

SERV

MiNa-Council

Social and Economic
Council of Flanders

Environment and Nature
Council of Flanders

Advice

*Public Governance Recommendations
for an effective Flemish
Sustainable Development Strategy*

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Content

1.	Executive Summary	3
2.	Introduction	6
3.	Why 'good governance' as approach?	7
3.1.	Sustainable development	7
3.2.	The link between sustainable development and 'good governance'	8
3.3.	'Good Governance' as approach for a Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development	9
4.	Governance principles for an effective Strategy for Sustainable Development	11
4.1.	A strategy is not a plan	12
4.2.	Broad ownership	13
4.3.	Emphasis on integration with what already exists ('mainstreaming')	14
5.	Recommendations for the development of a Flemish Strategy	15
5.1.	Recommendations with regard to support, transparency and participation	16
5.1.1	<i>Guarantee political involvement at the highest level</i>	16
5.1.2	<i>Reinforce mechanisms for transparency and participation</i>	17
5.2.	Recommendations with regard to horizontal and vertical policy co-ordination.....	19
5.2.1	<i>Reinforce the strategic policymaking in all policy domains</i>	19
5.2.2	<i>Provide specific instruments and mechanisms aimed at policy co-ordination</i>	20
5.2.3	<i>Collaborate with higher and lower government levels</i>	22
5.3.	Recommendations with regard to capacity reinforcement and 'learning'	23
5.3.1	<i>Reinforce 'knowledge management' and 'strategic intelligence'</i>	23
5.3.2	<i>Provide capacity building with regard to instrument development</i>	25
5.4.	Recommendations with regard to vision development and strategy development	25
5.4.1	<i>Provide a co-ordinating secretariat</i>	26
5.4.2	<i>Establish a multistakeholder forum</i>	26
5.4.3	<i>Use existing strategies and processes as the basis for a Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development</i>	28
5.4.4	<i>Create and support strategic projects and co-operation initiatives</i>	30
5.4.5	<i>Provide continuous effects, monitoring and evaluation</i>	30
6.	The way forward	32

1. Executive Summary

Context

On 12 October 2004, the MiNa-Council and Flanders' Social and Economic Council (SERV) made a joint appeal to the Flemish Government to attend to a fully-fledged *Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development* (STRADO). At the same time, both councils announced their willingness to make an active contribution. In the first place, by formulating recommendations on the institutional measures that are necessary in order to attend to sustainable development in Flanders, and on the best way to prepare a Flemish strategy for sustainable development. This is done in the present advice. The advice explains why 'good governance' is so important to sustainable development, and states a number of important governance principles for effective Strategies for Sustainable Development, which are the framework for formulating a number of recommendations for Flanders. The recommendations only relate to the *governance dimension* of a strategy for sustainable development. The (orientation of the) content of the sustainable development policy is not yet examined in this document. The organisations that are represented in the SERV and the MiNa-Council will make their contribution to that end later on, as they do not want to anticipate the outcome of the social interactions and institutional provisions advocated in this advice.

Key recommendations

The SERV and the MiNa-Council see the following five priorities for the coming months:

1. *The establishment of a central unit for sustainable development*

A Strategy for Sustainable Development can, to a large extent, be developed by reinforcing the tools, processes and structures that are already present. However, the strategy development requires specific administrative provisions, among which a Sustainable Development policy unit. Such a unit is needed to co-ordinate, feed and guard the continuing process of strategy development.

2. *The establishment of a multistakeholder forum and the reinforcement of the Flemish Parliament's involvement*

The Flemish Government has recently decided to assign the preparation of the core elements of the Flemish strategy for sustainable development to a cross-policy domain official working group for sustainable development. The MiNa-Council and the SERV do not think this is the appropriate way. A mere official-political formulation of a strategy for sustainable development implies, even with broad participation and advice from strategic advisory councils, the important risk that the strategy will be perceived mainly as a government project, which it will turn out to be in the end. An effective strategy for sustainable development implies a broad political and social commitment. That is why the SERV and the MiNa-Council ask for a *multistakeholder forum* that consists of representatives of the government, economic actors and social groups, and that provides a *broad ownership* and is charged with the development and the follow-up of the strategy. In concrete terms, they have a con-

struction in mind in which the Flemish Government regularly meets representatives of the social stakeholders with a view to the development and follow-up of the Strategy for Sustainable Development. Furthermore, the MiNa-Council and the SERV also think the Flemish Parliament should be allotted a central role in the design and follow-up of the Flemish Strategy.

3. *The supplement of the Pact of Vilvoorde on the basis of long-term vision development and points of particular interest from international, European and federal policy developments*

According to the SERV and the MiNa-Council, the Pact of Vilvoorde is currently the best available starting point to come to a Flemish strategy for sustainable development. However, given the characteristics of effective strategies for sustainable development, the Pact of Vilvoorde has to be reinforced and supplemented, in the first place by taking great care of the social interaction process that such a Pact should foster and support. This implies the involvement of all relevant actors and approaches. In the second place by supplementing the Pact with long-term vision development and points of particular interest from the international, European and federal policy developments in the field of sustainable development.

4. *The supplement of the Pact of Vilvoorde with existing and new 'experiments'*

According to the MiNa-Council and the SERV, the Pact of Vilvoorde should also be supplemented with strategic projects and co-operation initiatives that produce results in the shorter term, that can demonstrate the advantages of an integrated policy approach, and can nurture experiments and learning effects. Examples are the 'Innovatieplatform Milieutechnologie' (Environment Technology Innovation Platform), the project 'sustainable building transition management', the announced climate conference, etc.

5. *The supplement of the Pact of Vilvoorde with an 'institutional plan' that contains a planning for the other administrative reforms and mechanisms that are argued in this advice*

Finally, the Pact of Vilvoorde should be supplemented with an 'institutional plan' that contains a strategy and planning for among other things:

- Measures to realise *political involvement* and support for sustainable development, to reinforce the *transparency* and active *participation* of target groups and stakeholders in the policy development and implementation, to increase the accountability and to guarantee a *broad ownership* of a Strategy for Sustainable Development;
- Measures to realise more *policy integration*, in other words to promote the interaction and coherence between the policy plans and decisions at the different *levels* and in the different *policy domains*, and to map out and, if necessary, weigh up their implications for the different socio-economic groups and social interests;
- Measures to develop *strategic capacity* and make it available to support, dialogue and 'learning' in all phases of the strategy development and policymaking;
- Measures to guarantee a continuous *effect, monitoring and evaluation* of the Strategy.

The way forward

The recommendations in this advice have deliberately been described briefly. Completely in line with its content, the SERV and the MiNa-Council indeed do not consider this advice as an end point, but rather as a starting point for a dialogue with the Flemish Government, the Flemish Parliament and other actors. The MiNa-Council and the SERV therefore count on it that there will be ample opportunity to explain, discuss and further concretise each of the recommendations, in consultation with the Flemish policymakers.

2. Introduction

The ageing of the population, the financing of social security, the reinforcement of the innovative capacity, the prevention of traffic congestion, the improvement of environmental quality, ... These challenges require integrated long-term visions and strategies. On the other hand, short-term success parameters often determine the agenda: election polls, headlines, share prices, audience ratings, budgets, employment figures, ... *Sustainable development* is about looking for ways to combine these conflicting short-term and long-term agendas into a new political leadership and new methods of policymaking and decision-making. Sustainable development is therefore not situated in a distant future, but is something we can and should work on in practice today – also in Flanders. Not so much because we have committed ourselves in that respect at the international level, but in order to improve the effectiveness of policy with a view to a ‘quality society for everybody’.

It is against this background that, on 12 October 2004, the MiNa-Council and the SERV made a joint appeal to the Flemish Government to attend to a fully-fledged *Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development* (STRADO). At the same time, both councils announced their willingness to make an active contribution to the development of this strategy. In a first phase by formulating recommendations about the best possible way for Flanders to organise the transition to sustainable development. According to the SERV and the MiNa-Council, the key question for a strategy that aims at sustainable development, is indeed which interaction processes, structures, instruments and capacities are needed to make progress.

The present advice contains the proposals of the SERV and the MiNa-Council with regard to the elaboration of such *institutional provisions* in order to develop a Flemish strategy for sustainable development. The (orientation of the) content of the sustainable development policy is not yet examined in this document. The organisations that are represented in the SERV and the MiNa-Council will make their contribution to that end later on, as they do not want to anticipate the outcome of the social interactions and administrative provisions advocated in this advice.

The further structure goes as follows. Part 3 provides a justification of the importance of ‘good governance’ to sustainable development and the reason why it was chosen to be the line of approach for this advice. Part 4 deals with the main principles for the development of a Strategy for Sustainable Development. Part 5 contains the core of the advice, that is the recommendations for Flanders. Finally, part 6 deals with the short-term agenda for the following months, given the timing the Minister-President has put forward for a Flemish Strategy.

3. Why 'good governance' as approach?

3.1. Sustainable development

Generally, sustainable development is defined as "a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". Another definition that is often used, goes as follows: "Sustainable development is the process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations".

These definitions reveal a number of basic aspects of sustainable development:

- It concerns the satisfaction of needs of the current generations, both poor and rich, and both north and south (*intragenerational equity*).
- It also concerns the satisfaction of needs of the future generations; social developments must not compromise the opportunities of future generations (*intergenerational equity*).
- This also implies that the limits of what nature can cope with, the carrying capacity of the earth, cannot be exceeded.
- The three preceding basic aspects can also be described as allocation issues about supply and demand for needs satisfaction (*economic dimension*), distribution issues about the distribution of resources to satisfy the needs of everyone (*social dimension*) and scale issues about the external effects of the socio-economic system on the carrying capacity of the environmental system (*ecological dimension*). Sustainable development requires an *integrated approach* throughout all of these domains, within a wider perspective of time and space.
- Finally, sustainable development is not only a target, but also a process. In order to steer this change process, which aims at sustainable development, in the right direction, systematic attention will have to be paid to administrative elements (*institutional dimension*).

This brief enumeration shows that measures in different fields are required to make sustainable development operational. The main conditions for the realisation of sustainable development are threefold:

1. Make the market work for sustainable development: by means of an adequate market and price policy, the government should stimulate the actors to take the full social costs and benefits of their decisions into account, including the environmental and social implications;
2. Promote science, technology and innovation: through science, technology and innovation, actors should be stimulated to increase the social benefits and decrease their social costs of their decisions – in the course of time;

3. Strengthen 'good governance': institutions and administrative provisions are needed to integrate social, economic and environmental considerations at all levels and in all decisions, to take into account the longer-term implications, to reinforce transparency, participation and accountability, to improve policy coherence within and between governments, to realise a good market operation and stimulation of science, technology and innovation, etc.

In this advice, the MiNa-Council and the SERV exclusively focus on the latter, *institutional dimension*. However, they do resolve to pay special attention to the two other key conditions during the further mutual discussion and vision development in the field of sustainable development.

3.2. The link between sustainable development and 'good governance'

Although the basic aspects of "sustainable development" are clear, it is not a policy concept that can be made operational in an univocal way. In the first place, it is a process of social change that is only shaped and fleshed out through actual realisations. That is why "sustainable development" is interpreted in so many different ways and why no blueprint is possible. Each country or region has to find its own way when concretising "sustainable development", taking into account its culture, standards, values, history, social, economic and ecological challenges and priorities, the present institutions and political structures, etc.

As a consequence, social and therefore political choices will determine the exact content of sustainable development, the transitions that are needed and the way to realise them. However, this also implies that 'sustainable development' is closely connected with the quality of these social choices and therefore also with the way in which choices are made.

That is why the SERV and the MiNa-Council think that an important part of a policy aimed at 'sustainable development' lies in the improvement of the social choice process, in other words of the quality of the policy and the policy processes. In that respect, 'sustainable development' demands special attention for (1) the pursuit of synergy between the ecological, social and economic aspects; (2) the long-term and the international dimension as frameworks for policy decisions in the short term; (3) maximum co-operation between all policy domains involved and active participation of social actors in both the development and the implementation of the policy.

This requires radical changes in the existing social interaction and decision-making processes. Too often, these are characterised by unbalanced and 'compartmentalised' policymaking, obscure and closed decision-making, a too short-term focus, insufficient information, instruments and capacity to support the policy, lack of leadership, inadequate monitoring and follow-up of results, etc.

These necessary changes in the existing social interaction and decision-making processes do not occur automatically. They have to be discovered, fed, supported, guarded and evaluated by 'administrative provisions' (see text box 1). These are essential conditions for the development and implementation of a policy concerning sustainable development. *Putting into practice sustainable development therefore implies putting into practice 'good governance'.*

3.3. 'Good Governance' as approach for a Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development

An 'administrative' or 'governance' approach looks at the capacities, instruments and institutional mechanisms that are (or have to be) present in order to allow the pursuit of a coherent policy. In this context, *coherence* must be interpreted as the consistency between objectives, instruments and realisations, or between the policy formulation and the policy implementation in a specific policy domain (*vertical coherence*), the consistency between policy domains among themselves and the degree of policy integration (*horizontal coherence*), and the consistency between short-term and long-term objectives, or the link between the current policy and the perceived long-term challenges (*temporal coherence*). *Institutional capacity* concerns a country's ability to deploy or adapt its institutions so as to enable them to adequately detect and solve social problems. The term *institutions* must be interpreted in the broad sense, as it covers not only organisations and organisational provisions, but the whole of formal and informal rules, processes and practices that exist in a certain country and determine or influence policymaking.

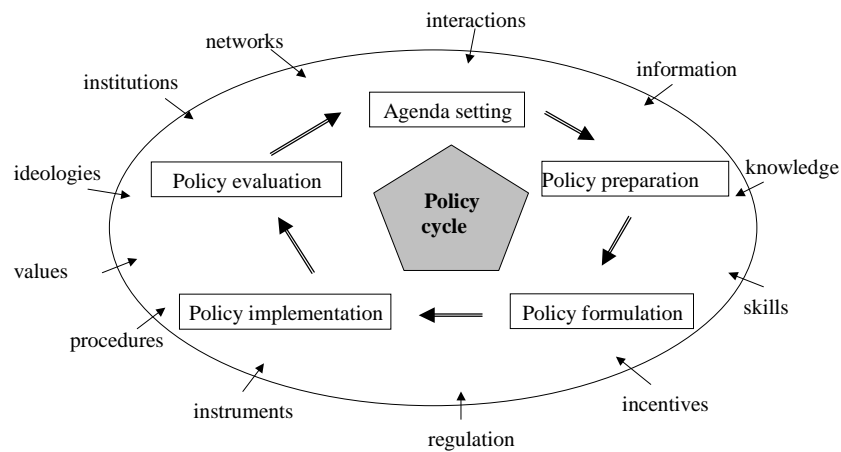
In comparison with that, the debate in Flanders about a Strategy for Sustainable Development has often been characterised by a too limited approach. It usually dealt with the 'hardware', or the well visible possible components of a sustainable development policy (a plan, a Minister, a commission, a working group, a Flemish Parliament Act, an advisory council, a budget, ...). However, those in themselves will be incapable of providing an answer to the shortcomings of the existing social interaction and decision-making processes. At least as important is the 'software': the presence of an adequate policy culture and policy processes, of leadership, networks and forums, of capacities, skills, knowledge and information, of procedures and techniques, etc. with a view to the exploration of the future, assessment, transparency, participation, policy co-ordination, choice of instruments and process management. The development of such '*strategic intelligence*' and the reinforcement of the social interactions are also part of the 'institutional provisions' referred to, and should also be at the centre of a sustainable development policy.

Text box 1 What is 'good governance' ?

'Good governance' is defined in many ways. As approach to the examination and improvement of the public sector policy, it happens to be set against 'traditional governance' (or 'government'), which is characterised by bureaucracy (many legal regulations), centralised policy (top down) and an internal government orientation (closed), whereas 'good governance' is characterised by several and flexible instruments, networks and partnerships within and between governments and with other actors, by transparency, participation and accountability, etc. The general meaning of 'good governance' in this advice, can best be explained by means of the well-known policy cycle. This cycle, from agenda setting to policy evaluation, forms a frequently used reference for policymakers. However, at the same time, it is a formalistic representation, as the practice will never follow such a linear course. Moreover, the phases of the policy cycle are interwoven, and each phase is the result of many inputs, factors and interactions between a (large) number of actors. Therefore, policy is by no means the result of one actor, the government, that makes merely rational choices with complete information and clear objectives and preferences. Interference also exists with policy cycles in other policy domains and at other policy levels. This leads to the vision that policymaking is a multi-actor and multidimensional process.

'Good governance' is about the way in which policymaking in such a multi-actor and multidimensional process is managed and influenced, both formally and informally. It typically concerns the mechanisms, procedures and practices that governments use with a view to agenda setting, policy co-ordination, co-operation with target groups, development of knowledge and experience, etc.

The policy cycle and 'governance' interactions



4. Governance principles for an effective Strategy for Sustainable Development

Making 'sustainable development' operational, as well as the meaning of a sustainable development 'strategy' and the characteristics of a good strategy, are often interpreted in various ways. That is why, before formulating recommendations, the MiNa-Council and the SERV wish to briefly examine the governance characteristics of effective sustainable development strategies.

These characteristics are based on a broad analysis of the experiences and best practices in other countries with sustainable development strategies¹. Annex 1 provides a survey of the main shortcomings in many existing strategies. In general, few results appear to be achieved with strategies:

- that mainly focus on the draw-up of a product (e.g. a planning document);
- that have been developed mainly or exclusively top down by the government;
- that consist of separate initiatives, next to or separate from existing policy processes.

Annex 2 contains the main principles for *effective* sustainable development *strategies*. The distinctive feature is that the best results have been achieved with strategies:

- that emphasize processes and the development of capacities and learning effects;
- that aim at a broad 'ownership', display a broad socio-political commitment, and are based on broad participation;
- that start from existing planning and decision-making frameworks, in order to improve and harmonize them.

According to the SERV and the MiNa-Council, these three administrative characteristics of effective sustainable development strategies are important starting points for the development of a Flemish strategy as well. That is why they are further explained below.

¹ Acknowledgement of sources

4.1. A strategy is not a plan

Up to now, several countries have tried, in a technocratic way, to provide an answer to the sustainable development challenges by means of a central role for sustainable development plans. However, such an approach nearly always appeared to be inadequate. Traditional planning fails to initiate the deeper socio-cultural, economic and institutional changes that are necessary for sustainable development. A strategic approach is required:

- It takes a *vision* indicating the picture of the future we strive for. This vision has to be developed and broadly supported by policy actors, the public and the stakeholders.
- It takes *multistakeholder forums* (with representatives of the government, the socio-economic actors and other social groups²) to translate the vision of the future into specific long-term and short-term objectives and to find harmony between possible policy options in order to realise it.
- It takes *mechanisms for intersectoral policy integration*, in order to promote the interaction between the policy plans and decisions at the different levels and in the different policy domains, and to map out and, if necessary, weigh up their implications for the different socio-economic groups and social interests. Moreover, these mechanisms have to provide for the active participation of stakeholders in the policy formulation and the planning at all levels.
- It takes *capacity* to monitor existing and future socio-cultural, economic-technological and physical-ecological developments (agenda setting), to analyse policy options and restrictions (policy preparation), to choose and implement adequate objectives and instruments (policy formulation and policy implementation), and to follow-up the progress, evaluate the started policy and adjust the strategy (policy evaluation – feedback – policy adjustment).

Together, these elements form the basis of a sustainable development strategy. As a consequence, a sustainable development strategy is no big 'super plan' or set of plans, but rather a coherent set of instruments and methods aimed at analysis, dialogue, reinforcement of capacity, planning and implementation, that allow to deal with the challenges of sustainable development in a coherent way. An effective sustainable development strategy serves as a *knowledge system* that develops and organises information, knowledge and capacity, and makes them available for interaction and dialogue. Such a system does not plan everything, but is rather directed at the support and guidance of those interactions and dialogue.

Therefore, the development of a sustainable development strategy requires new forms of thinking and working that may be different from the traditional policy approach and policy planning (see table 1).

² A good starting base for drawing up an inventory of the relevant stakeholders for a sustainable development strategy would be, for instance, the enumeration in Agenda 21.

Table 1: Differences between traditional policy planning and a sustainable development strategy

Risks of certain forms of traditional policy planning	Sustainable Development Strategy
Hierarchic-authoritarian: the government defines the policy at a central level, defines the objectives and limits, imposes obligations and sanctions.	Aimed at developing the policy in consultation with the stakeholders ('joint production of policy', government as 'change agent').
Not visionary: uses explorations of the future (forecasting), that continue existing dominant trends, and that aim at what is probable in the future, but that do not often lead to trend-breaking solutions.	Aimed at developing creative pictures of the future and identifying possibilities for radical change, based on the question how to achieve a certain future (backcasting).
Short-term horizon: objectives come into being by continuing and periodically intensifying the existing policy in the future.	Aimed at formulating a long-term vision and long-term objectives, as a framework for short-term objectives.
Risk-avoiding: risks and uncertainties are disguised by seeming scientific objectivity.	Aimed at learning to deal with risks and uncertainties, among other things by working with scenarios.
Compartmentalisation: policy is created in a fragmentary way, without much co-operation between policy domains.	Aimed at thinking in terms of several domains, interests and actors at various levels.
Encapsulation: the set preconditions (e.g. cost efficiency) determine the scope for policymaking and only lead to incremental improvements.	Aimed at fundamental innovation at policy, technological and institutional levels.
Product orientation: the policy is aimed at outputs (a plan, a Flemish Parliament Act, ...) and should lead to and be judged on the realisation of the set objectives.	Aimed at promoting the interactions between actors and broadening the social basis. Apart from a final goal, the government also has a process goal (process orientation).
Implementation orientation: objectives are formulated periodically, after which measures are taken to realise these objectives. There is little reflection on results, and little feedback about the initial objectives.	Aimed at gaining experience and learning effects, among other things by stimulating innovative initiatives, experiments and interactions (learning by doing and learning by learning).

4.2. Broad ownership

Strategies that are developed merely because of international agreements, that are largely or exclusively formulated by the government, or that copy foreign strategies, nearly always appear to fail. A sustainable development strategy has to be an 'own product' that meets 'self'-formulated pictures of the future, priorities and objectives.

Therefore, a broad 'ownership' is essential to an effective sustainable development strategy. In essence, sustainable development is indeed a process of social change. However, people and organisations do not change because the government enforces it. 'Sustainable' change can only be realised if all actors are intensively involved in this process of change, by understanding its necessity and participating in the decisions about its direction and pace. As a consequence, the government can only partly direct the change process. The attitude and actions of other actors are at least equally important.

Broad ownership therefore comprises more than the notion that all policy domains have to be involved and have to co-operate, or that a broad consultation is necessary. A broad ownership of

the strategy requires that stakeholders (socio-economic actors and other social groups) and the government enter into dialogue during all phases of the strategy development and implementation, and together take decisions about the scope, the content and the process. A social commitment can thus be realised that persists longer than one term of office.

However, the realisation thereof is not a simple task. Again, it requires the capacity and 'strategic intelligence' to discern and evenly bring together the relevant target groups and interests, to discover adequate forums and forms of interaction, in short to guide the strategy process.

4.3. Emphasis on integration with what already exists (‘mainstreaming’)

It was not uncommon for strategies for sustainable development to be started as new plans, institutions and procedures: a sustainable development committee, a sustainable development plan, an advisory council for sustainable development, a sustainable development Act, sustainable development impact reports, ... These instruments can have an important function but generally produce limited results. This can be partly explained by the fact that new provisions have often thwarted the existing planning, interaction and decision-making processes, and have wasted scarce capacity by starting all over again.

Effective sustainable development strategies on the other hand emphasise the improvement of already existing decision-making processes and instruments as well as their harmonisation, rather than completely new or distinct strategic decision-making instruments³. The focus is on the integration (*'mainstreaming'*) of sustainable development into all policy initiatives. In other words, on the development of mechanisms that promote the integration of the policy principles of sustainable development (search for synergy between ecological, social and economic interests, attention to the long-term and the international dimensions, policy co-ordination, active participation of social actors) into the existing planning and decision-making processes of all sectors and bodies. This implies that a good sustainable development strategy builds on the processes and initiatives that already exist, and reinforces them if necessary.

³ In that sense, a country may have implemented several parts of an effective sustainable development strategy without there being formal (and clearly visible) 'institutions' that explicitly concentrate on sustainable development. Conversely, a country may formally have an approved sustainable development strategy without it making much difference in practice. Therefore it is the practice, and not the label, which is important.

5. Recommendations for the development of a Flemish Strategy

Starting from the above-mentioned general characteristics of effective sustainable development strategies, the SERV and the MiNa-Council formulate in this part of the advice recommendations for the development of a Flemish Sustainable Development Strategy. These recommendations are also based on an analysis of the experience and best practices in other countries and on an assessment of the situation in Flanders. They reflect what the MiNa-Council and the SERV consider to be priorities at present in order to develop an effective Flemish Strategy.

The recommendations have deliberately been described briefly. Completely in line with the nature of the recommendations that are formulated, the SERV and the MiNa-Council indeed do not consider this advice as an end point, but rather as a starting point for a dialogue with the Flemish Government, the Flemish Parliament and other actors. The MiNa-Council and the SERV therefore count on it that there will be ample opportunity to explain, discuss and further concretise each of the recommendations, in consultation with the Flemish policymakers.

The recommendations are grouped around the above-mentioned four elements that form the basis of a sustainable development strategy from administrative perspective:

1. *Support, transparency and participation:* Which measures should be taken in Flanders with priority in order to realise political involvement and support for sustainable development, to reinforce the transparency and active participation of target groups and stakeholders in the policy development and implementation, to increase the accountability and to guarantee a broad ownership of the Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development?
2. *Policy co-ordination:* Which measures should be taken in Flanders with priority in order to realise more intersectoral policy integration, in other words to promote the interaction and coherence between the policy plans and decisions at the different levels and in the different policy domains, and to map out and, if necessary, weigh up their implications for the different socio-economic groups and social interests?
3. *Reinforcement of capacity:* Which measures should be taken in Flanders with priority in order to develop strategic capacity and make it available to support, dialogue and 'learning' in all phases of the strategy development and policymaking?
4. *Vision development and strategy development:* How can the vision development and strategy development for sustainable development be best started in Flanders? What are the priorities for the following months?

5.1. Recommendations with regard to support, transparency and participation

According to the SERV and the MiNa-Council, the following measures should be taken in Flanders with priority in order to realise political involvement and support for sustainable development, to reinforce the transparency and active participation of target groups and stakeholders in the policy development and implementation, to increase the accountability and to guarantee a broad ownership of the Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development.

5.1.1 Guarantee political involvement at the highest level

Objective and motivation

In order to have a chance of success, a sustainable development strategy has to be broadly supported and be able to affect the strategies of all policy domains. In the first place, this implies political will and commitment at the highest political level.

Current situation in Flanders

In Flanders, politicians in charge have often associated sustainable development with technocratic fantasies, and the actual political support for sustainable development has been lacking. The Flemish Parliament has been little involved in the debate on sustainable development, or in exercises for the long-term policy such as 'Kleurrijk Vlaanderen' (Colourful Flanders). Up to now, there has not been a person in charge of a co-ordinated Flemish sustainable development policy.

However, a positive step has been taken during this term of office. This Flemish Government has, for the first time, explicitly assigned 'sustainable development' to a Minister, that is the Minister-President. The sustainable development policy memorandum also shows an increasing political interest in and awareness of the importance of sustainable development. Moreover the Flemish Government recently decided to start preparing the core elements of the Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development, by charging a cross-policy domain official working group with this task.

Possible realisation

The MiNa-Council and the SERV appreciate the appointment of the Minister-President of the Flemish Government as co-ordinating Minister for Sustainable Development. As central and co-ordinating policy theme, Sustainable Development indeed belong to the centre of the policy, and not under a 'specialist Minister' or a line department. Therefore, the Minister-President of the Flemish Government is the best choice. However, it is very important that systematic attention is paid to

sustainable development at the level of the entire Flemish Government, in strategy development and certainly in strategy implementation as well.

Furthermore, the MiNa-Council and the SERV also think the Flemish Parliament should be allotted a central role in the design of the Flemish Strategy, as it pre-eminently has the democratic legitimacy to that end. Moreover, the Parliament as institution is suitable for forming a (preferably large) political consensus about long-term issues that allows continuity across periods of office. The councils therefore ask to allot to the Parliament the role it deserves, when designing and following up the Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development.

5.1.2 Reinforce mechanisms for transparency and participation

Objective and motivation

Transparency and participation are necessary elements in each of the phases of the decision-making process regarding sustainable development. A broad involvement in the development and implementation of a strategy is necessary but not sufficient. Transparency and participation are basic instruments to draft a quality policy and regulation. A sustainable development strategy should therefore reserve an important place for the reinforcement of transparency and participation in all policy processes.

Current situation in Flanders

Stimulated by the successive Flemish Parliament Acts on open government (1991, 1999, 2004), Flanders is evolving rapidly in the field of transparency, but it has come a long way. Generally, the Flemish government and the larger municipalities already smoothly deal with the right of the citizen to retrieve public information, although the citizen is usually ill-informed of his rights. Moreover, the citizen still experiences serious problems to find out which public information exists. Important progress has also been made in terms of government communication by imposing the appointment of communication officers. However, most documents that are important for the decision-making of the Flemish Government are not yet made available in time and systematically by the government.

Specific decision-making procedures regularly provide a public consultation, linked to an opportunity to participate. However, the feedback about the way in which the participation was taken into account, is often still insufficient. Opportunities to participate often occur (too) late in the decision-making process. Experiments with new forms of participation are still scarce. All in all, the organisation of the government does not yet allow the establishment of an actual policy dialogue with stakeholders.

Apart from that, Flanders has a strongly institutionalised advice and consultation tradition, mainly through formal advisory bodies that represent necessary but insufficient parts of an

open policy process. Moreover, advisory councils are periodically overloaded with small and/or urgent requests for advice. Formal requests for advice often come too late in the policy process, at a time when the tipping point of the preparation in terms of content and the political discussion is over, as a result of which the advisory opinions cannot be sufficiently taken into account. The informal consultation with interest groups and lobby groups is untransparent and easily leads to 'regulatory capture'.

As a result of all this, policy preparation follows an untransparent course, often lacks policy-supporting information, consultation and a balanced input from actors. Finally, the interest in the policy often stops at the moment of its approval. The reception of signals about the implementation is rarely regulated.

Possible realisation

The SERV and the MiNa-Council think the reinforcement of mechanisms for transparency and consultation in all phases of existing or future policymaking and regulatory processes should be a central point of a Flemish strategy for sustainable development. In that respect, it is important to differentiate the mechanisms or 'arrangements' depending on the phase of the policy process. Participation in an early strategic phase will have an other form than participation in an operational phase with a rather technical character. The whole must not lead to a competitive but rather to a complementary and transparent system of institutions aimed at participation. Attention should also be paid to innovative mechanisms in the field of direct participation.

For both approaches, a lot of inspiration can be drawn from the Aarhus Convention⁴, at European level and in other countries. It may be considered to increase the accessibility of the available information and of research results. The modernisation of and quality requirements for participation and consultation are important as well. A few examples are the selective use of white papers, the creation of a Flemish participation website, the use of new, flexible consultation methods and experiments (e.g. focus groups, test panels, workshops, ...), the improvement of the advisory procedures and a better delineation of advice through advisory councils and target group consultation. That is where the priorities are situated according to the MiNa-Council and the SERV, rather than in the establishment of a Flemish Council for Sustainable Development. Besides, the added value of such a council is limited in comparison with the already existing councils and their powers, all the more so when advisory councils start to increase their co-operation when issuing advice, of their own accord or at the Government's request.

The MiNa-Council and the SERV believe that a *multistakeholder forum* is necessary specifically for the design of a Flemish strategy for sustainable development. This forum consists of

⁴ MiNa-Council, Advice of 24 February 2005 on the implementation in Flanders of the Aarhus Convention, no. 2005/10, 40 p.

representatives of the government, socio-economic actors and other social groups, in which the social support and the sustainable development strategy are designed, confirmed and regularly evaluated and adjusted. This will be explained further on in the advice (see 5.4.2).

5.2. Recommendations with regard to horizontal and vertical policy co-ordination

According to the SERV and the MiNa-Council, the following measures should be taken in Flanders with priority in order to realise more intersectoral policy integration, in other words to promote the interaction and coherence between the policy plans and decisions at the different levels and in the different policy domains, and to map out and, if necessary, weigh up their implications for the different socio-economic groups and social interests.

5.2.1 Reinforce the strategic policymaking in all policy domains

Objective and motivation

A sustainable development strategy has to provide a global long-term vision which then stimulates the policy in terms of content in the various domains. Moreover, it has to reinforce the existing strategic policymaking in all policy domains, so as to create an institutionalised cycle of agenda setting, policy preparation, policy formulation, policy evaluation and policy adjustment. Only then space is created to consider, in a structured way, other social interests than those of the own focus, and to improve the integration of ecological, economic and social objectives into policymaking. Moreover, good strategic policymaking is an important condition for being able to enter into dialogue with other policy domains and to speak 'the same language'.

Current situation in Flanders

In Flanders, there is a very unbalanced distribution of strategic planning and strategic policymaking between policy domains. In some policy domains, strategic planning is completely absent. The current practice of policy letters and policy memorandums, imposed by the Flemish Parliament's regulations, only partly fills that gap and has its own weaknesses. The initiatives and guidelines of the Planning and Statistics Administration have produced too little results as well. In other policy domains, strategic planning is well-developed and even laid down in a Flemish Parliament Act. In the latter case (e.g. the Environment and Nature policy domain), it actually concerns two planning systems.

Strategic decision-making instruments such as consultation forums (target group consultation, round-tables, hearings, ...) communication and information systems and analysis tools (sce-

nario analysis, impact analysis, ...) are also used very differently between and within policy domains.

Possible realisation

To the SERV and the MiNa-Council, it is clear that the existing unequal level of strategic decision-making forms a barrier to policy integration and policy interaction. Moreover, strategic frameworks that are not geared to one another and do not start from a joint vision, lead to inefficiencies.

The MiNa-Council and the SERV certainly do not suggest that for each policy domain a uniform approach or a planning Flemish Parliament Act be designed that formalises the policy cycle in a series of periodical obligatory planning documents. Besides, the existing planning Flemish Parliament Acts also have their disadvantages and problems. However, the government should gradually expand, improve and streamline the strategic policy development in all policy domains. A first step could be to make an inventory of the best practices in Flanders, and build on that, for instance by designing a series of basic principles and instruments for strategic policymaking processes and strongly promoting the tailor-made use thereof. Anyhow, its basic principles consist of striving for a coherent system of policy objectives in the long, medium and short term, and explicitly showing the European and international obligations. In policy domains that have, apart from the system of policy memorandums and policy letters, also a planning by Flemish Parliament Act, these two systems at least have to be harmonised or, even better, integrated⁵.

5.2.2 Provide specific instruments and mechanisms aimed at policy co-ordination

Objective and motivation

Integration of ecological, economic and social objectives into the policymaking of each policy sector and public body does not occur automatically. Instruments and mechanisms are needed to promote, and if necessary exact the co-operation between policy domains and the mutual policy co-ordination, and, in case of difficult choices, to make the necessary considerations. These mechanisms cover a wide range of communicative measures, analysis instruments, organisational provisions, legal regulations and 'cultural arrangements'⁶.

⁵ With regard to the environment policy domain, see among other things the MiNa-Council. Advice of 24 February 2005 on the Draft Environmental Annual Programme 2005, and the SERV. Advice letter of 4 March 2005 on the Draft Environmental Annual Programme 2005.

⁶ Examples for each type successively are: shared information systems, obligation to provide information, hearings, advisory right, ...; impact analyses, tests, exploration of the future, scenario analysis, reports, ...; interface units, institutionalised consultation, interdepartmental decision-making bodies, ad hoc project groups, ...;

Current situation in Flanders

Administrations often have a defensive mentality and insist on their (narrowly defined) powers. There is hardly any exchange of information or consultation between (and sometimes also within) policy domains. This does not alter the fact that a few specific instruments and initiatives have been developed in recent years, that aim at promoting this policy integration. Examples are: formal and informal interdepartmental structures (e.g. the Integrated Water Policy Co-ordination Committee, the crossroads committee of LIN, ...), strategic environmental impact reporting, impact tests (child impact, impact on local governments, poverty test, ...) and (recently introduced) regulatory impact analysis. Specifically in the domain of sustainable development, the Flemish Government has recently formally confirmed the existing interdepartmental Sustainable Development Working Group. The latter will have an important role to play with regard to policy co-ordination with a view to sustainable development within the Flemish government.

Within the larger framework of the recent modernisation of the Flemish administration (Better Administrative Policy – BBB), research has been carried out into the problem of policy co-ordination, both for the different policy domains and for the whole of the services of the Flemish Government. However, this research resulted in few concrete decisions or actions. The focus of the reform of the Flemish administration was on the division of tasks and the allocation of responsibilities. Policy co-ordination has been somewhat neglected.

Possible realisation

The SERV and the MiNa-Council think Flanders should stake more powerfully on mechanisms for policy co-ordination. The range of opportunities has been insufficiently used. Apart from the currently too important political mechanisms (consultation between Ministers' offices), it comprises, among other things, mechanisms at the level of the leading civil servants (both among themselves and in relation to the political Ministers' offices), at the level of the functional civil servants and at the level of instruments.

Anyway, according to the SERV and the MiNa-Council, a number of persons within each policy domain should get the mandate and the resources to perform functions with a view to 'policy co-ordination', which has to be their essential result area. Apart from explicit responsibilities they can be judged on at staff level, this also implies the necessary budgetary provisions. Only then can capacity be developed to discover connections across divisions and departments, and to set up the necessary co-operation.

Furthermore, some of the new instruments of the Flemish regulatory management, provide good leads: the introduction of regulatory impact analysis, of a regulation agenda and of a register of intended regulation with corresponding 'notice and comment' provisions. At present,

co-operation protocols, arrangements in management agreements, formal legal rules, ...; regular exchange of civil servants, training and education, introductory visits, workshops, integration into the staff policy, ...

their potential in the field of policy co-ordination is far from being fully realised. The government has to develop and/or strengthen such methods and instruments for other subjects as well.

5.2.3 Collaborate with higher and lower government levels

Objective and motivation

Sustainable development does not only require co-ordination between policy domains and fields at the same policy level. With a view to the global perspective and a coherent sustainable development policy, co-operation with higher and lower levels of government is crucial as well. Higher levels of government form a step towards the global level, and often also have processes of strategy development running in the field of sustainable development, with which harmonisation is needed. Given their scale, lower levels of government are in principle better capable of working in an integrated way, and are closer to the citizen, which offers more opportunities in the field of direct participation as well. Moreover, local initiatives can serve as experimental gardens.

Current situation in Flanders

The international and European policy levels stimulate Flanders to attend to a strategy for sustainable development (the international World Summits in Rio and Johannesburg, the European Lisbon process as supplemented with the Göteborg summit, ...). The Flemish coalition agreement endorses this by confirming that the Flemish Government will make an active contribution to the European and international commitments with regard to sustainable development. However, in practice Flanders is generally still insufficiently involved in the international and European policy preparation. The co-ordination system for laying down the positions with regard to the European policy has not yet been developed strongly enough, the monitoring of the transposition of international policy into regional policy can be improved, the implementation could be more strict, the provision of decent input for fleshing out and adjusting the policy has to be arranged more clearly, etc.

Flanders does not give any global impulses to the local administrations in the field of the development of a sustainable development strategy. However, partial initiatives have been taken. For instance, the 'environment' co-operation agreement intends to be a step towards sustainable development. It subsidises for instance the recruitment of a sustainability officer. Other instruments such as the mobility covenant, contain relevant provisions as well.

Possible realisation

The MiNa-Council and the SERV argue in favour of the intensification, democratisation and better structuring of the procedures for "uploading and downloading" the international policy, and advo-

cate a more proactive role in that respect. With regard to a strategy for sustainable development, Flanders should, in concrete terms, build on (or even “leapfrog” with) the European and the national strategies for sustainable development. Conversely, the European level should increasingly support the national/regional level in the development of a sustainable development strategy. It could at least establish a “clearing house” for relevant information or devise other mechanisms that allow the actors at the national/regional level to learn from each other’s “good practices”. To provide a model for a STRADO (common framework) goes a step further. The development of a common framework is useful but must not lead to a (too great) limitation of the room for experimentation of the national/regional level.

A Flemish contribution to the national strategy for sustainable development, and harmonisation of the Flemish and the federal levels with regard to sustainable development can be realised through an interministerial conference. Arrangements can be laid down in a co-operation agreement.

In order for the above-mentioned intrinsic advantages of the local level to have a chance of success, the Flemish government has to guide the local levels as much as possible in an integrated way. To that end, it has to make progress with regard to the harmonisation/integration of instruments such as the environmental covenant, the mobility covenant and similar instruments at social and economic levels. The instruments for stimulating local authorities with regard to sustainable development, have to aim at complementarity and synergy with the existing instruments.

5.3. Recommendations with regard to capacity reinforcement and ‘learning’

According to the SERV and the MiNa-Council, the following measures should be taken in Flanders with priority in order to develop strategic capacity and make it available to support, dialogue and ‘learning’ in all phases of the strategy development and policymaking with regard to sustainable development.

5.3.1 Reinforce ‘knowledge management’ and ‘strategic intelligence’

Objective and motivation

An effective sustainable development strategy is supported by information, analysis and debate. *Knowledge management* is an important tool in that respect. It can be seen as a process to detect and start on the available ‘intellectual capital’, discover gaps and bridge them. Knowledge building is necessary at two levels: information for the strategy development and ‘*strategic intelligence*’. The latter contains analytical instruments such as exploration of the

future, scenario analysis, benchmarking, option and impact analysis, technology assessment, backcasting, etc. and competence with regard to process management, participatory consultation and co-ordination methods, choice of policy instruments and composition of a 'policy mix', system innovation and transition management, etc.

Current situation in Flanders

Flanders has no culture of strong policy-oriented research institutes or investment in policy-supporting scientific research (although the centres of expertise for policy-preparatory research have existed for five years now). Usually, the administration is organised in such a way that it is difficult to steer the policy-preparatory research. In practice, policy development is often dominated by 'technocrats', lobbies and Ministers' offices that can rapidly change when changes occur in the Government. This means that fairly little scientific and empirical information is collected in Flanders with a view to the decision-making, and an 'institutional memory' of knowledge and experiences is being developed laboriously. Moreover, the academic research is often too compartmentalised, too little problem-oriented and demand-driven, and badly opened up to policymakers. Strategic intelligence is only present in Flanders to a limited extent and in a very dispersed way.

Possible realisation

The SERV and the MiNa-Council emphasise that, in the long term, the development and transfer of knowledge will probably be the key factor for success for a sustainable development strategy. There is a need for a powerful and permanent programme of knowledge and capacity development, which comprises data collection, analysis, capacity and strategic intelligence. Knowledge and capacity development in itself requires specific capacity and facilities. In that respect, the required sustainable development policy unit (see below in 5.4.1) can play an important role to list and open up the available strategic intelligence.

More generally, there is a need for a knowledge centre or expert group within the government that can assist the departments with methodological training, guidance and advice in the field of analysis instruments, consideration methodologies, establishment of priorities, policy integration, strategic management, consultation and participation methods, etc. The future 'Flemish Government study service' may play an important role in that guidance of the departments.

Building on the currently existing instruments (EIA, RIA, CBA, child impact report), special attention should be paid to the development of more integrated forms of impact analysis, so that all effects will be fully examined. Further methodological development is necessary for the plan evaluation as well. With a view to strategic policy processes with regard to sustainable development, there is a need for a workable mechanism that tests social costs and benefits of proposed policy options in terms of their effects on the various dimensions of sustainable development, and especially their synergetic potential.

Furthermore it may be considered to stimulate (whether or not virtual) networks and forums at which the government, stakeholders and academics can exchange and debate instruments of strategic intelligence, and to make more general investments in the development of human capital (education and training, working/learning combinations, ...).

An important aspect of the knowledge reinforcement strategy is the development and application of an integrated demand-oriented multi-annual programme for policy-scientific research, in which sustainable development should be a central guideline. A specific point of interest in that respect is the optimal opening up and valorisation of the results of this scientific research.

5.3.2 Provide capacity building with regard to instrument development

The development of the set of policy instruments and the choice of complementary packages of policy instruments (geared to specific combinations of policy themes and target groups) forms an important part of the administrative dimension of sustainable development.

The thread of that part is the fact that actors are stimulated, through an adequate market and price policy, to take the full social costs and benefits of their decisions into account, including the environmental and social implications, and that actors should be stimulated, through science, technology and innovation, to increase the social benefits of their decisions and decrease their social costs (see also part 3.1).

However, the SERV and the MiNa-Council think the development of concrete proposals on the subject is a technically complex and socially delicate matter. Therefore they do not wish to further pronounce upon this issue at this stage. However, they do resolve to pay special attention to this subject during the further mutual discussion and vision development in the field of sustainable development.

5.4. Recommendations with regard to vision development and strategy development

Finally, the SERV and the MiNa-Council indicate below how the vision development and strategy development for sustainable development can be started in Flanders, and what they consider to be the priorities for the coming months.

5.4.1 Provide a co-ordinating secretariat

Objective and motivation

A Strategy for Sustainable Development can, to a large extent, be developed by reinforcing the tools, processes and structures that are already present. However, the strategy development requires specific 'governance' provisions, among which a Sustainable Development policy unit. The unit is needed to co-ordinate, feed and guard the continuing process of strategy development.

Current situation in Flanders

At present, Flanders has no service that specifically deals with strategy development in the field of sustainable development. In the past, AMINAL (the environment administration) took the initiative to work, at interdepartmental level, on sustainable development and chaired an official interdepartmental working group on Sustainable Development. Afterwards, the chairmanship was shared with the Administration of Foreign Affairs of Flanders. The Flemish Government has recently decided to charge a representative from the Services for the General Government Policy with the chairmanship from now on. For the time being, this is still the Co-ordination Department. An actual 'secretariat' or policy unit has not (yet) been provided.

Possible realisation

According to the SERV and the MiNa-Council, the experience in other countries and with horizontal policy themes (e.g. regulatory management) shows that a co-ordinating policy unit for sustainable development is crucial. It would be best to give it a central position in the public administration, and not in a line department. Experience also shows that such a policy unit must not function as a decision-making body. It should rather be regarded as a limited 'secretariat' with highly qualified collaborators, that deals among other things with the organisation, co-ordination and content-wise support of the strategy process, with gaining confidence and support for the strategy development, with the follow-up of decisions, etc. It is important to have a good task delineation. The secretariat should not perform all of the tasks itself, but should mainly focus on process management and consensus building. Content-wise, it should to a large extent fall back on the expertise, networks and strategic policy processes that are already available, both within and outside the government, and take initiatives to reinforce them.

5.4.2 Establish a multistakeholder forum

Objective and motivation

Initiatives in the field of internal government mechanisms are necessary but insufficient to make progress with regard to sustainable development. Important impediments indeed have deeper social causes. In order to be effective, a sustainable development strategy should therefore be largely supported, within and outside the government. A support that also holds out in the long term, implies a commitment at the highest political level and intense *consultation* between government and stakeholders, in the first place to reach a maximum of consensus on the views, interests, objectives, priorities and measures of the strategy⁷. That is why a *multistakeholder forum* is necessary, that consists of representatives of the government, economic actors and social groups, and that provides a *broad ownership* and is charged with the development and the follow-up of the strategy. A sustainable development strategy will indeed only be put into practice if all these actors feel co-responsible for its realisation. This feeling of shared responsibility can only be created if the actors are strongly involved in the formulation and follow-up of the strategy.

Current situation in Flanders

In Flanders, strategic planning is usually based on the administration or experts (e.g. environmental planning, spatial planning). Although there are logical differences according to the strategic level of documents and although there is a clear evolution in time, the social input is still mainly realised through advice on draft documents that are prepared at a merely official-political level. Examples of processes in which the social input and involvement was much larger in an early stage, are rare. (e.g. the Pact of Vilvoorde or the business conference).

For the sustainable development strategy, the Flemish Government seems to opt for the rather traditional approach, given its recent decision to charge a cross-policy domain official working group for sustainable development with the preparation of the guidelines of a Flemish strategy for sustainable development.

Possible realisation

According to the SERV and the MiNa-Council, this 'traditional' approach is not the right way for a sustainable development strategy. A mere official-political formulation of a strategy for sustainable development implies, even with broad participation and advice from strategic advisory councils, the important risk that the strategy will be perceived mainly as a government project, and will turn out to be one too. And the risk that the strategy will not survive more than one term of office. An effective, 'sustainable' strategy unites the expectations and expertise from the government, the private sector, social associations and citizens to design a vision of the future and work towards it.

The MiNa-Council and the SERV therefore think a multistakeholder forum should be established, in which the social support and the sustainable development strategy begin to take shape in an early

⁷ When it is impossible to reach a consensus, the bottlenecks have to be identified through the consultation, and reasoned options have to be formulated, so as to allow politicians to make better founded choices.

stage, are confirmed and regularly evaluated and adjusted. This forum should be composed of representatives of the government and of civil society. In order to keep the forum workable, a construction may be considered in the first place in which the Flemish Government regularly meets representatives of the social stakeholders with a view to the development and follow-up of the Strategy for Sustainable Development.

A multistakeholder forum is no alternative to information, participation and advice when developing a sustainable development strategy, and should moreover function itself in a transparent and participatory way. It is obvious that it should be a complementary part of the larger whole of participation-oriented arrangements (see 5.1.2).

5.4.3 Use existing strategies and processes as the basis for a Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development

Objective and motivation

To develop a sustainable development strategy with a view to structural changes in the existing production and consumption patterns implies that the strategy process contains the essential elements of good 'social management'. These elements are (1) vision formulation (which ultimate goal do we have in mind?); (2) vision development (the detailed exploration and discussion of the ultimate goal in a large social debate, the indication of the roads to take without decisive answers, and with respect for and willingness to listen to all participants); (3) planning (a comprehensive enterprise spread over a long period of time cannot work unless it is supported by a decent planning); (4) implementation; and (5) permanent evaluation and adjustment. (6) Concentration of forces is the connecting thread throughout this entire process of strategic policymaking. All actors involved (government and non government) have to be able to adequately make a contribution to the formulation of a vision and an ultimate goal. When the ultimate goal is worth it, and is developed in an open way, forces have to be joined in order to put this vision into practice.

In that respect, effective sustainable development strategies try in the first place to join already existing strategies and processes, in order to reinforce and improve them, rather than starting up a completely new or separate strategic decision-making process.

Current situation in Flanders

Of all strategic decision-making processes in Flanders, the past 'Pact of Vilvoorde' process comes closest to the 'social management' that is wanted. The Pact was prepared in a series of vision groups with the government and social actors. It was signed on 22 November 2001 by the then Flemish Government, the Flemish social partners and nature and environmental as-

sociations. With the “21 objectives for the 21st century”, the signatories wanted to provide an answer to the appeals, including those of the SERV⁸ and the MiNa-Council⁹, to Flanders to attend to a long-term vision and strategy, and to the appeal of the European Union to develop a competitive and dynamic knowledge economy by 2010. The new Flemish coalition agreement is based to a large extent on the Pact of Vilvoorde. Several objectives from the Pact have been copied in the coalition agreement and in policy memorandums. In order to follow up the Pact, indicators have been developed that were approved at VESOC (Flemish Economic and Social Consultative Committee). The progress was reported on in 2003, 2004 and 2005.

In the meantime, it has also been decided to update the objectives of the Pact of Vilvoorde. It is indeed recommended to hold objectives up to the light at regular intervals, including longer-term objectives such as those included in the Pact of Vilvoorde. In this context, and for the purpose of the consultation with the Flemish Government, the social partners represented in the SERV have recently formulated a proposal to adapt certain objectives of the Pact of Vilvoorde. In the meantime, the environmental and nature associations that have co-signed the Pact, have received these proposals together with the request to formulate their observations, in order to allow a dialogue to be held on the subject.

Possible realisation

At present, the SERV and the MiNa-Council think the Pact of Vilvoorde is the best available starting point to obtain a Flemish sustainable development strategy, because of its political-social meaning, the large number of policy themes it deals with, and the longer-term horizon (2010). These characteristics also allow the Pact to guide the strategic policymaking in the different policy domains content-wise. Therefore, the MiNa-Council and the SERV argue in favour of a reinforcement and improvement of the Pact of Vilvoorde as a method to institutionalise the process of strategy development with regard to sustainable development.

However, given the characteristics of effective strategies for sustainable development, the Pact of Vilvoorde has to be reinforced and supplemented, in the first place by taking care of the social interaction process such a Pact should foster and support. This implies the involvement of all relevant actors and approaches (cf. the demand for a multistakeholder forum). There has been too little interaction with the Flemish Parliament so far. Secondly, it is advisable to complete the Pact with (1) long-term vision development and points of particular interest from the international, European and federal policy developments in the field of sustainable development (see among other things the European strategy and the federal plan for sustainable development), (2) experiments (see below in 5.4.4), (3) a good follow-up system (see

⁸ SERV (2000). Platformtekst Langetermijnvisie voor Vlaanderen : een uitgestoken hand van de Vlaamse sociale partners. Brussels, Sociaal-Economische Raad van Vlaanderen, 12 July 2000.

⁹ MiNa-Raad (2000). Oriëntatienota van 7 december 2000: Toekomstvisie voor Vlaanderen.

below in 5.4.5) and (4) an 'institutional plan' that contains a planning for the administrative reforms and mechanisms that are argued in this advice.

5.4.4 Create and support strategic projects and co-operation initiatives

Objective and motivation

It takes time to see results of a sustainable development strategy, and a lack of visible results may lead to a lack of interest and decreasing social and political support. That is why it is anyhow recommended to also start and support concrete projects and co-operation initiatives that produce results in the shorter term, can demonstrate the advantages of an integrated approach and can nurture experiments and learning effects.

Current situation in Flanders

In recent years, many large and small-scale initiatives have been taken in Flanders that apply or test a series of sustainable development principles at their level. The most important example probably is the establishment of the "Innovatieplatform Milieutechnologie – MIP" (Environment Technology Innovation Platform). It concerns a partnership between different policy fields (innovation, environment, energy) and parties (government, market parties, research institutions) in which new forms of co-operation and policy integration can be developed and tested. Other examples are the projects with regard to 'sustainable building transition management', corporate social responsibility, the demarcation of urban areas, the process of animal production and consumption in the 21st century, brownfield development, rural policy, social employment in nature management, the announced climate conference, etc.

Possible realisation

The SERV and the MiNa-Council are of the opinion that the promotion, dissemination, support and valorisation of such initiatives is advisable and should be part of the sustainable development strategy. They consider them to be necessary learning processes and a concretisation of the bottom-up approach of sustainable development.

5.4.5 Provide continuous effects, monitoring and evaluation

Objective and motivation

A sustainable development strategy is no objective in itself. It has to affect all policy branches and initiatives. Moreover, a strategy is no linear process of formulation and implementation. Effective strategies are characterised by experiments, feedback and adjustment. A sustainable

development strategy therefore has to contain monitoring and evaluation. The government has to develop and follow up indicators. It regularly has to evaluate priorities, objectives, measures and results. The intention is not to judge policymakers on the results, but to permanently 'learn' from experiences and to make adjustments on the basis of new information and developments.

Current situation in Flanders

In recent years, Flanders has made a lot of progress in the field of policy indicators, both within the Flemish government (e.g. VRIND, MIRA, Pact of Vilvoorde, the environmental policy plan, Business Conference, ...) and outside it (e.g. the benchmarking of Flanders in SERA, the two-yearly socio-economic report of the SERV).

In the domain of evaluation research and feedback to the policy, the initiatives have been less numerous. Evaluation committees often have an ad hoc character and an indistinct mandate, limited resources and little time. The evaluation research is fragmented, and does not always fit in with the political agenda. In many cases, there is no standardised evaluation methodology. The Mira-BE process and, to a certain extent, also the environmental policy sciences support centre are a few of the rare examples of systematic policy evaluation.

Possible realisation

The SERV and the MiNa-Council are of the opinion that the experiences and initiatives in Flanders have to be built on in order to create a good monitoring and evaluation system for sustainable development. Ideally, such a system should fulfil four tasks: (1) the regular measuring of the state of the environment, the economy and society; the definition of the main strengths and weaknesses, and of the aspects having strategic importance; (2) the monitoring of the progress of the strategy implementation in terms of inputs, process quality, outputs, outcomes and performance of actors; (3) the evaluation of the results of the strategy in order to find causal connections between stated transitions and policy actions, to learn from it and to thus continue to develop capacity; (4) the reporting and wider dissemination of the previous elements with a view to interaction and adjustment.

The indicators and evaluations have to concern both the content-wise aspects and objectives of the strategy and the 'governance' mechanisms and instruments. When further concretising the monitoring and evaluation systems, harmonisation and convergence between the separate initiatives are advisable, as they stimulate comparability and possible learning effects. In order to guarantee the effect of the Flemish Sustainable Development Strategy and of the results of the monitoring on the policy, it is advisable to link the reporting to existing strategic decision-making moments (e.g. September Declaration of the Flemish Government, annual policy letters, ...).

6. The way forward

In his "sustainable development" policy memorandum, the Minister-President of the Flemish Government has announced that he intends to develop with priority a specific Flemish strategy for sustainable development in the course of the following years, taking into account the limitation in terms of administrative support. Having regard to the previous recommendations, the MiNa-Council and the SERV want to conclude this advice with a proposal for a short-term agenda for the coming months.

A first step will be of course the request by the SERV and the MiNa-Council, following previous meetings, for a further explanation and discussion of the analysis and recommendations in this advice. The MiNa-Council and the SERV repeat that they do not consider this advice as an end point, but rather as a starting point for a dialogue with the Flemish Government, the Flemish Parliament and other actors.

Somewhat in advance of these meetings, the SERV and the MiNa-Council suggest the following five priorities for the coming months:

1. The establishment of a central unit for sustainable development (see 5.4.1);
2. The establishment of a multistakeholder forum (see 5.4.2) and the reinforcement of the Flemish Parliament's involvement (see 5.1.1);
3. The supplement of the 'Pact of Vilvoorde' process on the basis of long-term vision development and points of particular interest from the international, European and federal policy developments (see 5.4.3);
4. The supplement of the Pact of Vilvoorde process with existing and new 'experiments' (see 5.4.4);
5. The supplement of the Pact of Vilvoorde process with an 'institutional plan' that contains a planning for the other administrative reforms and mechanisms that are argued in this advice (see 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4.4).

In the meantime, the SERV and the MiNa-Council resolve to continue their co-operation in the field of Sustainable Development.

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Annex 1: Most important weaknesses in many current strategic approaches

- Absence of an integrated, long-term vision. Most existing strategies have been developed as a *short-term response* to current (and even past) problems or in response to global agreements. Integration of economic, social, environmental and institutional issues has been *weak*.
- Lack of ownership of strategies. Most strategic planning frameworks are perceived to be *exclusively those of government*. There is little sense of commitment by stakeholders.
- No long term commitment. The pace of electoral cycles have made it difficult for governments to take a longer-term view in making decisions. Incoming governments see a particular strategy as representing the views or policies of its predecessor and either ignores it or initiates a new strategy process.
- Uneven involvement of ministries. There has rarely been effective engagement with other line ministries to build *cross-government support*. In many cases, sustainable development has often been interpreted narrowly as an environmental issue without implications for more than a small group of society. Segmented working methods prevail as constitutional, legal and political obstacles to policy co-ordination exist, partly in order to maintain clear distribution of responsibilities and specialisation of tasks among sectors and across levels of government.
- Weak analysis. Many existing strategies are based on incomplete or *weak analysis*. There is usually little time and demand for analysis. In addition, 'analysis' often consisted merely of assessments of the status of various sustainability issues.
- No effective participation. The formulation of most national strategies remains dominantly *top-down* or suffers from problems with participation. The strategy is conceived by some authority, and is developed by professional staff, with no or limited involvement of those likely to have a legitimate interest or be affected by the outcomes (stakeholders).
- Poor strategy management. Unsuccessful strategies have usually been *linear processes*, that is, designing, implementing and (sometimes) monitoring a new strategy as separate phases. There has been inadequate time for *experimentation, feedback, debate and attitudinal change*.
- Shortage and loss of capacities. *Capacity* is undermined by a number of factors, such as insufficient training/retraining of experts in government, weak systems for selecting expertise, not sufficiently attractive working conditions and career opportunities in the civil service to attract high-calibre individuals. In addition, post rotations within the civil service result in a loss of continuity. With their departure, there is also a *loss of institutional memory and access to networks*.
- Poor mechanisms for trade-offs, priority setting and conflict management. Past strategies have not effectively dealt with *trade-offs* because the methods remain poorly developed and the necessary skills and/or political will have been lacking. At best, this has resulted in '*shopping lists*' of ideas and project proposals without due regard to the need to *prioritise*, given resource limitations.
- Little financial resources for strategies. The usual practice in many countries is to fund the strategy as a single-task, time-bound project. As such, it will be unlikely to endure or influence government budgets on a long-term basis.
- Poor public communication. Communication is often limited to public relations initiatives through information campaigns and the media. There is no *two-way communication* between policy-makers and the public, nor a commitment to longterm social interaction to achieve a shared understanding of sustainable development and its implications.
- Ineffective monitoring systems and accountability. Establishing *baseline* information and data Identifying *indicators* of strategy progress and establishing systems to *monitor* strategy development and implementation to track progress, capture key lessons and change strategic directions where necessary have often been neglected.

Annex 2: Key principles of sustainable development strategies

Strategy formulation should be

- Country-led and nationally-owned. Countries must take the lead and initiative in developing their own strategies. Sustainable development strategies cannot emerge from outside pressures or international obligations.
- Rooted in a vision of long-term development. The vision should reflect a consensus among social, economic and political stakeholders across the political spectrum. High-level government commitment to the vision is also essential.
- Defined through a participatory process, involving civil society, the private sector and political stakeholders to open up debate, expose issues to be addressed, and build consensus and political support on action.
- Based on a solid analytical basis, taking account also of relevant regional issues, including a comprehensive review of the present situation and forecasts of trends and risks, including those beyond the country's control. Such analysis depends on credible and reliable information on changing environmental, social and economic conditions, pressures and responses, and their implications for strategy objectives and indicators.
- Focused on ensuring sustained beneficial impacts on disadvantaged and marginalised groups, notably the poor.
- Comprehensive and integrated. Strategies should seek to integrate economic, social and environmental objectives through mutually supportive policies. But where integration cannot be achieved, and hard choices have to be made, they should be negotiated in a transparent and participative manner. Ensuring transparency and accountability is therefore essential.

In developing the strategy key it is essential to:

- Build on existing strategies and processes, rather than adding additional ones, and focus on improving the convergence, complementarity and coherence between different planning frameworks and policies. This requires mechanisms to co-ordinate different processes, and to identify and resolve potential conflicts, as well as good communication and information dissemination with a premium on transparency and accountability.
- Define the roles, responsibilities and relationships of key participants in strategy processes early on. Governmental, civil society, and private sector stakeholders should agree on the "rules of the game" and be bound to clearly defined standards of behaviour.
- Set realistic and monitorable targets linked to clear budgetary priorities. Targets need to be challenging – but realistic in relation to financial and other constraints. The strategy needs to be fully integrated into the budget process to ensure that financial resources are available to translate it into action. Conversely, the formulation of budgets must take account of the priorities highlighted in the strategy.

Capacity should be developed by

- Identifying priority capacity development needs. This includes taking stock of the institutional, human, scientific and financial capacity of state, market and civil society stakeholders and finding ways to fill gaps.
- "Building in" continuous monitoring and improvement from the outset. This requires developing mechanisms and indicators to track progress, capture lessons from experience, identify necessary changes of course. Local capacities for analysis and existing information should be fully utilised.
- Linking national, international and local levels. Policy-making and planning should involve two-way iterative processes within and between national and decentralised levels of governments. The main strategic principles and directions should be set at the central level but detailed planning, implementation and monitoring would be undertaken at a decentralised level, with appropriate transfer of resources and authority.