

Operationalizing Urban-Rural Linkages for Integrated Territorial Development

Technical workshop in the framework of

SDG11 implementation and the preparations towards Habitat III

Berlin, 31st May 2016 | GIZ Building, Reichpietschufer 20

Background

The interdependence between urban and rural territories, their flows and functions, is demonstrated through economic dynamics, sociocultural links, and environmental synergies that occur across these areas and the populations that live in them. It is now commonly understood that addressing the themes of sustainable cities and human settlements and rural development in a complementary and mutually reinforcing manner will be essential in the implementation of the transformative, integrated, and universal Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework, as well as in the elaboration of a New Urban Agenda of universal value. A comprehensive systemic approach for integrated territorial development - encompassing the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development - is recognized. Particular attention is being given to spatial planning at the city-region scale, infrastructure, connectivity, access to services, city-region food systems, natural resource management, and community resilience across the urban-rural continuum. However, as we dive into the implementation of SDG11 and step up preparations towards Habitat III, it remains unclear how a systemic notion of urban-rural linkages will be translated into concrete policy, institutional, and financing frameworks for integrated territorial development.

In this context, the Communitas Secretariat has been facilitating and curating a “Stakeholder Dialogue on Urban-Rural Linkages” with the triple aim of:

- Supporting multilateral discussions by providing stakeholders with technical space to address this issue;
- Building capacity on the multiple dimensions, implications, and opportunities for integrated territorial development presented by urban rural-linkages; and
- Contributing to the identification of guiding principles to operationalize positive urban-rural linkages for the implementation of SDG11 on Cities and Human Settlements and the New Urban Agenda.

This technical workshop, which is part of the long-term efforts of the Communitas Secretariat on this topic, was co-organized with the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) and UN-Habitat and gathered a multi-disciplinary and multi-national group of territorial development and urban-rural linkages practitioners and experts. The list of participants can be found [here](#) and their biographies are available in this [document](#).

The objectives of this workshop were (1) to review the zero draft of the Habitat III Conference outcome document in the light of urban-rural linkages and integrated territorial development; (2) to contribute to the inception discussions towards the elaboration of guiding principles for urban-rural linkages, and (3) to continue nourishing the community of knowledge and practice on the topic. The workshop programme can be downloaded from [here](#).

The workshop was held against the backdrop of the release of the *International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning* and the work of the UN Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Indicators for the SDGs. The workshop offered an opportunity to build upon the deliberations of Habitat III Policy Unit 6 “Urban

Spatial Strategies” and other relevant Policy Units such as 3, 5, 7, 8 and 9; as well as on the work of a series of meetings organized during the past months on urban-rural linkages and integrated territorial development in various venues and with different conveners. Convenings that represent a particularly relevant background to this workshop were the April 2015 think-tank session on urban-rural linkages held in Nairobi, Kenya at the 2nd Preparatory Committee towards Habitat III; the October 2015 expert group meeting on “The Role of Intermediate Cities in Strengthening Urban-Rural Linkages towards the New Urban Agenda,” held in Montería, Colombia; the November 2015 Thematic Meeting of Habitat III on “Intermediate Cities: Urban Growth and Renewal,” held in Cuenca, Ecuador; the January 2016 international conference on “Territorial Inequality and Development” held in Puebla, Mexico; the February 2016 high-level meeting on “Situating the City: The role of integrated planning in sustainable and equitable economic transformation” held in London; and the April 2016 Briefing Session on “Integrated Territorial Development - What it is and why it is essential for the New Urban Agenda,” held in New York.

Session 1: Group reflections about the zero draft of the New Urban Agenda from the perspective of Integrated Territorial Development and Urban-Rural Linkages

During the opening session of the workshop, participants were asked to identify strengths and gaps of the zero draft New Urban Agenda (NUA) – the outcome document of Habitat III, the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development to take place in Quito, Ecuador, on 17 – 20 October 2016 - with regards to the subject of integrated territorial development and urban-rural linkages. The discussions among participants were of extraordinary richness and in many instances touched upon the zero draft overall. Some key comments on the strengths and gaps of the zero draft are outlined below.

Strengths

- A vision for cities and human settlements fulfilling their territorial functions beyond administrative boundaries, promoting urban rural linkages, cross-sectoral management of resources, cooperation among different scales of cities (...) (Para 51).
- Recognition of strategic and integrated urban and territorial planning and management as one of the three drivers of change to realize the transformative commitments for a paradigm shift (Para 7b) (Paras 96-100).
- Recognition that the urban economy does not function as an isolated system. It needs to operate in a territorial system that integrates urban and rural functions into the regional and national spatial framework and system of cities (Para 51).
- Commitment to encourage rural-urban interactions (...) by planning instruments based on a territorial approach (Para 54).
- Commitment to develop national urban policies and territorial policies (Paras 85, 86 and 87).
- Commitment to strengthen capacity for metropolitan governance (Para 90).
- Support through urban and territorial plans including city-region and/or metropolitan plans (Para 98).
- Numerous concepts related to integrated territorial development and urban-rural synergies are present throughout the zero draft NUA. Since this is a framework signed by national governments, in many ways it is useful that it is presented as a basket of many ideas and concepts that can be used by the many “doers” to achieve on the ground the vision that is pursued.

From the advocacy point of view, it will be important to steward along the intergovernmental process the wording that enshrines key concepts and commitments since it implies common understanding on the importance of integrated territorial development for urban rural linkage and also provides anchors for operationalisation.

Gaps

- The NUA should pursue the dual objective of leaving *no one* and *no place* behind.
- The draft needs to be anchored in the understanding that cities as an unplanned process, rather than a product. So, what is this transformation the draft talks about? Is it a planned transformation? How can the NUA presume that planning and management can predict and control the whole of the transformation? If cities are always a process not a result, the NUA should tell us how can this transformation and paradigm shift can be encouraged, effectively undertaken and curated despite this reality.
- The draft is very “city-centric.” It is not helpful to say that cities are at the center of the battle for sustainable development. It puts too much hope in the concept of urbanization and what it means for sustainable development. Good or bad urbanisation should also be measures in terms of the quality of the urban rural linkage it promotes. Urbanization happens best when it is rooted in structural transformation and that goes beyond cities.
- There is little substance behind the use of words “urban-rural linkages”; no concrete analysis or proposals on how to operationalize urban-rural linkages. It seems drafters were asked to include this language but there is no understanding of the “how.”
- The used of the terms “cities” and “urban” is blurred; from very early on in the document, “urban” is replaced by cities. Where is the mandate to take care of “settlements” gone?.
- The call for a paradigm shift is not translated into the parts dedicated to urban and territorial planning. The draft spans a large range of issues without any higher-level references of what is achieved with integrated territorial development.
- There is disconnect between this paradigm shift and concrete planning and management actions, from the billions of dollars that will be required in infrastructure to changes in consumption and production patterns.
- There is worrying silence about the linkages between spatial planning, financial instruments and infrastructure plans.
- Planning is completely disconnected from reality in the draft. The eyes of practitioners working in city and metropolitan administrations alongside those of scholars, activists and diplomats are essential. The NUA must make concrete planning suggestions and indicate means of implementation to achieve this; otherwise it will be a meaningless document for mayors and their administrations.
- The draft does not capture the need for systemic approaches, either city systems at the city-region scale: from food, to water, energy or ecosystem services. The same happens with the approach of cross-sectoral solutions, which is not sufficiently emphasized
- The draft falls completely short on food and agriculture and how these are essential systems for integrated territorial development, as well as driver for a dynamic economy and social cohesion.
- There are references to different scales but the draft falls short on the differentiation between scales. Different territories have different needs.
- There is very little recognition of borders and functional space in terms of governance of cities and rural areas. Stronger recognition of governance that goes across urban and rural territories will help operationalize integrated territorial development as a driver for change. The drafts misses a huge opportunity regarding metropolitan governance.
- The blatant omission of geospatial information systems (GIS) as a critical tool in complement to household surveys in order to achieve the territorial disaggregation of data (beyond disaggregation by social groups) must be remediated in the next draft. Besides, this would foster coherence with the ongoing works of the UN Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Indicators for the SDGs, where these aspects are being debated with no major controversy among national statistical offices.
- At moments the draft falls in a risky “one size fits all” approach. For instance, it somewhat feels that a specific approach to planned extensions and compact cities – a quite Eurocentric one - is being pandered in the draft. The NUA should use universally applicable language instead of language that comes with baggage.

- However efficient and affordable transport systems require some level of compactness. Perhaps the solution is to couch the concept of “compactness” in a specific area.
- The next draft should be more mindful that concepts in spatial planning can be relative and there lies the universality of the NUA. For instance, what is dense in one place might not be so somewhere else.
- The next draft should also elaborate on notions of compactness from a “polycentric structure.”
- Specific language on the promotion and development of urban rural partnerships is missing. More focus on governance and on the conditions for establishing these partnerships would be welcomed.
- Urban agriculture is missing.
- The NUA should be a roadmap to achieve all other agendas - like the SDGs, the Sendai Framework, the Climate Agreement - through the prism of sustainable urban development and to identify the interfaces and interlinkages. This is an important structural problem of the draft.
- Though this is a document for national governments, action at the regional and local levels is not reflected enough.

Session 2: From a development dichotomy to a linkages approach - Identifying areas for action and enabling components

This session was initiated with a series of presentations to contextualize discussions.

- *Mr. Remy Sietchiping*, Leader of the Regional and Metropolitan Planning Unit in the Urban Planning and Design Branch of UN-Habitat – Provided a review of Habitat III Policy Units outcomes to this regard, and the work of this entity and the UN system wide.
- *Ms. Christine Platt*, Honorary Vice-president & Former President of the Commonwealth Association of Planners; Chair of the Working Group on the International Guidelines on Integrated Urban and Territorial Planning, and Expert of Habitat III Policy Unit 6 – Gave an overview of the evolution in the attention to planning at the international level and presented in detail the International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Development, while providing specific case studies of particular cities and city regions.
- *Ms. Barbara Scholz*, Advisor in the Sector Project Sustainable Development of Metropolitan Regions of the German Agency for Development Cooperation GIZ – Presented on how integrated urban and territorial development can help maximise mutually-reinforcing interconnections between sustainable urban development and the other challenges of humankind. She outlined priority areas for action based on the experience of a federal government and its development cooperation projects; and also offered a breakdown of action areas/entry points for the operationalising of urban rural linkages.
- *Mr. Pedro B. Ortiz*, Milano Politecnico Visiting Professor, metropolitan consultant to the World Bank, Interamerican Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, European Union and United Nations, and author of “The Art of Shaping the Metropolis” – Presented on the imperative of metropolitan governance to respond to the 21st century challenges and opportunities that cities and rural areas face. He offered detailed reflections on the model of *polycentric metropolitan region*, where multiple centers of politics, governance, and finance take shape around the single, larger urban center.

A copy of the presentations can be obtained from the Communitas website [here](#).

During the question & answer session that followed the presentations, reactions touched upon several different aspects, including:

- Habitat III Policy Unit 6 made reference to and recommended the International Guidelines on Integrated Urban and Territorial Planning but the zero draft NUA falls short on echoing them. The Integrated Guidelines are recognised in a resolution of the UN Habitat Governing Council, which is not universal.

- There needs to be more discussion of subsidiarity and decentralization today, not as it was conceived decades ago. There is a difference between devolution and decentralization that is not often understood.
- It is crucial to bear more in mind the sphere of regional government.
- Integration is not just sectoral; it is multilevel as well (horizontal and vertical) and can include local and regional alignment with national policies.
- New spatial terms build new policy related and planning language.
- Population distribution is critical here. If 70% of people are living in cities, only 30% are producing food for them. From the opposite perspective, because of the agroindustry and the industrialization process, the argument that 30% of people in rural areas are producing for 70% of people in urban areas is a fallacy.
- The mother of all questions is what aspects of rural development should an international and universal urban agenda address. A complementary question is how to craft a notion of urban and rural linkages that is mindful of the specificity and distinct nature of rural areas and their needs.
- It is important to keep in mind tax issues and investment in rural areas.
- Some public needs should be covered under one metropolitan organization like transport, water, energy, etc.
- There is little discussion of when rural villages become urban, where there is a “technologilization” of the countryside.
- Instruments are needed to regulate land use, not just laws on paper. This will help protect agricultural land.

Following the discussion, the participants were asked to bring their ideas together as to systematize:

- Building blocks/broad categories for action in urban rural linkages: e.g., knowledge, policy and legislation, spatial planning, institutions and governance, financing, partnerships, and monitoring.
- Areas that should be addressed under the building blocks to operationalize urban-rural linkages (e.g., land regulations, food systems, small and intermediate towns, metropolitan governance, land value capture, etc.) and their enabling components (systems thinking, functional territories, participatory planning, flexible infrastructure, etc.)

The table below tries to capture concisely the myriad of ideas shared in this brainstorming exercise. It is important to remember that UN-Habitat and the International Fund for Agricultural Development IFAD have been in consultation about the development of a set of principles to strengthen urban–rural linkages that foster balanced, inclusive and sustainable urban and rural transformation. A consultative meeting to gather contributions from key experts and UN agencies working on issues of urban-rural linkages was held in Rome on 6th June 2016.

Building blocks	Governance	Urban Policies	Land use & management	Assessment & monitoring	Connectivity
Areas	Metropolitan areas	Planning for Integrated urban and territorial development	Planned urban expansion	Accountability of all government spheres and all actors	Integrated transport systems
	Stakeholder engagement: inclusion of rural stakeholders in urban planning	Different scales: Focus on small and intermediate cities, as well as on market towns	Specific instruments for protection of agricultural land	Specific chapters reporting on urban rural linkages	Infrastructure for public services

	and governance				
	Subsidiarity and devolution	Balanced Investment between rural and urban areas	Land value capture	Broadening of knowledge base with multi-disciplinary approaches	Information and communications technologies
	Decentralization	Vertical and horizontal coordination across jurisdictions	Systems thinking		
	Specificity of regional governments (intermediary government sphere)	Food systems			
		Integrated resources management			

Session 3: Measuring progress towards positive urban rural linkages

This session consisted of a concise review of the work of the UN Inter-Agency and Expert Group for SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) on target 11.a of the SDG on Cities and Human Settlements. The aim was to come up with strategies to improve the indicator and bolster its chances of surviving the review process. The session began with a brief presentation on the state of works towards an indicator for the target 11.a *“Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning.”*

The main messages of the initial presentations were the following

- The current indicator for integrated territorial development is linked to national urban policies and population dynamics.
- It is critical to push for a qualitative approach and not just a quantitative one.
- The timeframe for the indicator discussion is very limited and it is crucial to produce concrete suggestions for improving the indicator that can be taken to the IAEG-SDGs of the UN Statistical Commission.
- This is the indicator discussion of the SDGs, but there is nothing yet on the metrics of the NUA.
- In preparation for the potential indicator discussion for Habitat III, it is important to be mindful of the political hurdles of the indicator process of the SDGs.
- The City Prosperity Index is now also on the radar of the UN Member States of the Habitat III process but the zero draft NUA contains no reference to it.

The subsequent discussions among participants raised multiple aspects, among which:

- What is the urgency for indicators for the NUA? Is what is there measurable? It is important to consider what should be in a national urban policy, or even promote having a national urban policy.
- Having indicators helps to operationalize SDGs target and create consensus; at the same time universal areas are too different to have universal indicators. Quid the elaboration of subnational indicators adapted to the reality of territories?
- It is important to consider functional territories (where do urban areas begin and end?). Rural dynamics are key here for measuring progress.

As an immediate follow up action, participants were invited to provide feedback and specific suggestions to UN-Habitat colleagues within 2 days after the workshop, in order to take advantage of the tight window of opportunity offered by the ongoing IAEG-SDGs works and deadlines.

Session 4: Action plan forward - Furthering engagement in the Habitat III process and moving towards the elaboration of guiding principles for the operationalization of urban rural linkages

This session sought to wrap up discussions and identify the broad lines for strategic advocacy strategy within Quito in October 2016 and for moving towards implementation post-Quito in October 2016.

Ideas floated by participants include:

- From the advocacy point of view, it will be important to steward along the intergovernmental process the wording that enshrines key concepts and commitments since it implies common understanding on the importance of integrated territorial development for urban rural linkage and also provides anchors for operationalisation. Advocacy for the next draft should also focus on mainstreaming urban rural linkages along the different sections of the NUA; as well as on integrating more strongly the concept of functional territories and on fostering systemic approaches. Food systems are a strategic entry point. Overall, efforts should be made to improve the interface between the NUA and the Agenda 2030, the Sendai Framework and the Climate Agreement. It will be important to promote the concept of cities as a manifestation of a process rather than an unit. Besides, it will be important to advocate for the section “Action Plan” to be one actually offering specific guidelines for operationalization, commensurate means of implementation, multi-stakeholder partnerships and a robust monitoring and review architecture.
- A Multistakeholder Panel for Sustainable Urbanization should be included in the NUA and would be helpful in measuring urban-rural linkages and integrated territorial development. It is mentioned in paragraph 171 of the zero draft. Still, a sentence in a document does not create a panel. The details will make things more complicated. Mobilization in favour of such panel and in strategic thinking on the most adequate wording to provide a mandate for it in the NUA will be crucial.
- Any principles for the operationalization of urban rural linkages should be extracted from the reality of case studies. Case studies should not be “superposed” as an illustration.
- Multistakeholder and cross-sectoral solutions that have proven to work should be curated and institutionalized during the implementation. Scaling up is the outstanding subject.
- The promotion of urban rural partnerships should start immediately after the adoption of the NUA.
- Map out how existing mechanisms (of finance, partnerships or knowledge) can integrate the NUA into their work.
- Recognize dynamic tools that help cope with the complexity, scale, and rapidity of change taking place in terms of urbanization.
- Find the entry points for the contributions of donor agencies.
- Over the years of intergovernmental discussions within the post-2015 process and towards Habitat III have confirmed a reinvigorated desire from the international community to conceptualize and enable integrated territorial development for urban rural linkages. The spaces for multi-stakeholder discussion and brainstorming provided by in different venues by different conveners have been instrumental to help mature discussions and ideas from a dichotomy to a synergetic approach. A multi-disciplinary community of organisations, multi-lateral institutions and practitioners determined to make a difference in this area has been leading the efforts. This community of thought an exchange constitutes an incomparable “hub” to move towards joint action and projects in the field to test, operationalize and replicate solutions. The planned networking event in Quito could constitute a relevant forum to explore this transition.