Translating the Limits of Our Planet into Environmental Targets for Switzerland

Start Date: November 2013
End Date: February 2015

Rationale:

Human beings consume non-renewable resources on an increasingly vast scale, and several renewable resources are being depleted beyond their capacity of regeneration. Therefore it is necessary to reduce resource consumption to an environmentally sustainable level. Environmental impacts, including the environmental impacts generated abroad, should thereby be considerably reduced. This overall goal needs to be substantiated.

Description:

The goal is to develop recommendations for a set of environmental targets for a Green Economy, by translating the limits of our planet to the context of Swiss demand. For each environmental aspect a demand-based target should be formulated. Together, the targets should cover (as far as meaningful) the most important planetary boundaries, hence, if all these targets are met by the proposed deadline, Swiss demand is causing an environmental impact which can be fully sustained by nature on the long term.

The target should take into account realistic scenarios on worldwide growth of human population and economic development. Where possible, the targets have to be formulated as per capita targets (assuming realistic scenarios of world population expected), and in absolute terms (multiplying by expected development of Swiss population). In cases where the evaluation shows that a quantitative target is not meaningful, an alternative recommendation should be provided. Measurability of the targets, and the need for further development of indicators, should also be discussed.

Furthermore, distributional questions are addressed: In a first step, equal rights for global environmental public goods per capita may be assumed (and thus equal "rights to pollute"). In a second step, distributional questions should be addressed relating to different economic, climatic, and historic conditions. This discussion should lead to more refined targets which, in addition to the perspective of natural science, can be defended both from an ethical and an economical point of view. The proposed targets should be refined through a scientific discussion in order to enhance their scientific soundness. The discussion must include a half-day workshop with acknowledged scientists both from the Swiss and the international scientific community, organised by the contractor.
Outputs/Results:

A set of measurable environmental targets should cover the most relevant environmental issues related to Swiss demand. The targets must have a broad scientific justification and should be measurable. Therefore, the state of the discussion on relevant indicators for Switzerland should be taken into account.

Clients/End Users:

FOEN, UNEP, international organisations, post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals stakeholders; public and academic institutions and the general public.