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# Enhancing **URBAN-RURAL LINKAGES** to Harness the Transformative Power of Urbanization for Sustainable Development

## Introduction

1. Urbanization is a strong transformative force which is reshaping the world's urban and rural landscapes and bringing prosperity to many urban regions. However urbanization forces have also led to various challenges and opened up new forms of inequality, unsustainability, polarization and divergence in development and incomes between urban and rural areas.
2. In response to the increasing urbanization challenges and to harness the positive transformative power of urbanization, UN-Habitat is focusing on "Enhancing Urban-Rural Linkages to Harness the Transformative Power of Urbanization for Sustainable Development".
3. This flyer outlines the rationale for enhancing urban-rural linkages and identifies priority areas to advance the policy debate and actions for enhancing urban-rural linkages.

## Rationale for Enhancing Urban-Rural Linkages

4. Globally, over 50 per cent of people are now living in cities and large towns. It is projected that 70 per cent of the world's population will be living in urban areas by 2050. Furthermore, those moving to cities and large towns are from the rural areas. The metropolitan trend, with cities extending in peri-urban and rural areas, is another facet of the growing interconnection between rural and urban areas. The significant rural to urban shift often sees the edges or the urban areas growing rapidly and in an unplanned and uncoordinated manner. Given the large scale of urbanization and the implications for this type of development, it is vital to consider the linkages between the urban and rural contexts.
5. The concept of urban-rural linkages reinforces the idea of complementary functions and flows of people's movements, capital, goods, employment, information and technology between rural and urban territories of various sizes such as metropolitan regions, networks of small- and medium-sized cities, sparsely populated areas with market towns. The interdependencies and the synergies between urban and rural spaces and functions are further asserted through the economic dynamics, social links and environmental synergies. These flows, interdependencies and synergies are important in both developing and developed countries, even though the specific priorities in developing and developed countries may differ. Thus the theme of rural-urban linkages may be seen as universally important.
6. There is growing need to move away from dichotomizing the discussion of sustainable development into separate rural and urban themes. It is necessary to emphasize the importance of how partnerships, collaboration and unity in action, can yield dividends for all citizens, regardless of whether they live in urban or rural areas. In this way, the urban – rural linkages would provide a close and fresh look at means of fostering urban-rural development, with particular attention to food security, people's income, territorial planning, equity and governance.
7. The debate is also based on the three sustainable development pillars: social, economic and environmental. The debate would also demonstrate that achieving the new urban agenda would depend on the commitment to enhance urban-rural linkages in both developing and developed countries. Indeed, an effective urban-rural linkages programme, developed in partnership with other actors would clearly address key sustainable development concerns such as poverty eradication, sustainable agriculture, food security and nutrition, gender equality and women's empowerment, economic growth, infrastructure, promote sustainable consumption and production, climate, and peaceful and non-violent societies, rule of law and capable and adaptable public sector institutions.
8. In developing countries, people in vast numbers are moving from rural to urban areas, and vice-versa, in search of better life opportunities and also as a result of disasters and insecurity. This movement is also associated with many challenges and opportunities. Often, new urban residents live on marginalized land, in environmentally degraded conditions with little or no basic services such as water supply and sanitation. Urban areas provide new hope and opportunities and often improved quality of life. There is an urgent need for a paradigm shift, where cities should plan and provide for such migration at scale, through for example planned city extensions, where basic services for water supply, sanitation, mobility, energy is planned for in advance. Such planning should take into account the myriad of actors in urban and rural areas. The partnership sought after would require working vertically and horizontally through all spheres of national and local governments, in collaboration with the private sectors, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), communities and citizens at large.

9. In the more developed countries, especially in Europe, priority issues in rural-urban linkages are to an extent different and are addressed within the context of spatial planning, focusing primarily on improved integration of different sectors (such as housing, transport, energy and industry), territorial cohesion, improved systems of urban and rural development, and environmental sustainability. More specifically, spatial planning aims at: promoting territorial cohesion through more balanced social and economic development of regions, and improved competitiveness; encouraging development generated by urban functions and improving the relationship between towns and the countryside; promoting more balanced accessibility; developing access to information and knowledge; reducing environmental damage; enhancing and protecting natural resources and natural heritage; enhancing cultural heritage as a factor of development; developing energy resources while maintaining safety; encouraging high-quality sustainable tourism; and limiting the impact of natural disasters. Multi-level governance, which is necessary for integrating urban and rural development, is also an important concern.
10. The continuous transformation of urban and rural settlements creates the opportunity to harness the benefits of change. Ill-managed development may lead to negative consequences in both for urban and rural areas. The recent shift of the world population towards urban creates a new dynamics that require a fresh look at means of achieving more balanced territorial development through an enhancement of the urban-rural linkages. There is growing recognition that urban and rural settlements are part of the continuum of landscape that begs for a more holistic and integrated approach to achieve and sustained development for the benefits of all.
11. It is recognized that a large segment of the population in some parts of the world, particularly in Africa are still living in rural areas. However, projections clearly suggest that urbanization is unstoppable. Looking ahead, it is important to ultimately and decisively embrace urban and rural spaces as part of an integrated system of human settlements.
12. In many countries, the ways in which urban and rural areas are working together are not satisfactory. There are countries where one can witness an over-concentration of poverty in rural areas, slums or peri-urban areas. Shortcomings are also observed when dealing with urban and rural connectivity.
13. The work will build on partnership, considering the range of actors and stakeholders involved. For instance, in support to the SDGs process, IFAD issued a position paper entitled "Leveraging the rural-urban nexus for development". The paper recommends reducing the gaps between urban and rural areas, particularly on issues pertaining to connectivity, infrastructure, energy, and the smooth flow of people, jobs, goods, knowledge and finance. The paper recommends investment in quality data and information. The idea is to improve the quality of services and opportunities, strengthening urban-rural connectivity, and inclusive territorial and ecosystem governance. Further, UN-Habitat has been engaging with IFAD, UNCRD, UNECA, UNESCAP, the World Bank, FAO and other UN agencies to advance the areas of work on urban-rural linkages.

## **Proposed Priority Areas in enhancing Urban-Rural Linkages**

14. Achieving sustainable development is therefore maximized if (a) there is a definite departure from the political, social and geographical dichotomy between urban and rural urban areas; and (b) an understanding of the continuum of space between the rural and urban development. Such departures and recognition will help secure more equitable, sustainable and balanced development because the challenges of cities and towns will be viewed from a more informed angle and thus the solutions and options for sustainable change are more appropriate. The following ten priority areas have been identified by UN-Habitat as possible action entry points.
  1. Spatial Flows of Products, Services and Information/Expertise Between Urban and Rural Areas
  2. Reducing Environmental Impact in Rural-Urban Convergences
  3. Urban – Rural Continuum in the face of Conflicts and Disasters
  4. Mobility and Migration between Urban and Rural Areas
  5. Rural urbanization: the development of small and intermediate towns
  6. Territory and Spatial Planning for Balanced Urban and Rural Development
  7. Food Security, Systems and a 'sustainability chain' for All
  8. Enhancing Legislative and Governance and Capacity for Urban-Rural Partnerships
  9. Inclusive Investment and Finance in both Urban and Rural Areas
  10. A Global Partnership on Promoting Urban-Rural Linkages

## Annex: Selected Mandates on Urban-Rural Linkages

1. **Sustainable Development Goal 11** seeks to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable,” with Target 11.a seeking to “support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning.”
2. The **Vancouver Action Plan of 1976** stressed the importance of the rural dimension of human settlements.
3. The **Habitat Agenda** states that cities, towns and rural settlements are linked through the movements of goods, resources and people, social and cultural connections, geography and infrastructure. The Agenda places emphasis on urban-rural linkages and importantly, treats villages and cities as ‘two ends’ of a human settlements continuum in a ‘common ecosystem’. It emphasizes the interdependence of urban and rural areas via their economic, social, cultural and environmental links and that an integrated approach is required to promote balanced and mutually supportive and sustainable urban-rural development.
4. **Resolution HSP/GC/25/L.9** of April 2015 that “Invites Governments to promote the reduction of disparity along the rural-urban continuum through, inter alia, inclusive public and private investments in infrastructure and services across the rural service centres as well as of small intermediate and secondary towns to strengthen linkages as appropriate, and promote sustainable and balanced integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.” The resolution also “requests the Executive Director to develop tools and disseminate good practices to promote urban rural linkages through investments in market towns and in the intermediate towns through integrated regional and territorial planning to strengthen development corridors;”
5. **Resolution HS/GC/17/10** of 14 May 1999 requested that urban-rural interdependence be taken into consideration in the execution of the work programme of United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) given the strong synergy between urban and rural areas. Paragraph 3 of the Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium, emphasizes that cities and towns are engines of growth contributing to the development of both rural and urban human settlements. Resolution HS/GC/19/6 stresses the impacts of urban development on rural areas and request to end the urban-rural dichotomy debate and address the rural dimension of sustainable urban development. **Resolution HS/GC19/10** re-stresses the importance of urban-rural complementarities for poverty alleviation and sustainable rural development and urbanization, and that positive urban-rural linkages can improve living conditions and employment opportunities for both rural and urban populations and thus help manage urban-rural migration.
6. **Resolution HSP/GC/24/3** on “Inclusive and sustainable urban planning and elaboration of international guidelines on urban and territorial planning”, reinforces the importance of regional planning which addresses the need of urban and rural spaces.
7. In the **Rio+20 Outcome Document “The Future We Want”**, member states “recognise that, if well planned and developed including through integrated planning and management approaches, cities can promote economically, socially and environmentally sustainable societies” and “commit to work towards improving the quality of human settlements, including the living and working conditions of both urban and rural dwellers in the context of poverty eradication so that all people have access to basic services, housing and mobility.”
8. The report of the **Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals** has further identified rural-urban linkages as one of the targets for the Post-2015 SGDs. In particular, it stresses the need to bring rural and urban areas together to move closer to achievement of sustainable development has been explicitly expressed.
9. **Montería commune**, following the Expert Group Meeting on “The Role of Intermediate Cities in Strengthening Urban-Rural Linkages towards the New Urban Agenda” held between 27-28 October 2015, Montería, Colombia stressed on the need to develop tools, approaches, indicators to support the role of small and intermediate cities in enhancing the development of both urban and rural areas.

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