

Opinion on the assessment of local projects for sustainable development

- Requested by Minister for the Environment, Consumer Protection and Sustainable Development, Freya Van den Bossche
- drafted by the Scientific Research and Awareness and Communication Working Groups
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1. Summary:

- [a] The local level has to play a key role in implementing sustainable development. Guaranteeing effective implementation requires giving the players involved in this process the instruments they need to assess their progress towards achieving sustainable development. For this reason, and at the request of the Minister for Sustainable Development, the FCSD (Federal Council for Sustainable Development) suggests several topics for discussion and a number of instruments for assessing the sustainability of local projects for sustainable development.
- [b] A distinction is made between two types of projects:
- on the one hand, local projects carried out during a defined period and by civil society. These projects can undergo *ex ante* (preliminary), mid-term and *ex post* assessment.
 - on the other hand, the processes destined to be permanent and initiated by public authorities: local Agenda 21.
- [c] The opinion gives considerable importance to preliminary project assessment, which measures three elements:
- the qualities and experiences of the project promoters
 - the basic criteria: relevance, efficiency and viability
 - The criteria more specific to sustainable development, concerning diagnosis, aims, means and methods, results sought and indicators.

A project is also a social process. The opinion accordingly attaches importance to modes of developing and implementing the project, namely:

- the means of coordination between project promoters
 - possible technical and scientific support
 - integration of the project at local level
 - development of the sense of responsibility of those involved
 - participation
 - communication
- [d] Finally, the project must also lend itself to evaluation after start-up. Various practical arrangements for assessment are possible. The FCSD determines the criteria for such assessments.
- [e] After having defined the concept of "local Agenda 21", the Council discusses assessment criteria and instruments: the lists of indicators of networks of towns and municipalities, the Stadsmonitor project, the Vlaamse Duurzaamheidspiegel and the ecological footprint.

2. Context of the opinion

- [1] At the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the United Nations agreed that the local level must play a key role in putting sustainable development into practice. To implement international undertakings in matters of sustainable development and to achieve the established objectives, it is imperative that all levels of power work together: "Think globally, act locally". Sustainable development at local level takes different forms. Local projects concern a variety of products (goods, services, infrastructure, etc), contexts (trade, social sphere, health, culture, etc.) and players (businesses, trade unions, local public powers, NGOs, etc.).
- [2] In November 2003, Minister Van den Bossche asked the FCSD to issue an opinion on sustainable development and the use of assessment instruments for local projects for sustainable development. The aim is to draw attention to the most adequate existing instruments that can be used to measure locally the headway being made in sustainable development either in the context of the municipality or in the context of other concrete projects at local level.
- [3] The Minister considers it important that the indicators used by these measurement instruments strike a balance between the different dimensions of sustainable development. These indicators must also be concrete and simple to use.

3. Introduction

- [4] The FCSD sets out in this opinion several ideas for discussion and examines a number of instruments, without being exhaustive. Indeed, it considers that a thorough analysis of the question should be carried out in a scientific study.
- [5] As far as methodology is concerned, a project typology was developed on the basis of:
 - project duration: specific time period or conversion process
 - project initiators: public authorities or civil society.

Three types of project assessment are identified: ex-ante assessment, ex-post (these two are possibly complementary) and mid-term review, for example, to measure the dynamics of Local Agenda 21 projects.

It is nevertheless important to note that these distinctions are superficial in nature since in practice the different types of projects are often conducted together and are mutually reinforcing.

- [6] For Type 2 partnerships in particular (a result of the Johannesburg Summit), namely public-private partnerships (governments, private businesses, trade unions, NGOs, universities, persons concerned, etc.) aimed at voluntary concrete sustainable development projects, the FCSD refers to its opinion of June 18, 2002, drawn up in preparation for the Johannesburg Summit (2002A10F) and to the guidelines established by the UN Commission on Sustainable Development at its 11th session in May 2003.