

DAY 1 in Brief

30th October 2023

Songyang County, China

联城乡 共建美好家园
ENHANCING URBAN-RURAL CONNECTIVITY TO BUILD BETTER LIVELIHOODS

2023浙江丽水松阳·第三届城乡联系论坛
THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON URBAN-RURAL LINKAGES



iFURL

智慧互联城乡 共建美好家园
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The International Forum on Urban-Rural Linkages is a platform by co-organized by Department of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of Zhejiang Province, Department of Transportation of Zhejiang Province, Lishui Municipal People's Government and UN-Habitat, whose aim is to promote urban-rural linkages (URL) as an effective approach for sustainable development.

The focus is to promote sustainable rural transformation amidst urbanization through diverse topics. The forum has been held biennially the [first](#) and [second](#) in 2019 and 2021, and this third edition is being held from 29th to 1st November 2023.

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VISIT TO THE WINDOW OF SONGYANG



The forum began in earnest with a 1-hour field tour of the [Window of Songyang](#).

The Window of Songyang is an important gateway for people to get to know about Songyang.

It features an exhibition area spanning 4,400 square metres, serving as a hub for exhibitions for formal, informal or cultural events, government administration, education, and a space for social interaction.

The short trip was eye opening to many participants, who got to appreciate the diverse aspects of Songyang which boasts a blend of urban and rural interactions.





OPENING CEREMONY

Following the introductory trip, more than 180 globally diverse participants from 17 countries and 18 international organizations came together for the opening ceremony. Inspired by the theme, “**enhancing urban-rural connectivity for better livelihoods**”, the opening ceremony speakers curated their remarks to demonstrate various aspects of urban rural linkages, including examples and experiences from their contexts.





The opening remarks began with a video address by the *UN-Habitat Deputy Executive Director, Michal Mlynar*. He reiterated that Urban-rural linkages are not merely about geographic connections but represent a multifaceted nexus of economic, social, and environmental functional interdependencies. He was keen to mention how the theme of the forum underscores the urgency to address the socio-economic disparities between urban and rural areas.

He also reminded participants that the solutions we seek are not one-size-fits-all. Learning from the diverse initiatives by Songyang, it is through this diversity of approaches, tailored to local contexts, that we can truly achieve global impact. He concluded his speech by underlining UN-Habitat’s continued support to support Member States to ensure rural areas and communities are not left behind in development globally.



On his part, *Mo Liang, Songyang County*, extended a warm welcome to all guests attending. After sharing a piece of the county’s rich history and geographical features, he expressed the hope that through the exchange of knowledge and ideas in the forum, global practices would further advance the development of Songyang. “In addition, it I also hope that Songyang’s experiences can be shared with the world,” he added.





Remy Sietchiping, *UN-Habitat*, then mentioned that the forum is a great opportunity for diffusion of knowledge, exchange of ideas and perspectives, cross-learning on contextual experiences, and also importantly, conclusion with concrete actions to advance the urban-rural linkages at the advocacy, normative and operational fronts. He also highlighted that the forum was an opportunity to solidify existing friendships and partnerships, as well as forge new forms of collaboration.



Additional opening speeches from the high-level representatives included **Wu Shunze**, *Songyang County*, who pointed out how Songyang has in recent years promoted urban-rural integration and looked forward to the active participation in the various activities of the forum.

Shao Hong, *Sonyang County*, focused on the transportation perspective, expressing pride of being the province's first pilot county for smart transportation industry.

Ying Baiping, *Songyang County*, angled his speech from the point of rural revitalization. He was proud that Songyang is one of the first counties to implement efforts that restore and protect traditional villages.

In closing the opening remarks, **Dong Hongmei** underlined that from the recent restoration and utilization of traditional building crafts and cultures, more such cases would contribute to opening up the path to urban-rural integrated development.



KEYNOTE SPEECHES



The IFURL3 keynote speeches were prepared by renowned experts from various fields of academia, as well as from globally recognized research institutes. The speeches effectively covered multiple thematic areas that touch on urban-rural linkages.

Kicking off this session was **Antonella Contin**, *Politecnico di Milano*. Basing her presentation on the metropolitan urban-rural linkage scale, she proposed the **adaptive** and **inventive** model, which bridge rural and urban areas, fostering positive feedback and at the metropolitan scale, inventive features private investments, social innovation, and local participation. She also placed emphasis on **regenerative agriculture, green and digital diplomacy, strategic partnerships**, and **balancing urban-rural needs**.



On her part, **Li Qin**, *Baidu Institute for Intelligent Transportation*, she highlighted Baidu's efforts to support Songyang county to enhance its technological approaches. She also proposed the integration of artificial intelligence and cloud computing to narrow the technological gap between urban and rural areas.

Jeeranuch Sakhamduang, *Thailand Environment Institute (TEI)* then presented Thailand's Bio-Circular-Green Economy (BCG) model which the institute has used its concept to work with communities to not only revitalize connectivity of urban and rural areas but also support locals' livelihoods and enhancing natural resource governance through bio-economy concept.



Luo Deying, *Tsinghua University*, observed the county’s practice of restoring and revitalizing traditional villages so that these villages exist among the towns in a network of mutual coexistence and preservation of culture.

In closing this segment, **Rodrigo Ignacio Yanez Rojas**, *Latin American Center for*

Rural Development, elaborated on the results of the project, *Effects of Shocks In Urban, Mixed And Rural Territories: A case Study of Food Insecurity and Resilience Strategies In Latin America*, hoping that the research findings would inform the development of context-specific policies.



SITE VISITS

As part of the forum, site visits were elaborated, to demonstrate experiences on the subject from different contexts along the four subthemes of the forum.

1. Youth

This began with a tour of the Songyang Xiangrui e-commerce Industrial Park, an ecosystem of business premises with several products from Songyang. These include clothes, tea, honey and other agricultural products. Participants learned with interest how the industrial park is creating an enabling environment for young people to earn livelihoods while living in a rural area.







A prominent feature of the park was the use of social media to advertise and sell agricultural products from the local area. It was interesting to learn that the business incubation section of the park provides young entrepreneurs with free training on digital skills to further improve their business through social media and e-commerce.



Participants were then taken to the Dalutan Post which is located along Songyin River, together with the Shimenyu Bridge and other cultural buildings create a national touristic scenic area. After the two site visits, participants gathered to explore the role of youth in bridging the urban-rural divide. Starting off the presentations,

Xiang Yong, Peking University, highlighted the various initiatives that can be used to connect cities and villages, including festivals, digital products and creative culture products. He mainly proposed four main aspects to further include young people and children makingspaces, art relationships and products in rural revitalization.



Sun Li, Leeds University, brought in the element of using technology, connectivity and e-commerce to encourage more youth to the rural areas. She also proposed that the benefit of moving to rural areas is reversal of brain drain, knowledge transfer and cultural preservation.



Ma Gongzuo, an entrepreneur and local of Songyang, then shared his experience of moving to the city then returning to Songyang to operate a successful bee-keeping business using the power of social media.

Paolo Gerli, *Edinburgh Napier University*, in his remarks called for the need to change the narrative on digital skills in rural areas. There is need to continue pushing for advanced digital skills in rural areas.

Shen Weixing, *Hangzhou City University*, underscored that rural areas should be places of hope and not places to move away from. To do this, there is need to design rural areas to be more attractive to young people.

Cai Yidan, *Zhejiang Province Youth Development Research Center*, pointed out that there is need to attract more people to rural areas through identifying the major driving force for rural revitalization; need to further develop industries; enhancing culture in the rural areas, and; need to improve rural infrastructure.



In concluding this site visit, **Christophe Hersse** and **Michael Quadrelli**, *Rural-Urban-Youth Initiative*, presented on their project whereby inspiring installations are constructed and placed in rural and

urban areas. These installations provide common spaces for communities to converge and discuss common issues such as climate change and biodiversity.

2. Resource Distribution

A second group of forum participants were taken on a field trip and parallel side event to Shanxiayang Village.

Participants were then shown around the village to see how the concept of resource distribution is being implemented by Songyang County.

Shanxiayang Village was established before the Ming Dynasty and was named Shanxiayang because the village is located at the southern foot of Dalingbei

Mountain. As a National Traditional Village, it is inhabited by 675 households with 1,642 people. Shanxiayang Village is characterized by ancient villages and geomantic omen.

Participants also learned that there are more than 120 ancient buildings with complete forms, covering a total area of 39,000 square meters, which is one of the relatively complete and largest ancient villages in Zhejiang Province. After the visit, discussions on the topic were held.





The discussion session was designed with the objective of exploring how the various resources in urban and rural spaces can be harnessed for equitable development and mutual benefit of both urban and rural communities.

Pan Yigang, *Zhejiang Development & Planning Research Institute*, proposed that to narrow the gap, there is need to: improve farmers livelihood; countryside need to develop their own industries, and organizations can help to transform the rural economy, including initiatives attracting the youth.

Yang Guiqing from *Tongji University* and the Chinese lead of *Sino-German Urban-Rural Assemy (URA)* project, presented how village regeneration contributed to the improvement of livelihood in the urban-rural continuum in Huangyan District, Taizhou City. The long-term cooperation between Tongji University and Huangyan District Government built a solid basis for the successful implementation of urban planning.

This is where the Sino-German URA project started, from village regeneration to sustainable transformation of the Huangyan-Taizhou region, underpinned by multi-disciplinary research topics and the participatory Raumbild planning method. URA project is part of funding scheme of Sustainable Urban and Regions (SURE), sponsored by German Federal Ministry of Education and Science (BMBF). Both Huangyan District and Songyang County are located in Zhejiang Province, providing inspiring practices in strengthening urban-rural linkages from China.



Ann Therese Trevenen-Jones, *Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition*, argued that access to healthy diets, like the distribution of natural resources such as arable land, water, land based, fresh water and marine life are not evenly distributed across the Earth. How we seek to realise consistent access, within Earth's natural systems boundaries, to safe, diverse healthy diets for all, as culturally preferred, is essential to the well-being and prosperity of people and planet.

Rosana Zenina - Poblet Alegre, presented how the Lima Ecological Infrastructure Strategy (LEIS) is used to demonstrate how open spaces serv as systems to reconnect people with

nature, culture and life, and how could these systems support food production, wastewater cleaning, reduce risks, improve public health, and support the mutual exchange of resources between urban and rural areas.

Hu Bao, *Zhejiang Provincial People's Government*, proposed reuse of waste products, digital innovation, and combination of economic and tourist activities in same places.

Valentino Marini Govigli, *University of Bologna*, suggested that changes are needed in ways food is produced, processed, distributed, marketed and consumed, and highlighted diversity of actors involved.

Suggested adaptive governance, adoption of mechanisms for cooperation, flexibility in formalization, and community-based engagement systems.

Zhang Ping, *Peking University Law School*, added that for urban-rural reconstruction to be successful the legal environment needs to be considered.

Vincent Joineau, *Mayor of Rions*, concluded this session by sharing the

history and experiences of Rions. He then proposed efforts such as promote social diversity and mutual understanding; Expansion of associations for different kinds of events and activities; Participatory decision making for all major decisions, and the need to preserve the environment and landscape heritage.



From this first day, the opening remarks and thought-provoking keynote speeches refreshed participants' knowledge of the urgent need to bridge the urban-rural divide, approaching urban rural areas as a continuum and not separately. From the site visits, it was clear that Songyang has taken massive strides since the previous forum, to support equitable **resource distribution** between urban and rural areas. Additionally, the county extensively demonstrated various strategies and initiatives to elevate the role of **youth/young people** in rural revitalization.



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