

# *BELGIAN PLATFORM INDICATORS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT*

## Context

Implementing sustainable development not only means reconsidering numerous political decisions but also striving towards an adaptation of individual and collective behaviour. Beyond alternate decision-making, sustainable development must lead to a re-defining of decision-making mechanisms while relying on specific decision aid tools.

Among those tools, indicators for a sustainable development capture the interest of political, administrative, scientific and civil society actors. Indicators can cover a range of functions within the decision-making cycle, from decision-maker's or public's information/awareness-raising to the monitoring of societal progresses.

The Platform "Indicators for Sustainable development" answers a series of basic and practical questions resulting from these potential functions.

## Project description

The platform was created in the framework of the PADD I support actions in response to different analyses which had shown the necessity to improve communication between researchers and decision-makers.

The platform's working areas include:

- firstly, indicators for sustainable development, both as lists and menus (for instance, the CSD, OECD, AEE... listings), and indices and indexes (such as the ISEW, ESI...);
- secondly, the environmental, economic, social and institutional indicators

referring to key thematics of sustainable development (such as climate change, decoupling, material flows, transport indicators...).

Focusing on the interdependency and integration aspects of these indicators is meant to be favourable to relationships (and, therefore, the cooperation) between a series of actors of sustainable development on the federal and regional levels.

## Objectives

The overall objectives of the platform aim at:

- Contributing to an improved organisation of research activities  
The activities undertaken in the frame of the platform should result in the expression and implementation of proposals for improving the organisation of research on sustainable development indicators in Belgium, aiming at:
  - a better co-ordination and coherence of the research works: the platform should favour methodological comparability, exchange of research results and scientific cooperation between researchers; reinforce the complementarity of research initiatives, notice discrepancies and duplications; integrate approaches, synthesise and value the results... It should also contribute to spreading new knowledge of the state-of-the-art evolution in the field of sustainable development indicators;
  - a better cooperation between scientists, decision-makers and other social actors: confrontation between research and policy actors should result in faster identification of users' needs (working out of a research agenda), transmission of the results to users, retroaction between researchers and users...
- Improving the accessibility of research results  
The above-mentioned objectives involve information on sustainable development indicators being made accessible to a large public, in a structured and interactive way. To this purpose, an "indicators" module is being developed, within the Sustainable Development Information System (SDIS), in close collaboration with the platform. Simultaneously the platform lists the Belgian actors and projects linked with indicators and makes them accessible via its website.

The operational objectives of the platform are:

- monitoring and analysis of the scientific, political and administrative activities in the field of sustainable development indicators;
- improving the accessibility and understanding of such activities and initiatives for each different type of actors concerned;
- encouraging the exchange of information and experiments between the different types of actors concerned;

- identifying the strong points and weaknesses of research on sustainable development indicators in relation to the demand;
- promoting Belgian expertise on the international level.

### Methodology

The major role of the platform consists in networking the societal actors involved in the development or the use of sustainable development indicators through identifying and listing the actors, and through developing a range of activities, such as:

- Scientific seminars aimed at a series of actors involved in indicator research and development, in order to favour the debate on the links between decision processes and indicators.
- Symposia/thematic conferences favouring exchanges between the scientific, political, administrative, civil society actors with a view to link scientific capacities to concrete needs.
- A web site providing information on the platform activities, on connected Belgian expertise and initiatives, sustainable development and indicator concepts, Belgian and foreign experience likely to favour meeting and information exchange on indicators.
- Methodological support to public institutions in relation to experience in methodological indicators ("indicators" pilot group of the Sustainable Development Interdepartmental Commission).

### Interaction between the different partners

The platform partners, coming from 4 public institutions - 2 universities (KULeuven-HIVA and ULB-IGEAT) and 2 public management institutes (IBGE and BfP) -, have been collaborating since the early 2001. The researchers from these 4 institutions make up the operational cell of the platform. They work in close interaction on the development and organisation of the platform activities.

### Expected results and/or products

The platform activities intend to back the creation of an epistemic community concerned with the issues of sustainable development indicator development and use. Concretely, the platform activities are detailed on the [www.belspo.be/platformisd](http://www.belspo.be/platformisd) website; and in the activity reports, which are available on request.

### Partners

ULB-IGEAT - Centre for Studies on Sustainable Development

The Centre for Studies on Sustainable Development carries out multidisciplinary research with respect to a series of aspects in relation to environmental policies and strategies within the general frame of sustainable development. The Centre is concerned with research on the elaboration and evaluation of policies and instruments, as well as with the socio-economic, technical or philosophical context of sustainable development.

#### KULeuven-HIVA

The Higher Institute of Labour Studies (Hoger Instituut voor de Arbeid - HIVA) is a research institute of the KULeuven. It was set up in 1974, on the initiative of the KULeuven and the Christian Workers Movement. The primary objectives of HIVA are to obtain scientific insights into the social problems of workers and of deprived groups in society, in order to contribute to the resolution of these problems and to stimulate dialogue and collaboration between science and practice, between the university and the labour movement. The research activities focus on 4 sectors: employment, education and labour market, social and economic policy sector, sustainable development, all sectors in which the HIVA multidisciplinary team has acquired a wide-ranging expertise and a nationwide as well as worldwide reputation.

#### IBGE-BIM

The Environmental Data Observatory, set up in 1996, produces documented data and indicators related to the Brussels environment. Since 1998, it has equally developed a health-environment interface. Since its creation the ODE team has been dealing with Brussels and supraregional problematics. The ODE produces only a part of the basic data and works in close collaboration with a network of data providers, inside or outside the IBGE. It is also specialized in the assessment of specific issues.

#### Bureau Fédéral du Plan - Task-force Développement durable

The Bureau fédéral du Plan, a public body under the authority of the Prime Minister and the Minister of economic affairs, takes orders from the Council of Ministers. Globally the BFP is in charge of the achievement of macroeconomic forecasts, assessment of the results of the economic and social policies, and structural analyses mainly in the economic, social and environmental fields. Moreover, the BfP is in charge of the writing of the Federal Report on sustainable development and the draft project of the Federal Plan on sustainable development. The Task Force Sustainable Development has been active within the BfP since January 1998, date of its creation.

#### Contact Information

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Website: [www.belspo.be/platformisd](http://www.belspo.be/platformisd)

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