Update 2030 Agenda and EU 2020

Federal Council for Sustainable Development (FRDO-CFDD)

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Belgium presents first VNR in New York

During the HLPF (= High-Level Political Forum, see also this report) in New York Belgium presented its first Voluntary National Review (VNR) on 18 July . It was Minister De Croo who delivered the statement on behalf of the country. The minister indicated a number of our country's strengths, such as its very effective social protection system, its efforts to promote recycling and the importance of gender mainstreaming. At the same time, he observed that there was still much work to be done, for example in the fields of environmental protection and the energy transition, lifelong learning and the fight against obesity. The first VNR could be regarded as a good benchmark against which to measure progress in future years. Anne-Sophie Dubrux (Youth Council) added a brief statement on behalf of civil society. In the debate that followed the presentation, Luxembourg asked how Belgium could strengthen the role of parliaments in the SDG implementation process.

In her 2018 policy statement Minister Marie Christine Marghem described the first VNR as *"a first exercise, essentially taking stock of what was already being done at the time in Belgium to implement the sustainable development goals"*. The minister announced her intention of beginning work at once on a second VNR, *"to prepare this process properly and to involve all the stakeholders better, without the same time pressures as applied when we were drafting our first report."*

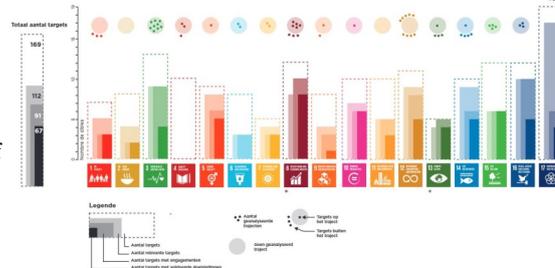*(photo: IISD)*

Federal report: is Belgium achieving the SDGs?

The recently published 2017 Federal report on sustainable development assesses 34 indicators on the progress of Belgium towards the SDGs and investigates the gulf between existing scenarios and the SDGs in three areas: poverty, energy and transport.

According to the report, progress is being made in a number of respects. But on current trends, it will not be possible to achieve the SDGs. So, there is a lot of work ahead. The report formulates a number of recommendations for this work.

Federal 'gap analysis'

October saw the publication of a study assessing the extent to which the federal authorities are on track to implement the SDGs. A "gap analysis" considered the remaining gaps in proposed policies.

The 17 SDGs contain 169 targets. The study suggests that of these 169 targets 112 are relevant, meaning that the federal government is responsible for the areas covered by these targets. For most of them, the federal government shares its powers with the regions and/or communities. The federal administration is taking adequate measures for most of the SDGs, but this is not enough. There is still work to be done, principally in respect of

poverty (SDG 1), responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), climate (SDG 13), seas and oceans (SDG 14) and partnership (SDG 17). The federal government is performing well, however, in terms of health (SDG 3) and sanitation (SDG 6).

The study makes eight recommendations for improved policy. In her 2018 policy memorandum Minister Marghem announced that an action plan would be presented before the next federal elections, containing proposals on the basis of the gap analysis.

"Warm and cuddly ambitions are simply no longer going to cut it. The UN system has to have the courage to hold its member states accountable."

(*Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah*)

Flash

On 19 October the Federal institute for Sustainable Development (FIDO/IFDD) organised a conference to mark the 20th anniversary of the sustainable development law in Belgium. | Eurostat published a report assessing the EU's achievements in relation to the implementation of the SDGs. | What should the EU do in response to this monitoring report? Some experts from the IEEP and the IDDRI give their point of view. | The platform KnowSDGs has published some more tools to support implementation of the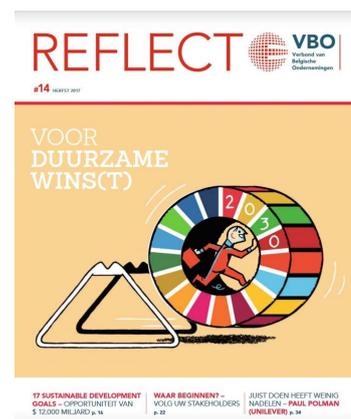 SDGs. | On 5 December the European Multi-stakeholder platform on SDGs held an initial preparatory meeting. The next meeting will take place on 10 January. | How can businesses report on the SDGs? And what tools can help them?

The FEB on SDGs

The FEB's recent edition of the magazine *Reflect* focuses on the SDGs. In his foreword, CEO Pieter Timmermans points out that the SDGs represent a huge opportunity for businesses. The world is at a crossroads, he says: "To take no action is to be guilty of negligence".

The magazine also references a study from the Business and Sustainable Development Commission which suggests that the SDGs will unlock market opportunities worth some $12,000 billion. It also contains several examples of businesses that have accepted the challenge of the SDGs.
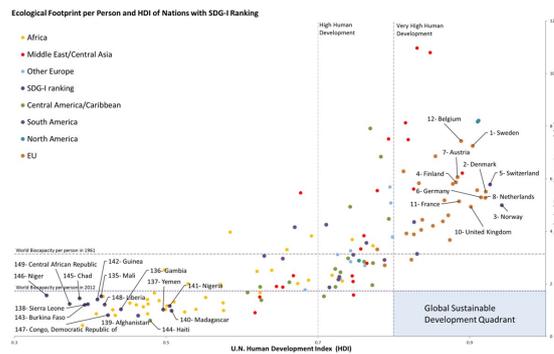
How sustainable are the SDGs?

A recent article by Mathis Wackernagel, known for his work on the environmental footprint, addresses a weakness in the SDGs. The SDG Index is widely used to compare countries in terms of their efforts to achieve the SDGs.

However, the article shows that the countries that score highly on this index generally have a very high environmental footprint. It concludes that as currently implemented the SDGs fall short in terms of environmental sustainability.

Ignoring the constraints imposed by planetary limits harms the poorest, is the conclusion. In implementing the SDGs, there must be more attention to the planetary limits; otherwise, there is a great risk that the wrong investment choices will be made.

Flash

How do forests contribute to the SDGs? | What action is UNESCO taking? | What is the relationship between migration and the 2030 Agenda? A briefing from ODI. | What role for academics in realising the SDGs? | A DIE paper on the link between the Paris Climate Agreement and the 2030 Agenda. | Spotlight on Sustainable Development 2017, a report from a number of NGOs on the scope for public authorities to conduct their own policy. | Towards a pollution-free planet, a UNEA report. | A new report on green industrial policy. | A new International Resource Panel report on global resource use. | Whether or not we succeed in achieving the SDGs will largely depend on the way in which we can make our consumption sustainable. | A series of ODI reports on climate finance.

"We have to realise that only when we reboot the financial system, will the movement towards a more equitable, inclusive and sustainable world get the traction and scale we need to deliver the SDGs. "

(Peter Bakker)

Enabel opts for SDGs

The start of January 2018 will see the Belgian Technical Cooperation – BTC – change its name. The BTC will become Enabel, the Belgian development agency. The task of Enabel is to implement and coordinate Belgian development policy. The Council of Ministers recently approved its first management contract with Enabel.

The SDGs will play a central role in this contract, which includes strengthening local entrepreneurship in partner countries, the use of digitalisation as a lever of development and innovative approaches to development finance.

SDG information day on 22 November

An information day on implementing the SDGs was held on 22 November, organised by the Interministerial Conference on Sustainable Development (IMCDO). A United Nations representative, Barbara Pesce-Monteiro, gave an update on the current state of progress towards realising the SDGs. Olivier De Schutter then delivered a much-appreciated presentation on the changes that are needed to our way of life if we are to achieve more sustainable development. In a discussion panel, representatives of the various Belgian governments explained what initiatives they are currently taking. Attendees were then able to formulate suggestions for better implementation of the SDGs in a series of workshops. In another discussion panel, representatives of civil society, all members of the Federal Council for Sustainable

Development (FRDO), gave their opinions of the process to date. Jean-Pascal van Ypersele gave some concluding remarks, in which he also made some recommendations for the existing legislative framework and how it might be bettered.

The national sustainable development strategy (see also the FRDO opinion) provides for the organisation of an event such as this information day twice per legislature. The second event will take place in spring 2019. The same national strategy states that by then a *"comprehensive progress report (...) on the execution of the SDGs in Belgium"* will be prepared by the IMCDO. The aim of this report is to *"jointly*

assess Belgian progress towards the achievement of the SDGs in Belgium, to identify gaps, and to make recommendations for adjustment and/or prioritisation." At present no further details of the preparation of this report are available.