COMMUNIQUE “THE ROLE OF INTERMEDIATE CITIES IN STRENGTHENING URBAN-RURAL LINKAGES TOWARDS THE NEW URBAN AGENDA”

27-28 October 2015, Montería, Colombia

Background
The Habitat Agenda in Para 43 (i) committed to: “Promote the development of more balanced and sustainable human settlements by encouraging productive investments, job creation and social infrastructure development in small and medium-sized cities, towns and villages”; in Para 76. (m) the agenda commits to: “promote comprehensive rural development through such measures as equal access to land, land improvement, economic diversification, the development of small and medium-scale cities in rural areas and, where appropriate, indigenous land settlements.” Para 165. (b) seeks to: “take appropriate measures to improve the living and working conditions in regional urban centres, small towns and rural service centres,” and Para 169 advocates for: “an integrated approach to promote balanced and mutually supportive urban-rural development. Through among others provision of: an appropriate legal, fiscal and organizational framework that is suitable for strengthening the networks of small and medium sized settlements in rural areas.”

In 2015 UN-Habitat Governing Council enacted resolution HSP/GC/25/L.9 that seeks to strengthen the capacity of small and intermediate towns. The resolution “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;” it also “invites Governments to support strengthening the capacity of rural service centres, and small, intermediate and secondary towns to attract populations, increase investments, create jobs and reduce reliance on primate cities, as a strategy to promote decentralized growth.”

The resolution further “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;” and also “invites member States, with the assistance of UN-Habitat, as requested and in line with its work programme and budget to initiate or enhance programmes and projects at national or sub-national level to strengthen the capacity of rural service centres, small and intermediate towns to improve the access of rural and peri-urban inhabitants to sustainable urban basic services, including water, sanitation, transportation and energy, as well as access to social and economic services such as health, education, banking, retail and market services.”

1. UN- Habitat, United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD), Andalucía Agency for Development International Cooperation, and Montería City Council collaborated to organize the Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on “The Role of Intermediate Cities in Strengthening Urban-Rural Linkages towards the New Urban Agenda”;

2. The EGM took place from 27 to 28 October 2015 in Montería, Colombia and brought together over 20 international and national participants from both developing and developed countries, with expertise in a variety of fields, representing academia, International Development and Inter-governmental Organizations, Development Finance Institutions, government and local authorities, the private sector and NGOs;

3. The overall objective of the EGM was to exchange practices and experiences on how to strengthen urban-rural linkages through small and intermediate cities, with particular focus on post-conflict situations;

4. More specific goals of the EGM included promoting urban-rural linkages and highlighting the importance of the system of small and intermediate cities together with the rural areas between them as critical spaces for enhancing urban-rural linkages;

5. WE appreciate the sponsorship of the Andalucía Agency for Development International Cooperation, and the hosting by Montería City Council with support from UN-Habitat and UNCRD;

6. WE took note of the recent development and endorsement of processes, such as
the one embodied in the Sustainable Development Goals, the International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning, the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, the City Region Food Systems knowledge platform, and the Colombia “Agropolis” territorial framework;

7. WE underscore that small and intermediate cities are a key locus of operationalizing urban-rural linkages.

8. WE acknowledge the critical role of technology (including Information and Communication) and knowledge exchange in strengthening urban and rural areas;

9. WE appreciate the role of partnership and collaboration between all levels of governments and actors in all sectors to ensure that policy alignment and integration are supporting urban-rural linkages;

10. WE highlight the negative impacts of climate change, conflicts, weak decentralization and global economic instability in realizing the effective and inclusive urban-rural linkages;

11. WE also recognize the challenges facing small and intermediate cities in achieving inclusive and aligned territorial development, including through ensuring and enhancing social inclusion, access to infrastructure and services (both virtual and physical), access food and natural resources, financing and resourcing, and improved institutional and governance systems;

12. WE take note of the diversity in definitions of concepts, such as urban rural linkages, systems of small and intermediate cities;

13. WE recognise the importance of territorial approaches and contexts that consider urban, peri-urban and rural areas as part of the same systems;

14. WE further recognize that people living in urban and rural areas share similar social concerns and economic aspirations, such as the need for sustainable livelihoods, adequate water, food and nutrition, environment and natural resources management, and peace and security;

15. WE therefore suggest that the following principles could support sustainable urban and rural linkages: equity, accessibility, affordability, governance, participation, inclusiveness, resilience, and people centred development;

16. WE make the following recommendations to support the effort of strengthening urban-rural linkages:

• Develop principles, roadmap and policy papers articulating a new narrative on urban-rural linkages;

• Develop and share inspiring good practices to exchange across cities and regions;

• Strengthen the capacity of actors in small and intermediate cities and rural communities to promote:

  • good governance and management through multi-sectoral and multi-scale approaches;

  • leadership and long-term vision, strategy and plans for the city and region;

• Develop tools, approaches, indicators to support the role of small and intermediate cities to enhance the development of both urban and rural areas;

• Strengthen dialogue with partners to enhance interventions at country level in order to operationalize urban-rural linkages;

• Improve information and knowledge on the small and intermediate cities – e.g. documenting proven successful experiences, collecting data on the sector jointly with other partners and promoting and assisting governments on consumer information;

• Develop and mainstream a community of practices, and networks on urban rural linkages;

• Monitor and assess interventions at country level, at various stages of development and implementation;

• Publish the papers prepared for the EGM in the Regional Development Dialogue, a Journal published by UNCRD, for wider dissemination.

17. Moving ahead,

• WE recommend that the EGM and its outcomes should be taken as contribution to Habitat III processes, particularly to the relevant policy units, regional and thematic meetings to ensure that the issue of urban-rural linkages and small and intermediate cities will be included in the outcome document of Habitat III Conference in October 2016;

• WE call for the outcomes of this EGM to inform the deliberations of the group setting the indicators for the SDGs, in particular the indicator for integrated urban, peri-urban and rural planning (11.a);

• WE urge that the recommendations of the EGM form part of a proposed UN-Habitat position paper and corresponding guidelines on promoting urban-rural linkages in cooperation with other relevant UN agencies and ensure the delivery of key messages on integrated urban and rural planning as a means of implementation for the SDGs .

• WE invite interested partners to sustain continued dialogues, develop and share knowledge, develop and implement projects on urban rural linkages and small and intermediate cities;

WE decide to develop a network of experts and concerned partners based on the participants of the Expert Group Meeting and invite interested partners to join and link with existing networks.

Montería, Colombia, 28 October 2015