

# URBAN-RURAL LINKAGES Newsletter

## 6<sup>th</sup> Edition | October 2023



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The Second session of the United Nations Habitat Assembly (UN-Habitat Assembly) Nairobi, Kenya, 4th June 2023 © UN-Habitat/Julius Mwelu

### EDITORIAL TEAM NOTE

*Hello Reader,*

Welcome to our 6<sup>th</sup> Edition of the Urban-Rural Linkages Newsletter.

In this edition, we take stock of the progress made by UN-Habitat and partners, on urban-rural linkages, since February 2023 when the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the newsletter was released.

We also flash back to the recently concluded Second United Nations Habitat Assembly (UNHA2), focusing on key events and sessions on urban-rural linkages.

From a set of prepared guiding questions, this edition features interviews with experts (academia, field experts, government) on the concept of urban-rural linkages past, present and future.

We also shed light on what's to come for the remainder of the year 2023.

We hope this newsletter inspires you to continue supporting the urban-rural linkages agenda in your work.

Enjoy the read and please share widely.

#### Editorial team

Grace Githiri; Hillary Sun; and Antonio Kipyegon



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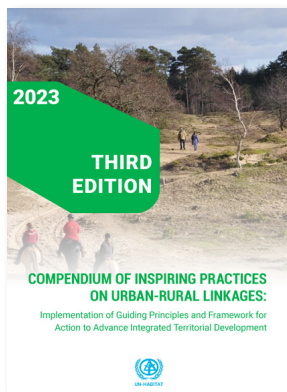
# 1. Brief Updates



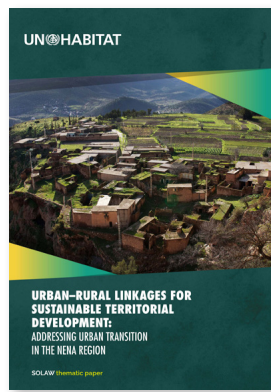
Since the last edition of this newsletter, UN-Habitat has continued working closely with several partners to advance the urban-rural linkages agenda. The publications released continue to expand knowledge on this crucial topic, and provide good practices, examples, and lessons to adapt in various contexts.

The outreach sessions (events) organized and participated have not only been occasions for convergence of ideas, experiences, and calls to action, but have also been platforms to diffuse the new knowledge produced, helping enhance awareness on urban-rural linkages at global, national, and other territorial levels.

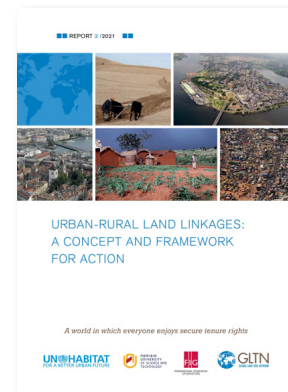
## a. A Selection of Recent Knowledge Products



17 Cases globally on integrating urban and rural communities



Explores urban-rural linkages issues in NENA region



Explores urban rural land linkages in-depth

## b. Events Organized

### ► Expert Group Meeting to Advance Territorial Development Through Global Urban-Rural Agenda

UN-Habitat and the Extremadura Regional Government, convened an Expert Group Meeting in Merida, Spain, to discuss ways of advancing territorial development through an integrated urban-rural agenda. The meeting brought together 60 experts from research institutions, governments, UN agencies and civil society.



13th & 14th March 2023





(More Photos Available in the link)

The 2-day EGM culminated in the **Mérida Communiqué**, which explores the urban-rural agenda, a transformative initiative aimed at achieving sustainable livelihoods, resilience, and a balance between urban and rural

communities. The communique also stressed the **essential role** of regional, subnational, and local governments in mitigating territorial imbalances. More on the EGM is available [here](#)

► **Launch of the Center of urban rural linkages at the University of Nairobi**



**13<sup>th</sup> October 2023**

In November, 2021, a joint agreement of cooperation was signed between UN-Habitat and University of Nairobi. The cooperation was towards implementation of a project based in five countries supported by partner universities and government agencies namely; Cameroon, Kenya, Niger State, Senegal and Zimbabwe. This necessitated the need for a long term platform of

cooperation for African countries. The Center for Urban-Rural Linkages in Africa (CURLA) is set to be launched at the University of Nairobi, Kenya, on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2023. The Center will serve as a hub for research, collaboration, and knowledge exchange, fostering sustainable urban-rural linkages throughout the continent.



Moments from the launch of CURLA © University of Nairobi

Organized by



in Glasgow  
University

15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>  
February 2023

### c. Events Involved

#### ► Urban Neighbourhood Sustainability and Impacts from Covid-19 Workshop

This is an international collaborative research initiative to address global urban challenges and grow research capacity in Africa and Asia. The event featured a wide array of

speakers and participants from academia, research institutions, and international organizations. For more details on the event, click here: [SHLC](#)



21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>  
May 2023

#### ► Inaugural General Assembly of the World Farmers' Markets Coalition (WorldFMC)

This was a momentous opportunity to contribute to the development of a sustainable local food system model that focuses on rebuilding the link between rural and urban areas and strengthening local economies, public health, and biodiversity.

UN-Habitat participated in a panel discussion on how farmers market contributes to strengthening URL and relevant global agendas. UN-Habitat also participated through a [video address](#) by the Deputy Executive Director. He elucidated how food systems strongly feature in the UN-Habitat Strategic Plan, and highlighted the progress made with several partners to advance sustainable and territorial food systems in recent years.

He also underscored that Farmers' markets have become part and parcel of urban development and should be integrated into urban planning, urban policies, urban legislation, and governance processes among others.



*UN-Habitat Deputy  
Executive Director  
video address*

## ► Sino-German Research project-Urban-Rural Assembly (URA) workshops

Weimar and Apolda, Thuringia, Germany, **4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> May 2023** & Huangyan-Taizhou, Zhejiang Province, China, **August 31, 2023 – September 2, 2023**

This series of workshops is jointly organized by Technical University of Berlin (Germany) and Bauhaus University of Weimar (Germany), supported by Tongji University (China), Zhejiang University (China), Shanghai University (China), ICLEI Southeast Asia, International Building Exhibition (IBA, Germany), Leibniz Institute of Ecological Urban and Regional Development, and Huangyan District Government.

***The workshop in Apolda “StadtLand – from Thuringia to a planetary perspective”*** opened new avenues of thought and action – from the current urbanization tendencies in Thuringia and numerous other regions worldwide, to spatial visions and planning strategies toward sustainable urban-rural interrelations. For more information, click [here](#).

***The Workshop in Huangyan, China*** explored the significance of urban-rural relations for regional development based on the interdisciplinary URA research results. For more information, click [here](#).

► *Participants exchanging experiences and perspectives on urban-rural interrelations*



## ► UN Food Systems Summit +2

The 2023 UN Food Systems Stocktaking Moment (24-26 July) served as the first global follow-up to the [2021 Food Systems Summit](#), where individuals and countries committed to accelerate and deepen the transformative power of food systems, for the full realization of all 17 SDGs. The summit drew an attendance of over 2000 participants, representing 161 countries, including 22 Heads of State and Government, more than 100 Ministerial delegates, and 150

Non-State-Actor organizations. This impressive convergence underscored the renewed commitment to foster sustainable food systems. Elevating the discourse, UN-Habitat actively contributed to various sessions, channelling relevant messages including the role of local and subnational governments, territorial approaches, working with cities networks, urban-rural linkages including food systems, and UN coordination (including the Local2030 Coalition).



▲ *UN Secretary General, António Guterres, addressing delegates at the opening Ceremony © FAO/ Alessandra Benedetti*

## 2. A run-down of the second session of the UN Habitat Assembly

The Second Session of the UN-Habitat Assembly (UNHA2) convened around the theme of a **sustainable urban future through inclusive and effective multilateralism**. UNHA2 was a welcome platform for the advancement of the urban-rural linkages agenda. One of the 10 adopted Resolutions,

**on biodiversity and resilient cities**, touches directly on urban-rural linkages and will firm up the actions on biodiversity in the sustainable development agenda. Side events, bilateral sessions and informal consultations gave window for sharing of knowledge, good practices, and lessons to advance

urban-rural linkages.

A wide range of partners came together to co-organize and participate in the URL-related side events. The discussions showcased the growing recognition of the need to strengthen urban-rural linkages for sustainable development. The two main side events held are:



2<sup>nd</sup> UNHA



### a. Recovering territorial balance by Strengthening Urban-Rural Linkages: Towards a global partnership to promote Urban Rural Linkages approach

This engaging side event was hosted by the Extremadura Regional Government of Spain, with the support of UN-Habitat. The session was held building upon the outcomes of the Expert Group Meeting held in March 2023. The event featured a panel discussion by several experts from national and subnational governments, international organizations, and civil society, who contributed to the topic with perspectives from their contexts. Some of the aspects that emerged include integrated territorial planning and development, strengthening the role of intermediary cities, gender equality, food systems, the environmental lens, as well as strengthening partnerships at both technical and political levels.



More details can be found [here](#).



### b. Cities Engaged in Food System Transformation: Challenges and Opportunities

This side event was organized by UN-Habitat and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Among the many imperative discussions that took place, the side event captivated the attention of participants, taking the Kenyan context to review, discuss and exchange knowledge how different actors are strengthening food systems in their contexts obstacles and potential solutions in food systems transformation. More details can be found [here](#).



### 3. Expert interviews on urban-rural linkages



#### Prof Eugene Chigbu

Namibia University of Science and Technology, Windhoek, Namibia / Global Land Tool Network.

Uchendu Eugene Chigbu is an Associate Professor in Land Administration at the Namibia University of Science and Technology. He is particularly interested in societal development and land issues and is highly active in practice and academia. He is Co-Chair of the Research Cluster of the Global Land Tool Network (UN-Habitat). He is the Southern Africa Regional Coordinator of the Network of Excellence in Land Governance in Africa (African Union).

He is the coordinator of the pan-African project, "Fostering Research and Intra-African knowledge transfer through Mobility and Education" (African/European Union), which is focused on enhancing capacity development in food-energy-water nexus in Africa through intra-African collaboration. He is the Associate Editor of the journal *Land Use Policy*, published by Elsevier. His latest book, *Land Governance and Gender: The Tenure-gender Nexus in Land Management and Land Policy*, was published in 2022.

#### 1. What do you consider some of the key impacts of urbanization on rural areas and livelihoods in the past 10 years?



The politics of urban and rural planning and imbalances in their development have left urban and rural areas to be developed unequally. Considering that about 80% of the global rural population lives near either urban regions or cities, it is important to develop rural and urban areas to coexist for mutual benefits. This has not been the case. Instead, what we see is uneven development that cause disparities in the development of rural and urban areas, to the benefit of the urban and the disadvantage of the rural.

This development scenario is against the principle of "Leave No One Behind," which is the pivot of development implementation in the context of the sustainable development goals or SDGs. This spatial development outcome that caters more for the urban and less for the rural, potentially leaves the rural settlements, and so practically leaves nearly 50% of the world's population behind. It is a scenario caused by isolated focus on urbanisation. A more balanced focus is mandatory for a rebalancing to take place.



#### 2. How should governance of urban rural linkages function towards enhancing equitable socio-economic development? Can you provide any examples for that?

Let me start by recognising the effort of the UN-Habitat in facilitating the first and second *International Forum on Urban-Rural Linkages* in 2019 and 2021 respectively. I am happy that urban-rural linkages are now well-placed on the development agenda. I consider urban and rural governance to be about decisions and implementing activities based

on made decisions on the living conditions of people and these environments. On this basis, I strongly think that the rural and urban areas must be viewed as a continuum, and all biases must be eschewed to pursue equivalent living conditions in these unique but highly interconnected human settlements.



For instance, the rural economy/territory is home to the world's forests, agricultural activities, and natural resources, including mining, nature and tourism, among many others, yet these rural areas are always presented as though they produce or contribute less to national economies than the urban areas.

Imagine that we remove all rural areas from any of the continents of the world. What do you think would happen?

I want to use this opportunity to highlight that rural areas support urban growth and integrated development and should be recognised as equally important as urban areas. The peri-urban areas are vital in regulating urban-rural partnerships within a spatial continuum relationship. Peri-urban areas, which I consider as a linkage settlement between urban and rural areas in many countries, can accelerate or impede urban-rural linkages.

This is why it is important not to negate the development of the peri-urban areas. An example of where urban rural linkages' function apply in Africa is in Namibia, where the city of Windhoek has been administratively integrated with its neighbouring rural settlements in the **Khomas** region to ensure that the rural part of the region gained better access to urban services, such as water and electricity.

In this policy arrangement, **Groot Aub** which is a part of the rural Windhoek was incorporated into the City of Windhoek to enhance development in the settlement. A lot of work is still needed to ensure that this administrative integration benefits both rural and urban populations. However, it is a good starting point for urban-rural linkages in an African country.



### 3. How do we better leverage the advantage of functional urban-rural linkages for the achievement of the Agenda 2030?

Firstly, the challenges that have resulted from dealing with urban and rural areas in isolation will have to be identified to fully understand how and where the planning system went wrong. Secondly from those challenges, recommendations will then be made to address these challenges. As much as these challenges are already known by the relevant authorities, they are often understood and dealt with individually instead of collectively in an integrated manner. Perhaps, to improve these sorts of situations it is important to engage in territorial planning or policies.

Thirdly, these planning or reform policies should be backed by spatially non-discriminatory strategies.

These must include implementation, as well as monitoring and evaluation strategies. Implementation strategies should clearly explain in detail how the policy objectives and action plans should be executed. For instance, for whom by whom, where and for what. The monitoring and evaluation strategies should be capable of assessing the progress, success and failures of the implementation of urban-rural or regional or territorial plans. This could really be another way to do things differently to ensure a balanced and well-functioning society through urban-rural linkages.





#### 4. What are the possible areas on urban rural linkages that UN-Habitat could focus on between now and 2030? How should UN-Habitat initiate?



Focusing on a land perspective, I recommend a renewed emphasis on land linkages between urban and rural areas or urban and rural planning as well as development. In this regard, the Namibia University of Science and Technology, the International Federation of Surveyors, and the Global Land Tool

Network published a conceptual and operational document entitled Urban-Rural Land Linkages: A Concept and Framework for Action in 2021. From a land administration lens, this document contains many ideas that UN-Habitat and other organizations may focus on, between now and 2030 promoting

equivalent development in urban and rural areas. The document was developed to seek innovative solutions to the interlinked land challenges urban, peri-urban and rural areas nowadays.



#### Thomas Forster

Coordinating Author of the Guiding Principles of Urban-Rural Linkages

**Thomas Forster** has degrees in philosophy and landscape planning and has worked for over 30 years with civil society and government organizations on policy to strengthen urban and rural linkages in food systems, especially in relation to sustainable agriculture, food governance, biodiversity, climate change, urban food and nutrition security, and public food procurement. He is based in New York where he has been engaged with processes at UNHQ that led to the sustainable development goals (SDGs) in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and negotiation of the New Urban Agenda, the outcome of Habitat III.

He led a technical team in 2015 that drafted the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact and coordinated the Milan Pact Awards for food policy and practice in cities and territories around the world from 2016-2018. In 2018 he was selected as the coordinating author for the UN Habitat-convened multistakeholder Urban-Rural Linkages: Guiding Principles (URL-GP) and Framework for Action to Advance Integrated Territorial Development. Since its launch in the UN Habitat Assembly in 2019 he has been working with the UN-Habitat URL team on guidance tools, normative products, and advocacy to implement the URL-GP and territorial development with global partners including UN Nutrition, GIZ, UNCCD, FAO, CBD, and subnational government networks UCLG, ICLEI, Regions4, among others.

#### 1. What do you consider some of the key impacts of urbanization on rural areas and livelihoods in the past 10 years?



Human settlements, rural communities and landscapes have been impacted by the growth of towns and cities for a long time. However, as the spatial expansion of cities and demographic shift to

metropolitans occurred early in the 21st century, the impacts of urbanization have been affecting rural transformation more significantly than ever. It is not only a simple physical impact on peri-urban, rural



areas around cities are planned or unplanned, but a combination of profound economic, social, cultural, and environmental factors which potentially contribute to radical transformation of rural landscapes and communities globally. Unfortunately, in order to meet a larger scale of urban demand for food, water and resource consumption, rural livelihoods and ecosystems have been transformed

negatively. This phenomenon leads to an increase of rural depopulation and environmental degradation. In the last decade, degradation of rural areas has been accelerating as urbanization grows rampantly. As the New Urban Agenda recognized, sustainable urbanization is only achievable if ways are found to rebalance the interactions of urban and rural communities. Urban-rural relations have become even

more critical, as the world has been confronting a new normal of vulnerable supply chains due to a variety of unprecedented issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and global conflict. Due to these impacts, the importance of rebalancing urban and rural planning and development is expected to become a higher priority for local, subnational, and national governments.

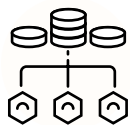


**2. How should governance of urban rural linkages function towards enhancing equitable socio-economic development? Can you provide any examples for that?**

Urban-rural linkages can be managed for balance on “equitable socio-economic development”. Efficient governance requires cooperation between urban and rural authorities. Practically speaking, such enabling bureaucratic environments usually require horizontal arrangements between jurisdictions across urban and rural communities as well as vertical alignment, support from subnational and national governments. The horizontal and vertical dimensions of governance are complex to capture, so allow me begin with important entry points representing the reciprocal priorities of urban and rural leaders and constituencies. For instance, the provision of public services such as housing, land, health, education, transportation, is able to mitigate migration challenges, to improve food security and nutrition, to conserve

biodiversity, to build resilience as well as to severe impacts of climate change, among others.

The development of **guiding principles and framework for action (URL-GP)** developed by UN-Habitat with other international organizations precisely can be seen as a tool to help guide efforts to strengthen URLs in diverse fields. A series of thematic guides have been produced to further help dimensions such as nutrition and food systems improvement, biodiversity protection, land and ecosystem restoration, health, etc. Finally, practical experiences from around the world showcasing country and subnational policies and programmes to address URL process, have been collected in Compendia of Good Practices (2020, 2021 and 2023).



**3. How do we better leverage the advantage of functional urban rural linkages for the achievement of the Agenda 2030?**

URLs are central to most if not all the SDGs. More specifically, integrated urban, peri-urban, and rural planning for sustainable development is included in the sustainable development goal to make cities inclusive,

safe, resilient and sustainable (SDG 11.a). Review of SDG 11 progress was included in the annual ministerial review of progress towards achieving all 17 SDGs in high level political forum (HLPF).



As with nearly all the SDGs, progress on making cities sustainable is far behind at the midway point between the launch of the SDGs in 2015 and 2030. In this context and with the impacts and lessons of both COVID-19 and geopolitical uncertainty, the importance of urban-rural linkages

and the recognition of the front-line role of urban and territorial approaches to accelerating the SDGs was a strong element to this year's HLPF. Indeed, the rise of local and regional governments in this HLPF was a profoundly new dimension. UN-Habitat declared this the "urban moment" of Agenda

2030 and urban-rural linkages is increasingly linked to sustainable urbanization as recognized in the New Urban Agenda. This global recognition is led by the evidence at local and subnational levels, where greater resilience and recovery from crisis results from more functional urban-rural linkages.

**4. What are the possible areas on urban-rural linkages that UN-Habitat could focus on between now and 2030? How should UN-Habitat initiate?**



The focus at the global level is on how to manage existing complex challenges integrating urban and rural governance. It involves basic services, migration management, emergency responses and etc. They could all lead to more functional URLs. The contextually defined priority will dictate the answer in terms of how URLs can be managed in innovative and more productive ways.

In most cases, decision makings depend upon a mixture of political leadership, pressure deriving from the vulnerable populations, as

well as accessible technical and financial resources. In general, an inclusive, participatory process takes into account of existing power imbalances and inequitable conditions between urban and rural communities must be mitigated and addressed. In May, 2023 an expert group meeting in the region of Extremadura, Spain contributed four linked actions to rebalance urban and rural territories, including:

- » 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



**Li Fan**

Vice-Chair, ISOCARP Scientific Committee

Dr Fan is a senior researcher at the Technical University of Berlin, Germany. She has worked both as a practitioner and a researcher in China and in Germany. She served as a consultant for urban development and regeneration projects funded by national and international institutions, including UNDP and ADB. She is a German Chancellor Fellow, a DAAD fellow, a board member of International Association of World Heritage Professionals, and the vice-chair of ISOCARP Scientific Committee. Her ongoing research interests focus on urban regeneration and urban heritage conservation in China and in Germany.



## 1. What do you consider some of the key impacts of urbanization on rural areas and livelihoods in the past 10 years?



One of the key impacts is the improvement of infrastructure in rural areas. Well-connected road system and public transportation allow for better flow of people, goods, resources, and products. This also includes the enhancement of digital connectivity, which is equally important as physical infrastructure. With digitalization, rural producers can have more efficient access to market and value chains. Through e-commerce platforms smallholder farmers can directly sell their products to end consumers and earn better incomes.

In the urbanization process, agricultural land use has been largely converted for non-

agricultural purposes leading to the loss of livelihood opportunities for farming-dependent families. In China, strict regulations were released recently to protect the size and area of cultivated land to ensure food security. Along with urbanization there is increased rural-urban migration. People move to urban areas in search of better employment opportunities, and higher quality of healthcare and education. Due to constant migration to urban areas, some villages tend to be insufficiently habited.

The other key impact is the dynamics of social and cultural transformation. Urbanization may provide an opportunity to appreciate

culture and heritage but might also lead to the destruction of cultural relics. I stress the impact on cultural aspect because it is often overlooked. In China, for example, decent housing, private cars, and diverse food are accessible for many families in rural areas. However, cultural and relaxation activities remain insufficient. In some villages cultural halls, concert halls and exhibition halls have been built but most of time they remain empty. Urbanization is regarded as the physical change symbolized by high-rise buildings, rather than enhancement of livelihood in all aspects.

## 2. How should governance of urban rural linkages function towards enhancing equitable socio-economic development? Can you provide any examples for that?



The governance of urban rural linkages is key to enhancing equitable socio-economic developments. Effective governance should be based on integrated territorial planning involving multiple jurisdictions across the region. One successful association in Ruhr region, Germany, is the Emscher Association, founded in 1899 to deal with issues related to Emscher River flowing through the entire area. From the late 1990s, Emscher Association has been responsible for the construction a new sewage system for the entire territory. The regeneration of the Emscher River, which represents one of the largest infrastructure investments in Germany, functioning as a pilot program of regional development with high acceptance among the municipalities and counties.

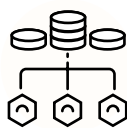
As a result, cities and towns along the Emscher River can be equitably benefited from the improvement of water infrastructure.

In China the Beautiful Village Initiative (*meili xiangcun*) aims for comprehensive village development that characterized by scientific planning, high productivity, good infrastructure, and livable environment. In particular, the construction of beautiful village follows the principle of adapting measures to local conditions and strengthening local identity. This has led to a series of culture heritage conservation and place-making projects in rural areas.



Last but not the least, the central government introduced the institution of Rural Planners (*xiangcun guihuashi*) to facilitate Beautiful Villages program. Rural planners function as community planners and work

closely with villagers to advocate for a participatory approach of planning. The campaign style programs have fostered comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable development in the rural areas.



**3. How do we better leverage the advantage of functional urban rural linkages for the achievement of the Agenda 2030?**

One of the strategies is to promote integrated territorial planning approaches. Development plans, policies and investments should consider both urban and rural areas as interconnected parts of a regional system and foster synergies between urban and rural development. Further, infrastructure improvement can be prioritized to enhance connectivity between urban and rural areas. Efficient infrastructure can facilitate the movement of goods, services, people and

information, thus to foster economic growth and reduce inequalities. This includes physical infrastructure such as transportation networks, roads, bridges, as well as intangible infrastructure such as digital connectivity. The other strategy is agricultural innovation. Advanced technologies can be integrated into traditional approaches of agriculture to enhance productivity, sustainability and resilience. A functional and high-quality modern agriculture system can improve living conditions and

enhance the well-being of people both in urban and rural areas, which align with the essential goals of the agenda 2030. Most strategies target livelihood in rural areas in the context of the "urbanization" of rural areas. However, we should note that life quality in urban areas does not necessarily equate to better conditions. Embracing the concept of "ruralization" in urban areas may provide us with a new mindset of enhance social and ecological wellbeing.



**4. What are the possible areas on urban-rural linkages that UN-Habitat could focus on between now and 2030? How should UN-Habitat initiate?**

UN-Habitat plays a leading role in mainstreaming urban-rural linkages and raising the topic to the forefront of achieving SDGs and NUG through the development of universal guidelines and providing a platform to promote inspiring practices worldwide. However, this is just the beginning of the global discourse on the urban-rural continuum, which is particularly needed in rural areas where external information is not easily accessible in many regions and areas. Regarding the URL-GP, its implementation, localization, and adaptation, as well as training, are potential areas of focus in

the upcoming years. Although the international guidelines (URL-GP) are designed for universal application, they will evolve and be interpreted within the local context, as indicated by Principle 1: Locally Grounded Interventions. Only through close collaboration with local governments can URL-GP have the intended impact. For many local governments, URL-GP and other related documents are not disseminated or discussed, even though these documents exist in their native languages. International guiding principles should not be limited to discussions among

academics and policymakers at the national level; they are, more importantly, needed at the local level. On the other hand, localizing the URL-GP can further enrich the Urban-Rural Linkages program and contribute to better policy-making at the international level. Understanding what is happening on the ground is key to developing much-needed policies, and a bottom-up approach will help integrate international guidelines into local agendas. Training programs related to URL-GP, similar to programs for other guidelines at UN-Habitat, can be carefully



designed and adapted to the local context, working in cooperation with locally funded training institutions.

One approach to better involve local stakeholders is through an awarding process. Currently, UN-Habitat captures, analyzes, and promotes innovative practices through the International Forum on Urban-Rural Linkages and the URL Compendium of Case Studies.

If possible, the UN-Habitat Award for inspiring practices in URL may have a significant impact, as it aligns with the agenda of local governments and will be widely reported in the media at all levels. Currently, UN-Habitat hosts several awards, including the newly launched Shanghai Award, but none of these awards shed light on URL or rural areas.

Another working area missing in the URL program is rural heritage. While much attention has been paid to social and environmental perspectives in the URL Guiding Principles, the cultural aspect has been overlooked. Rural heritage, both tangible and intangible, can serve as a driving force for rural revitalization and urban-rural integrated development. This does not solely refer to the preservation and conservation of individual monuments or architectural pieces, but rather encompasses tradition and culture as a whole, regardless of whether they are officially recognized or not. Rural heritage should be identified, respected, and regarded as a driving force for strengthening local identity and improving the quality of life, which is one of the essential goals of the SDGs.

Rural heritage should be integrated into all aspects of territorial development. Addressing how to embrace urbanization without negatively impacting local culture and identity is an understated issue. In developing countries such as China, cities and towns in urbanized areas have lost their identities and now present similar urban landscapes, so-called “thousands of villages look the same”. This process often involves importing mainstream urban culture to rural areas rather than respecting rural traditions. In doing so, UN-Habitat could work closely with UNESCO and ICOMOS to foster a culture-led territorial development. The project “Metropolitan Heritage”, under the auspices of PLGS, serves as a good example of such type of cooperation.

## 4. Perspectives from Niger State, Nigeria: Cooperating with UN-Habitat on Urban-Rural Linkages



### Dr. Abdul Husaini

The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Lands and Housing, Niger State

Dr. Abdul Husaini was the pioneer General Manager of Niger State Geographic Information Systems (NIGIS). As a fellow of the 2007 United Nations University -International Course (UNU-IC) and 2022 Arcadis Shelter Academy Programme, Dr. Husaini was the focal person connecting UN-Habitat's and the Niger State Government through Urban Rural Linkages enhancement. In addition, he has been acting as the Team Lead for the collaborative research on Covid-19 Impacts

on “Transportation of Food and Related Commodities in the Urban-Rural Nexus (ITFCURN)” in some selected African countries funded by UN-Habitat, through University of Nairobi, Kenya.

Dr. Abdul Husaini, is also a recipient of the 2018 Presidential National Productivity Order of Merit (NPOM) award, by supporting the UN on ESD through acknowledgment of a Regional Center of Expertise (RCE) on Education for Sustainable Development in Minna since 2011.





▶ **N**iger State Ministry of Lands and Housing is one of the technical ministries of the government responsible for land administration, urban planning, urban surveying, housing as well as enhancement of urban development. There are numerous challenges faced by the government in the Lands, Housing, and urban development sub-sector fundamentally lying under the obligation of delivering safe, planned, convenient and sustainable environment for Nigerian citizens and limited resources, political guidance.

Based on the mandate of UN-Habitat to support national governments in the actualization

of the New Urban Agenda of “leaving no one behind”, the Policy Legislation and Governance Section (PLGS) has assisted our governmental agency in capacity building in project design and implementation, ensuring our government is able to go a long way as achieving our common goal of expected city plans. We studied and coped each other on the “fluidity” of decision-making process when initiating projects under democratic dispensation.

UN-Habitat PLGS has been supporting the government of Niger State, Nigeria, in areas of designing and implementing specific urban plans as well as urban strategies,

especially within the context of the New Urban Agenda, to address contemporary issues in Niger State. Moreover, this engagement of planning is able to tackle most of the current issues which our cities confront, e.g youth restiveness and insecurity, waste management, infrastructure and utility provision. UN-Habitat is great assisting on educating our policy makers as well as cultivating their knowledges on the need for planning before any urban development.

In 2017, Niger State government signed an agreement with UN-Habitat to support the State in some specific areas of planning, urban development and GIS.

These are broader areas covered by the agreement between Niger State and UN-Habitat. In this way, the state attracted more support in other areas like:

- I. **Urban Rural Linkages (URL) programme:** Niger State became one of the participating entities in the Urban – Rural Linkage programme of UN-Habitat with other countries like Guinea, Kenya, Cameroon and Zanzibar, Tanzania. This was an important opportunity for the state to relate and share “blight and bright” spots experiences in integrated territorial planning.
- II. **Support in the conceptualization and design of the Suleja Smart City:** Niger State Government, through the agreement signed with UN-Habitat, was able to attract support towards the preparation of Master plan of the Suleja Smart City. DOHWA Engineering company of Korea was engaged through a Korean grant to Niger State to prepare the master plan. This is a very important contribution towards actualizing the dream of a world class city on the fringes of Nigeria's capital. This was possible only through the support of UN-Habitat.



In the course of the implementation of other programs by UN-Habitat in Niger State, project implementation team and consultants interconnected, extensively, with relevant government officials and stakeholders to understand the system and mode of operation.

Focus Group Discussions, as more technical presentations and study visits were adopted in project implementation. For instance, under the Urban Rural Linkages component of UN-Habitat support, Niger State participated in all the Expert Group Meetings in Kenya, Zanzibar (Tanzania) and Guinea Conakry. During these meetings, Niger State made presentations on the modest progress in improving Nigerian rural areas to make sure "no one is left behind". Additionally, Niger State participated at the First International Conference on Urban Rural Linkages in Songyang, China.

The impact of UN-Habitat support, through its facilitations of international collaborations and visit, was that it awakens the interest of the state in standardizing some governmental activities relevant to Urban Rural linkages principles. For instance, the renewable energy deployment through mini grid rural solar power projects was implemented in the state prior to the commencement of URL activities. GIZ under the Nigeria Energy Support Programme, funded by European Union, initiated this project in some selected states of Nigeria including Niger State. Our participation in the URL Programme motivated us to adopt this mini grid project as a means of rural transformation.

As at today there over 30 rural communities with electricity through solar mini grid with a total renewal energy generation of 2,690.4kw. This has transformed the benefiting community and improved their businesses.

Additionally, the Nigerian government has adopted the acupuncture approach in our urban renewal strategy through Minna Urban Regeneration through Acupuncture (MURA) project at Kpakungu area of Minna. This project was inspired by what we previously witnessed in Songyang, China, where rural local communities were transformed through simple improvement using the acupuncture method.

Lastly, through the collaboration with UN-Habitat, Niger State was one of the participating entities in the joint research on Covid-19 Impacts on Transportation of Food

and Related Commodities in the Urban-Rural Nexus (ITFCURN) in some selected African countries of Kenya, Cameroun, Senegal, Zimbabwe and Nigeria (Niger State) funded by UN-Habitat, through University of Nairobi, Kenya. This work has given the state the opportunity to contribute in the understanding of the effect of Covid-19 in our rural areas.

The partnership between Niger State and UN-Habitat is closely conjugated, cordial and beneficial. Since 2017, when the state signed agreement what UN-habitat, Niger State was able to participate in many international events with positive impacts.

UN-Habitat and Niger State are pursuing more collaborations in some of the areas highlighted, such as urban planning, sustainable development, land administration and GIS. These are areas of interest to UN-Habitat and central to the attainment of the Global Agenda and New Urban Agenda. This is the right time to re-strategize with our new government at the state under the able leadership of Rt. Hon. Mohammed Umar Bago, who is very passionate about urban planning and development. His pronouncements and interest in providing all the necessary support to address the unplanned development of our cities, especially his interest on Suleja, is very encouraging and needs the support of UN-Habitat and relevant development partners.

***"I would like to most sincerely appreciate UN-Habitat for the continued support and understanding. The Nigerian government is looking forward to working with them in our common goal of leaving no one and no space behind."***





## 5. In Foresight

A wide range of efforts to advance urban-rural linkages have been achieved so far, but what lies ahead for 2023?

### a. Upcoming events

#### ► The third International Forum on urban rural linkages, Songyang County, China



The International Forum on Urban-Rural Linkages (IFURL) brings together experts and key stakeholders from national and sub-national governments, academia, private sector, civil society, and international agencies to deliberate and exchange knowledge and inspiring practices on urban-rural linkages. Continuing with the solid partnership with Songyang County, China, UN-Habitat and Songyang

County will host this international forum between 29<sup>th</sup> October and 1<sup>st</sup> November, 2023, under the theme **Enhancing Urban-Rural Connectivity to build Better Livelihoods**. New partnerships that will be formed at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Forum will strengthen existing collaborations and expand the network to continue bringing territories to a coherent policy and normative discourse.

#### ► Fifty-first plenary session of the Committee on World Food Security



This 51<sup>st</sup> session of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) will be held under the theme **“Sustainable food systems: how to maximize transformative opportunities across the rural-urban continuum to achieve healthy diets and SDGs”**. The session will discuss urban-rural linkages and the implications of an emerging rural-urban continuum

in the context of current challenges and opportunities for food systems transformation to deliver healthy diets from sustainable food systems. UN-Habitat is among 10+ co-organizing organizations that will spearhead this session taking between 23 and 27 October 2023 in a hybrid format in Rome, Italy.

More on the session is available [here](#).



## b. Upcoming publications

### GLOBAL STATE OF URBAN-RURAL LINKAGES REPORT



This inaugural report reviews and unpacks the concept of urban-rural linkages and reviews its role in the sustainable development agenda and its evolution since 2000. It also features the changing landscape of urbanization, specifically exploring the global and country trends in urban-rural linkages through data collected from member states.



### SYNTHESIS REPORT ON THE STATE OF URBAN LINKAGES IN AFRICA WITH SELECT CASE STUDIES

This synthesis report provides an overview of urban rural linkages in Africa with insights from the UN-Habitat projects in select African countries.



### INTEGRATING LAND TENURE AND MANAGEMENT IN URBAN-RURAL LINKAGES

This is a guide jointly developed by UN-Habitat and the UN Convention for Climate Change and Desertification (UNCCD). The guide supports integration of the concept of URLs into practice and policies, providing practical insights for better land management, job creation, decent livelihoods, and opportunities in rural areas.

## PREVIOUS EDITIONS OF URBAN-RURAL LINKAGES NEWSLETTERS



Issue 1



Issue 2



Issue 3



Issue 4



Issue 5

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