S. Van Hauwermeiren (Bond Beter Leefmilieu, BBL)

2 out of 6 representatives of the non-governmental development cooperation organisations

B. Bode (Broederlijk Delen), G. Fremout (Vlaams Overleg Sustainable development, VODO)

both representatives of the non-governmental consumer protection organisations

C. Rousseau (Centre de Recherche et d'Information des Organisations des Consommateurs, CRIOC), P. Van Cappellen (Onderzoeks- and Informatiecentrum van de Verbruikersorganisaties, OIVO)

5 out of 6 representatives of workers' organisations

B. Melckmans (Fédération Générale du Travail de Belgique, FGTB), M. Pans (Algemeen Belgisch Vakverbond, ABVV), F. Philips (Algemeen Belgisch Vakverbond, ABVV), L. Slabbinck (Algemeen Christelijk Vakverbond van België, ACV), A. Wilmart (Confédération des Syndicats Chrétiens de Belgique, CSC)

4 out of 6 representatives of employers' organisations

C. Bosch (Federatie Voedingsindustrie, FEVIA), I. Chaput (Fédération des Entreprises de Belgique, FEB), C. Klein (Federatie van de Chemische Industrie van België, Fedichem), P. Vanden Abeele (Unie van Zelfstandige Ondernemers, UNIZO)

both representatives of energy producers

H. De Buck (Electrabel), D. Rigaux (Samenwerkende vennootschap voor Productie van Electriciteit, SPE)

5 out of 6 representatives of the scientific world

L. Hens (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, VUB), L. Lavrysen (Universiteit Gent, UG), J.-P. van Ypersele (Université Catholique de Louvain, UCL), H. Verschure (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, KU Leuven), E. Zaccai (Université Libre de Bruxelles, ULB)

Total: 29 out of the 38 members with voting rights

Annex 2. Meetings for the preparation of this advice

The Sustainability Strategies Working Group held meetings on 30 April, 16 May, 23 May and 4 June 2002 to prepare this advice.



Annex 3. Participants in preparation of the advice

Members of the Council with voting rights or their representatives

I. Chaput (FEB), I. Dekelper (Syndicat Libéral, CGSLB), G. Fremout (VODO), B. Gloire (Oxfam-Solidarité), C. Klein (Fedichem), R. Moreau (Greenpeace Belgium), C. Neven (Fedichem), M Osterreith (ULB), Anne Panneels (FGTB), E. Quintana (National de Coopération au Développement, CNCDD), T. Snoy (IEW), S. Van Hauwermeiren (BBL), S. Vanholme (Natuurpunt-Birdlife), A. Wilmart (CSC), E. Zaccai (ULB)

Scientific advisors and invited experts

M.-P. Kestemont (Université Catholique de Louvain – chairman of the Sustainable Strategies Working Group)

J. Miller (European Environmental Bureau, EEB – deputy chairman of the Sustainable Strategies Working Group)

J.-R. Drèze (Attaché-advisor to the prime minister)

Members of the Council with no voting rights or their representatives

L. Bas (Aminal), J. Maertens (aide to Olivier Deleuze)

Secretariat staff

J. De Smedt, N. Maelfait