



UN-HABITAT

JUNTA DE EXTREMADURA

Consejería de Agricultura, Desarrollo Rural,
Población y Territorio

POLICY BRIEF

RECOVERING TERRITORIAL BALANCE BY STRENGTHENING URBAN- RURAL LINKAGES

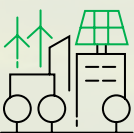


DECADE
OF
ACTION

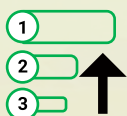


IMPLEMENTING
THE NEW
URBAN AGENDA

A BRIEF FOR POLICY AND DECISION MAKERS FOLLOWING AN EXPERT GROUP MEETING IN EXTREMADURA, SPAIN



As our world becomes increasingly urban, rural landscapes and territories are undergoing rapid transformation in all regions. Both urban and rural populations face converging crises of climate emergency, social tensions, conflict, post-COVID public health and economic vulnerability. Rural areas of our world are where the impacts of severe weather events, economic decline, biodiversity loss and land degradation are most pronounced. The results are a combination of rural depopulation, the aging and feminization of rural communities, loss of traditional livelihoods, the erosion of human rights and weakened cultural integrity. Accelerating these trends is the widening chasm between urban and rural peoples and the governance of urban and rural areas through policies and programmes that are divided by urban and rural agencies in governments at local, regional and national levels.



These trends have not gone unnoticed or unaddressed. Rural poverty, hunger and economic development are a priority for the United Nations development system, as well as for donor governments and nongovernmental organizations. Rural challenges are addressed in global agendas such as the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda which both call for integrated urban and rural planning and development. Nonetheless, there is a rising consensus that recognition and customary approaches are not enough to meet the challenges of rural decline and urban-rural disparity. A new focus on balanced and inclusive territorial approaches to sustainable development is gaining ground in different national and international arenas.

Communities of practice from diverse fields, including resilient food systems, biodiversity mainstreaming, linked urban and territorial planning, ecosystem restoration, humanitarian relief, integrated landscape management, among others are all converging around a call for new urban-rural partnership. Uniting all these thematic responses to some of our greatest challenges is the undeniable fact that the **rural ecosystems and rural populations of an increasingly urban world are vital to human survival and planetary health.**



In southwest Spain a rural area that has faced rural depopulation and its consequences for decades is the autonomous region of Extremadura. In March of 2023, the regional government of Extremadura and UN-Habitat convened a multistakeholder expert meeting to address “Recovering Territorial Balance by Strengthening Urban-Rural Linkages”. The meeting was attended by researchers, planners and development from local to national levels of government, international agencies, nongovernmental and private sector organizations and from regions across Spain, Europe, Africa, Latin America, North America and Asia. The meeting coalesced around a call for functional partnerships between urban and rural communities in the Mérida Communiqué.



The call for urban-rural partnership to advance territorial development is appropriately initiated by a regional subnational government (Extremadura).

Extremadura and other regions of Spain join subnational governments from around the world to:

“Accelerate data and evidence-based advocacy and capacity for integrated and balanced territorial development. This will be achieved through horizontal and vertical cooperation and complementarity, and the incorporation of people-centered and inspired solutions and experiences into global, regional, national, and subnational transformation processes to implement the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda.”

**Mérida Communiqué,
15 March 2023**

Actions proposed to implement the call for urban-rural partnership echo recommendations from parallel calls for integrated territorial approaches.

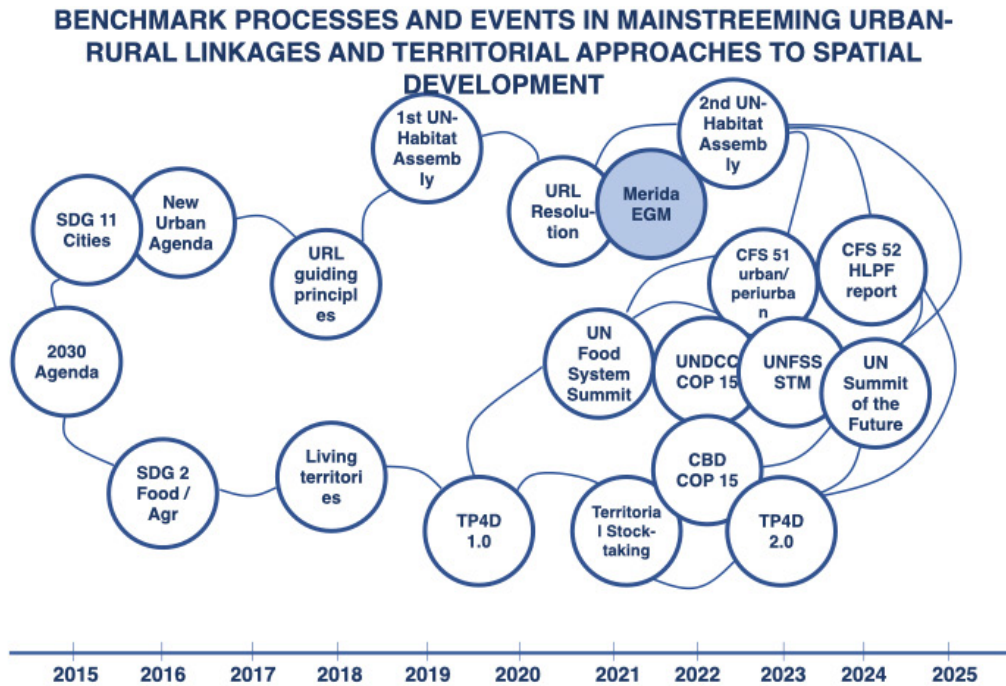

The Mérida EGM called for:

- 🌿 Robust governance frameworks of complementarity and reciprocity between urban, peri-urban, and rural areas;
- 👥 Agreements or partnerships to bring policy support, investment and capacity for gender and age sensitive integrated territorial development;
- 👤 Transformation of territories through the lens of human rights, resilience, multilevel and participatory governance, and equity; and
- 🌐 A global partnership for urban-rural integration by regional governments with the support of national governments and the leadership of Extremadura and its partners.


The Mérida EGM follows and precedes a succession of benchmark international policy decisions that address “reterritorialization” of development approaches. Recent examples include the launch of the Urban-Rural Linkages Guiding Principles and Framework for Advancing Integrated Territorial Development, Territorial Approaches for Sustainable Development, Territorial Approaches to the SDGs, Territorial Perspectives for Development, and decisions from the CBD COP 15 and UNCCD COP 15, among others.

Coming in quick succession in 2023 at a global level are the second UN Habitat Assembly, the High Level Political Forum review of SDG 11 for sustainable urbanization, the Stocktaking Moment for the UN Food Systems Summit, the UN General Assembly, the Committee on World Food Security and UNFCCC COP 28. These are just a few of the global events, and at a regional and national level there are other opportunities to mainstream a new approach to territorial development linking urban and rural people and places.

#UNHA2

In conclusion, the role of subnational local and regional governments is crucial, as they include urban, peri-urban and rural spaces and communities. National support for policy and public investment that promotes new territorial balance is needed to strengthen and institutionalize integrated territorial approaches. The local and subnational level is where planning and policy development can be most inclusive of territorial populations (both urban and rural).



Urban rural partnerships can be promoted as the means to operationalise local convergence of different global but too often sectoral agendas, starting from common interests. Entry points may for example be delivery of economic, social, health, food, water, energy and other public goods and service needs across administrative boundaries of municipalities and rural authorities.

