



MÉRIDA COMMUNIQUÉ

Call for Global Urban-Rural Agenda (GURA)

The government of the Extremadura Region, Spain, sponsored an international Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on 13 and 14 March, 2023 titled “**Recovering Territorial Balance by Strengthening Urban-Rural Linkages**”. UN-Habitat’s Country Office in Spain and the Nairobi-based Policy, Legislation and Governance Section of UN-Habitat co-organized the EGM held in Mérida, Extremadura.

Under the leadership of the Junta of Extremadura, with the support of United Nations agencies and treaty bodies, the EGM brought together over 60 representatives of Spain national government, the Basque, Asturian, Galician and Valencian regional governments, as well as other regional and municipal government representatives, including United Cities and Local Governments, international organizations, and experts from academia, civil society, private and finance sectors to explore concrete pathways and solutions to rebalance territorial development.

Participants:



Noted that the drivers and challenges of territorial imbalance, including the intersection of economic, environmental and social crises, have put a spotlight on the importance of integrated territorial development through strengthening urban-rural linkages.



Expressed concerns with the consequences of ill-managed urbanization and rural transformation, including increasing socio-economic inequalities, land degradation, depopulation, demographic imbalance, energy crisis, food insecurity, biodiversity loss, vulnerability to climate change, and cost of living.



Appreciated the role of regional/subnational/local governments in addressing territorial imbalance is essential. Further noted that towns and intermediary cities are engines of communication, connections, transit, flow, partnerships, and economic development.

Recognized that for centuries, cultures and traditions have been used to manage the complexity of human-nature relations. Underscored that the territories of regions also include natural, animal and cultivated landscapes that provide essential ecosystem services critical for the resilience of both urban and rural communities.



Acknowledged the importance of building robust frameworks of complementarity and reciprocity between urban, peri-urban, and rural areas to bring more policy support, investment, and capacity for gender and age sensitive integrated territorial development. To achieve a positive and win-win urban-rural balance, actors and sectors will need to work together in “whole of government and whole of society” ways to create functional, vibrant, prosperous and resilient territories and leave no one and no place behind.





Recognized and appreciated the significant effort and advancement of Spanish national and regional governments, and acknowledged the concrete experience generated at local levels worldwide through a variety of actors (including civil society, local leaders, youth) and thematic entry points (such as food systems transformation, nature-based solutions, public health, climate change adaptation, biodiversity, energy, risk and crisis prevention).



Further, **encouraged** actors at all levels to accelerate solutions-oriented efforts and positive transformation of territories through the lens of human rights, resilience, multilevel and participatory governance, and equity. Recalled that the 2019 [Urban-Rural Linkages Guiding Principles](#) and associated Framework for Action to Advance Integrated Territorial Development provide relevant insights into strengthening urban-rural partnerships.



Decided to Call for a Global Urban-Rural Agenda (GURA) dedicated to advance territorial development, at both political and technical levels. GURA is seen as a key element in promoting sustainable livelihoods, life, and the commons for the planet's resilience. Steered by the Junta of Extremadura and partners, the GURA initiative will use multilateralism principles to accelerate data and evidence-based advocacy and capacity on integrated and balanced territorial development.

This will be achieved through horizontal and vertical cooperation and complementarity, and the incorporation of people-centered inspired solutions and experiences into global, regional, national, and sub-national transformation processes to implement the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda.

Merida, Extremadura (Spain)

15 March 2023



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