

AQUATOR GROEN & RUIMTE
COMMUNICATION ON PROGRESS 2020

ADVANCED LEVEL

COMMUNICATION ON PROGRESS 2020
ADVANCED LEVEL – GRI CONSOLIDATED STANDARDS

to: whoever it may concern

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1 INTRODUCTION

Aequator Groen & Ruimte is an independent advisory firm from the Netherlands, with a leading role in (re)vitalizing rural areas and making them a better place to live, work and enjoy.

Our advisors are keen to match public and private goals and will always search for creative solutions that meet the ambitions of both the (local) government and the farmers, landowners and other users of the rural domain. To think in opportunities instead of threats is our central slogan. In the Netherlands we are forerunners in the design of environmental services agreements and financial constructions for the management of the rural space. Sustainability is therefore partly 'in our genes'.

Our expertise concentrates on the interfaces of agriculture, nature, soil, water and land use planning and is based on many years of experience as intermediaries between policy and practice. Our roots lie in the world famous Dutch agricultural extension service. Our working method is creative and aims to implement, to 'move' and to 'do'. Sustainability is leading for all our activities. Reporting on the sustainability of our own internal business processes perfectly fits this philosophy.

While active within the Global Compact Network since 2009 and submitting our reports annually, we have felt the need to raise our standards of working and improve our reporting on that accordingly. The world is in turmoil and global processes like climate change and serious pandemics threaten our future. Responsible, transparent efforts and intentions of all that dwell on our planet are needed. Therefore, we have chosen to increase our efforts and raise our reporting level from 'Active' to 'Advanced'. This report reflects these efforts. And during 2021, we will try to do even better!

2 STRATEGY AND ANALYSIS

2.1 Statement of continuing support

Sustainable development is our core business and priority. As advisors active in the rural and green areas of the Netherlands, so we can not underestimate the importance of the sustainability of our activities, advices and efforts. In terms of Sustainable Development Goals, our company's activities relate to:

SDG-2: to end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture,
SDG-13: to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts,
and SDG-15: to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.



As a company, Aequator undertakes several activities related to the selected SDGs, some in collaboration with other stakeholders such as waterboards, local governments and farmers, others as part of our business model. The COP explains our business priorities with respect to the selected SDG's and highlights the opportunities and responsibilities we see.

Achievements in 2020

- Aequator is continuing its support to the selected SDGs and principles mentioned in this COP;
- The injury frequency rate was nil (in 2009-2018 also nil).
- The number of workdays lost due to accidents was nil (in 2009-2018 also nil).
- The number of workdays lost due to sickness amounted to only 30 days. In comparison: in 2019 we reported 119 days, in 2018: 47 days, in 2017: 8 days, in 2016: 19, in 2015: 85; 2014: 75, in 2013: 61, in 2012: 152, in 2011: 100, 2010: 130 and in 2009: 426 days).
- There was 1 pregnancy: a female colleague took her maternity leave on December 18, 2020 (and become mother to a son in February, 2021).

- Three individual personal coaching schemes were to colleagues; 11 professional courses on communication, commercial writing, presentation skills and so forth were provided to 7 colleagues.
- No case of human rights violation has been reported during the year.
- All the workmen are subject to collectively agreed the Terms of Employment (AVR).
- During the reporting period no worktime was lost because of rift or strike by employees.
- No form of forced or compulsory labour was resorted to.
- The total number of personnel was 20 with a male:female ratio of 2,3:1. During 2019 it had been on average 2,0:1.
- Regarding electricity use Aequator uses saving bulbs and adheres to the policy of 'lights off at night after work'.
- Aequator continued its savings account at the largest Dutch sustainable bank: ASN Bank (www.asnbank.nl), to help finance sustainable development worldwide.
- Aequator re-qualified for the fifth consecutive year to the new ISO 9001:2015 standards .
- Communications through digital and social media are further promoted (over printed copies).
- The number of hybrid and electrically driven business lease cars during 2020 was 1 and 1 respectively. Public transport is promoted when employees travel large distances and especially to the cities of The Hague and Utrecht, where many governmental institutions reside. Due to the world wide covid-19 pandemic, the number of transportation kilometres, both by car and by public transport, were drastically reduced during 2020.
- New lease contracts for cars, used by Aequator staff, are of categories A, B, hybrid or fully electric, guaranteeing lower levels of suspended particulate matter and SO₂, NO_x and CO to the ambient air.
- Printers are selected (and maintained) according to the latest environmental standards.

Further achievements at the Advanced Signatory Level

Starting 2021, Aequator has chosen to report on a higher level: the Advanced signatory level of our COP. We do so by transparently filling out all the required documents and publicly submitting our COP to the UN Global Compact website. With this COP we reconfirm our adherence to the principles of Global Compact and the criteria corresponding to the advanced signatory level.

In specific we want to emphasize criterion 1 'The COP describes mainstreaming into corporate functions and business units' of the responsibility for the execution of our sustainability strategy in all relevant corporate functions. Aequator is a small to medium enterprise in which procurement, dealings with government affairs, human resources, legal issues and so forth are centrally executed by the management staff, ensuring that no function is conflicting with company sustainability commitments and objectives. From this COP 2020 onwards, we will do so at the Advanced signatory level, making goals and achievements SMART and transparent.

The COP describes value chain implementation (criterion 2) of our goals through training and capacity building through lectures and webinars on topics related to our field of knowledge (such as soil and water management, climate resilience, knowledge transfer). From this COP 2020 onwards, we will do so at the Advanced signatory level, making goals and achievements SMART and transparent (e.g. the free, knowledge sharing national network presided by Aequator on soil science, called "Bodemcomité").

As for our contribution to the selected SDGs (criterion 15)¹, Aequator has developed a range of knowledge products that facilitate the more sustainable use of land and water resources in rural areas. Some of these products are freely accessible to all, others require tailor-made local adaptation and hence, have become part of new business models/products. Examples are to be found – for example – on www.verrijkendelandbouw.nl and www.waterhouderij.nl.

Aequator performs various strategic social investments (criterion 16) related to access to knowledge and education (e.g. a full PhD program for a colleague at the expense of the company). Such social investments are an integrated part of our sustainability strategy as expressed in our 'MVO' (see www.aequator.nl/mvo/). In the vicinity of our office in Ede, the Netherlands, we support – both financially and through free presentations - the student organisations www.wsr-argo.nl and www.pyrusbwa.nl at the Wageningen University & Research. In the vicinity of our headoffice in Harderwijk, the Netherlands, we support the Science Café (www.sciencecafehardenwijk.info), the new Energy Cooperative Endura (www.endura-harderwijk.nl) and the regional Jobrotary Noordwest Veluwe initiative (www.jobrotary.nl). Jobrotary has the objective of facilitating work to people who have difficulties finding a job.

Experts and staff of Aequator participate actively in summits and conferences (criterion 17) on topics related to our field of business, advocating the sustainable management of soils and waters (without expressing political viewpoints). The most visible example was the leading role of one of our soil experts during the National Soil Summit 2020.

¹ Criteria 3 to 14 of the Advanced signatory level are described in the following sections of this COP

Aequator is member of the Global Soil Partnership, presided by FAO, and the Climate Smart Agriculture alliance. Also abroad, Aequator teams up with other private companies and research institutes to promote our knowledge on agriculture and soil and water management through the Netherlands Food Security Alliance (www.nl-fsa.nl). These and many smaller activities fit our adherence to criterion 18 of the Advanced Level.

Ambitions 2021

- Our main ambition is to hold on to our achievements so far (and detailed in this report) and report again at the Advanced Level in 2022 (over the year 2021).
- We aim to further decrease environmental effects caused to the ambient air by the emission of lease cars, ie replace fossil-fuel cars by hybrid or electrical cars when lease contracts are reviewed.
- Further reduce paper use by increasing the share of digital reporting to our clients.
- Reach full waste disposal division in our new offices according to type of materials (paper, plastic, ink cartridges, general waste).
- Re-qualify for ISO 9001: 2015 standards
- Provide coaching and training to colleagues.

We express our support for the Global Compact and how the ten principles on human rights, labour standards, environment and anti-corruption influence our company's strategy. We adhering to the principles of Global Compact and GRI will further strengthen our serious intentions.

To improve transparency and accountability, we have added a table of quantified performances on each of the basic principles.

Signed:



Peter Sloot
Director Aequator Groen & Ruimte

2.2 Summarizing table

Performance

The table below summarizes our performances during the calendar year 2020. Only quantifiable indicators are listed. More detailed descriptions are discussed in the sectors that follow.

		2020	2019
Principle 1: protection of human rights			
injury frequency rate	number / year	0	0
working days lost due to accidents	number / year	0	0
working days sick	number / year	30	119
sickness absences longer than 1 week	cases / year	1	2
number of pregnancies	cases / year	0	0
colleagues in coaching programmes	number / year	3	4
colleagues in professional training courses	number / year	7	5
number of professional training courses	number / year	11	14
extra working days spent on team sessions	number / year	0	1
Principle 2: no human rights abuses			
Human rights abuse	cases / year	0	0
Principle 3: freedom of association			
number of rifts or strikes	cases / year	0	0
Principle 4: no forced or compulsory labour			
number of cases of forced labour	cases / year	0	0
Principle 5: no child labour			
number of cases of child labour	cases / year	0	0
Principle 6: elimination of discrimination			
number of cases of child labour	cases / year	0	0
number of personnel	total number	20	20
start ratio male : female personnel	ratio in december	2,3	2,0
Principle 7: caution of environment			
number of hybrid cars leased	number / year	1	1
number of electrical cars leased		1	1
share of hybrid or electrical cars as of total leased cars	ratio in december	50%	50%

2.3 Actions, performances and ambitions on all principles

Principle 1: Business should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights.

Commitment

Aequator vows allegiance to the Dutch Constitution, which resolves to secure to all its citizens justice, liberty, equality and fraternity and which also encompasses the fundamental human rights as envisioned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Aequator stands committed to support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights.

Systems

Though there is no specific provision as such for human rights in statutes and guidelines of the company, the essence of all our working procedures ensures that our employees enjoy the fundamental human rights.

Aequator has in its management system provisions for health, safety, pension and education.

Actions

Health

- Aequator offers specific plans for re-integration of employees that have been ill for more than a week;
- Aequator offers a very attractive access to post-retirement scheme with ABP, the largest Dutch pension plan, for all its employees.
- Aequator offers advice on healthy working conditions and positions (chairs, desks and so forth) and invests in specially adapted seats for those personnel who require as such;

Safety

- Personnel at both our offices receives basic medical and emergency training (BHV-training), including refresher training
- Safety appliances such as fire blankets, fire extinguishers etc. are taken, also for lease cars.
- An externally performed Risk Analysis show no safety hazards for employees. Only minor suggestions for improvement had to be followed up (such as working desks with adjustable heights).

Education

- Aequator trains its employees regularly to update themselves, professionally, managerially and technically.
- Aequator encourages its employees to better their educational and professional qualification by giving suitable incentives, study leave, etc.

Performance during the year 2020

- The injury frequency rate was nil (in 2009-2018 also nil).
- The number of workdays lost due to accidents was nil (in 2009-2018 also nil).
- The number of workdays lost due to sickness amounted to only 30 days. In comparison: in 2019 we reported 119 days, in 2018 we reported 47 days, in 2017: 8 days, in 2016: 19, in 2015: 85; 2014: 75, in 2013: 61, in 2012: 152, in 2011: 100, 2010: 130 and in 2009: 426 days).
- There were no pregnancies.

- Three individual personal coachings were granted to junior and senior colleagues; 11 additional professional courses on communication, commercial and presentational skills were provided to an additional 7 colleagues.
- A team session was held with the entire company to discuss the long term strategy of the company.

Ambitions for the year 2021

- It is the ambition of Aequator to continue our policies and maintain our performances in this field .

Principle 2: Business should ensure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses.

Commitment

Aequator vows allegiance to the Dutch Constitution, which resolves to secure to all its citizens justice, liberty, equality and fraternity and which also encompasses the fundamental human rights as envisioned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Aequator stands committed to support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights.

Systems

- Aequator aims to support the protection of human rights and ensures that it is not complicit in human rights abuses, as a natural extension to all our policies and projects.
- Aequator has legal Terms of Employment (AVR) in which employees' rights, job review and performance procedures as well as the pathways for formal objections and grievances are described.

Actions & Performance during the year 2020

No case of human rights violation has been reported during the year.

Ambitions for the year 2021

It is the ambition of Aequator to continue our policies and performances in the field of human rights.

Principle 3: Business should uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining.

Commitment

Aequator stands committed to the protection of freedom of association among its employees and business partners.

Systems

Aequator distinguishes no hierarchic layers in its organization, besides that of the Management Team (general director, director and office manager). All personnel has the same type of contract, with the only exception being the general director, who has a managerial contract through his private consultancy.

1. Employees have the freedom to become member of an union. More than one Union is functioning in the Netherlands.
2. Upon invitation, employees can become shareholders of the company.

Actions

By Dutch law, Aequator does not need to have a legal entity (OR) that represents its workers in their dialogue with the directors. Important decisions concerning employees' direct interests, such as wages, incentives, bonus, line of promotions, working conditions, welfare measures, are all taken in plenary sessions, with all employees and ruled out in our Terms of Employment (AVR).

Performance during the year 2020

- All employees are subject to the collectively agreed the Terms of Employment (AVR).
- A committee of employees revised the AVR and made suggestions for improved which were incorporated in the AVR 2021 and approved unanimously.
- During the reporting period no worktime was lost because of rift or strike by employees.

Principle 4: Business should support the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour.

Commitment

Aequator stands committed not to resort to any form of forced and compulsory labour.

Systems

- No employee is required to deposit any sum of money for employment in Aequator, nor do service bonds exist, forcing employees who have been specifically trained at the cost of the company to remain for certain period.

Actions

- Printed copies of Terms of Employment and other rules are distributed to all employees upon contracting, and after each alteration.
- Handbooks containing the rules and regulations of the company are available online on the company's Intranet facility.
- Employees are given incentives for achieving higher levels of output.

Performance during the year 2020

No form of forced or compulsory labour was resorted to.

Principle 5: Business should support the effective abolition of child labour.

Commitment

Aequator stands committed not to engage any child labour and do all that it can to abolish it from its surroundings.

Systems

- For appointment in the company, the minimum age prescribed and scrupulously followed is 18 years.
- All employees are paid much above the minimum wages prescribed.

Actions

No specific actions were considered necessary.

Performance during the year 2020

- No child labour was employed by Aequator.
- No child labour was allowed to be employed by the subcontractors working for Aequator.
- Aequator does not promote trade with organisations engaging child labour.

Ambition for the year 2021

Aequator will include in its procurement procedures the official criteria that articles produced by child labour will under no circumstances be bought or otherwise acquired.

Principle 6: Business should support the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

Commitment

Aequator stands committed to follow the policy of non-discrimination in all matters – recruitment, employment opportunity, promotion, etc.

Systems

- The Dutch Constitution unambiguously prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.
- As a Dutch company, Aequator is bound to follow the Government directives, which are abundantly clear against any discrimination in any matters.
- Employees have easy access to the management to discuss and resolve discriminations, if any, quickly and effectively.

Actions

No specific actions were taken.

Performance during 2020

- Total number of employees 20
- Female employees 6
- Male:female ratio in December of the year: 2,4

Principle 7: Business should support a pre-cautionary approach to environmental challenges.

Commitment

Aequator stands committed to prevention and control of environmental pollution due to its activities, products and services, in a sustained manner. In fact, our core business, by order our our customers and our internal activities, is aimed at creating a more sustainable, hence environmentally more sound world.

Systems

In order to ensure pollution-free environment, norms and regulations as laid down by the Dutch Government are meticulously followed. The monthly bilateral meetings between staff and individual employees are a perfect communication channel for reporting concerns or seeking advice regarding environmental impacts.

Actions and performance during the year 2020

- Regarding electricity use Aequator uses saving bulbs and adheres to the policy of 'lights off at nigh after work'.
- Aequator continued her savings account at the largest Dutch sustainable bank: ASN Bank (www.asnbank.nl), to help finance sustainable development worldwide.
- New lease contracts for cars, used by Aequator staff, are of categories A, B or hybrid, guaranteeing low levels of suspended particulate matter and SO₂, No_x, and CO to the ambient air. The number of hybrid cars during 2020 was 1 and 1 electrically driven lease vehicle (out of a total of 4 by the end of the year).

Ambitions for 2021

Aequator aims to continue replacing lease contracts of relatively 'dirty' cars for new contracts of cars that emit low levels of suspended particulate matter and SO₂, NO_x and CO in the ambient air. The use of hybrid and electric cars will be encouraged.

Collection of garbage into separated streams of paper, plastic/metals, organic residues and 'other wastes' will be introduced in the offices of the Ede branch.

Principle 8: Business should undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility.

Commitment

Aequator stands committed to promoting greater environmental responsibility in agriculture, nature development, water management and rural development in general. Aequator also encourages employees and contractors to do so.

Systems

- Environmental aspects are carefully considered and appropriately incorporated at the planning stage of a project itself.
- Employees are frequently made aware of their environmental responsibility, e.g. in use of (lease) cars, paper and other stationary, electricity, etc.

Actions and performance during the year 2020

- Aequator received again the qualification of the international ISO 9001:2015 standards.
- Communications through digital and social media were further promoted (over printed copies).

Principle 9: Business should encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies.

Commitment

Aequator stands committed to encouraging the development and diffusion of environment-friendly technologies.

Aequator shall therefore endeavour to adopt safe and environment-friendly methods of advisory and commits itself to total compliance of all applicable environmental laws.

Aequator will maintain office equipment in excellent condition to ensure minimum impact of their operation on health and environment.

Actions and performance during the year 2020

- Public transport is promoted when employees travel large distances and especially to the governmental capital of the Netherlands, the Hague.
- Printers are selected (and maintained) according to the latest environmental standards.
- Aequator continues to adhere to Sustainable Procurement for all government projects (Duurzaam Inkopen).

Principle 10: Business should work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery.

Commitment

Aequator stands committed to eliminating corruption from all aspects of its functions. This COP is the public statement or our formal policy of zero-tolerance of corruption

Systems

- Surprise and regular checks are carried out of all sensitive functions of work.
- For their monthly declarations, employees are required to submit full details, i.e. receipts.
- Independent and qualified Registered Accountants perform legal checks on the book keeping of our larger projects.

Actions and performance during the year 2020

No specific actions were taken.

2.4 Discription of key impacts, risks and opportunities

Please refer to 2.1 above

2.5 Organization profile

The full name of our organization is Aequator Groen & Ruimte bv. In this report the company's name will often be abbreviated as "Aequator".

We are an advisory firm, active in the market of governments (national, regional and local) and land owners/land users of the rural parts of the Netherlands. Our services and produce are advisory reports, process advice and the like. In 2013, all our services were sold under the label / brand of "Aequator".

We are a commercial company, with limited liability (BV), under Dutch law. As of 31 December 2016, the company is owned by 3 shareholders, being 2 employees and 1 former employee, who is contracted under a management contract. Our office locations remain in Harderwijk (c/o Postbox 1171, Harderwijk, NL-3840 BD) and Ede ((Bovenbuurtweg 27, Ede, NL-6727 XA).

Aequator is, as for now, active in the Netherlands only.

Our markets are remain governments (national ministries, regional provinces, local municipalities), water boards, organizations that own and manage the Dutch natural areas, private land owners, farmers, drinking water companies and other advisory firms.

3 GOVERNANCE, COMMITMENTS AND ENGAGEMENT

3.1 Governance structure of the organization

The company is directed by the Management Team (MT), consisting of the director and the office manager. The Board of Shareholders controls the MT.

3.2 Since December, 2016, the Board of Shareholders consists of 3 persons, all of them working for Aequator, either directly or through a management contract. The chairman of the Board of Shareholders is Mr. Ruud Mantingh. The board of directors consists of Ruud Mantingh and Peter Sloot.

3.4 Several mechanisms exist for shareholders to provide recommendations or directions to the Board. Important decisions have to be taken unanimously (the list of 'important' decisions is part of the Shareholders Agreement); others require a majority of more than 75% (also listed in the Shareholders Agreement). By Dutch law, a company the size of Aequator does not require an Ondernemingsraad (OR) or Working Council to represent its employees in dealing with the Management Team or Board of Shareholders. Personal contacts are frequent and open and most managerial information on turn over, costs and benefits are openly communicated with all employees. Only information regarded as private (salaries, health related topics and so forth) and/or confidential is excluded from this rule.

4 REPORT PARAMETERS

4.1 The reporting period is the calendar year of 2020.

4.2 This is the eleventh Aequator report to the GRI/Global Compact standards.

4.3 Our intention is to report annually.

4.4 Questions on this report may be directed to Peter Sloot, director, psloot@aequator.nl or www.aequator.nl.

4.5 Scope of this report is Aequator Groen & Ruimte, active in the Netherlands.

4.8 Aequator has no joint ventures, no subsidiaries and no leased facilities. Outsourced operations are Finance, Personnel (salaries, pensions, et cetera) and IT.

4.10 NA

4.11 There are no changes in scope, limitations or measuring methods compared to earlier reports.

5 GOVERNANCE, COMMITMENTS AND ENGAGEMENT

5.14 The list of stakeholders engaged in our company and its activities is:

1. employees, their families, other workers and their trade unions;
2. our customers (75% public, 25% private);
3. our customers' clientèle', in specific; land users in the rural areas (for agriculture, nature, recreation etc);
4. shareholders and providers of capital;
5. suppliers;
6. neighbouring s companies sharing the same building facilities;
7. civil society.

5.15 The identification and selection of stakeholders for possible engagement is an active part of Aequator 's working processes. Employees (group 1) are contacted for advisory matters and social company affairs (such as Christmas dinner parties and so forth); our customers (group 2) are an important and obvious group (of demanding and paying entities); the third group is much broader (some 50% of the Dutch population) and less easily contacted and, hence, less frequently approached (only on a project scale). Shareholders are employees (see group 1); suppliers are not specifically engaged; with fellow companies, sharing office facilities (entrances, hallways, toilets etc) we engage on an incidental manner and with group 7, the civil society as a whole we correspond only through mass media .