

Response to Habitat III Framework Policy Paper #6

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Introduction: This response is limited to Policy Paper Framework 6 *Urban Spatial Strategies*, and the primary focus of these remarks is on the paper's treatment of integrated planning and urban rural linkages. Key points on integrated urban rural development should also be reflected in other policy papers, including *Socio-Cultural Urban Framework* (2), *National Urban Policies* (3), *Urban Governance* (4), *Urban Ecology and Resilience* (8).

1. **A new narrative on urban rural linkages for the 21st century and the New Urban Agenda** should be clearly articulated as recommended in the outcome document of the UN Habitat organized Expert Group Meeting (EGM) held in Monteria, Colombia last October.² The current policy paper framework on “Urban Spatial Planning” (hereafter called the “paper”) should incorporate recent expert academic and practitioner consensus that there are new “functional territories” combining urban and rural areas in which the “urban” and the “rural”—spatially, culturally and economically—are inextricably interwoven and therefore cannot be treated separately. Urban policy frameworks need to be redressed accordingly. The repercussions from policy *not* catching up with the new geography of urban rural territories may invite more challenge and greater conflict of the types found in many countries in the world today, in both developing and developed nations. Urban rural territories or “city regions” comprise smaller towns, intermediate cities and the rural spaces between completely urbanised spaces and remote or depopulated rural spaces.³ Urban rural territories or city regions exist on every continent, and both have similar patterns and fundamental differences. Research from RMISP and IIED shows the combination of small and intermediate cities and rural areas together contain the greatest hunger and poverty globally and policy interventions must address these areas specifically. The authors of a 2015 paper commissioned by FAO and the Prince of Wales International Sustainability Unit contend, “the more integrated urban settlements and rural territories are, the more resilient and sustainable both cities and subnational regions will be.”⁴
2. **The paper would be more concrete by referencing examples of the innovation and creative solutions emerging in every region** to learn, adapt and implement strategies that do in fact address the challenges the paper identifies to improving urban rural relations. Some solutions have transferable policy and practice in ways that are inclusive, participatory

¹ These remarks are drafted by Thomas Forster, expert on city region systems and participant at a UN Habitat organized expert group meeting on 27-28 October, 2015 in Monteria, Columbia on “The Role of Intermediate Cities in Strengthening Urban-Rural Linkages towards the New Urban Agenda”. (Outcome document is appended to these remarks).

² The “Monteria Communique” is appended as an annex to these comments.

³ The term “**city region**” is increasingly being used in reference to newly understood interwoven urban and rural communities. For further information see reports and inputs to the Habitat III process presented by groups associated with the City Region Food Systems Alliance (www.cityregionfoodsystems.org) defining the New Urban Agenda including:

1. The World Urban Forum *Call for Action on City Region Food Systems* (Medellin, 2014)
2. *City Regions as Landscapes for People, Food and Nature* (Washington, 2014)
3. *Food in an Urbanising World: The role of city region food systems in resilience and sustainable development* (London, 2015)
4. Submission of a non-issue paper on *City Region Food Systems and Sustainable Urban Development* (Nairobi, 2015)
5. *Strengthening Urban Rural Linkages through City Region Food Systems* (Monteria, 2015)

⁴ From introduction to *Strengthening Urban Rural Linkages through City Region Food Systems*, paper presented to Monteria expert group meeting, October 2015.

and have had positive results.⁵ While the paper may not have room for a comprehensive showcase of the varieties of good practice, there should be at least a reference to the entry points to addressing urban rural “flows” of different kinds, including most importantly people, land, capital, energy, water, food, biodiversity and waste. A number of recent studies include diagrams of these urban to rural and rural to urban flows and it may help to include a diagram in the paper. It is through encountering first the challenges, then the solutions to impediments in these flows, that local governments and people learn across urban rural divides to find common cause and mutual benefit. Recognizing the variety of entry points will provide hooks for local policy and planning that in many cases need enabling policy at the national level.

3. **Stronger reference to the importance of systems approaches is needed in the paper.** The flows from people to food and services to waste are all inter-related through supply and distribution systems, social protection systems, market systems, food systems, ecosystem functions and benefits, etc. Together, these sectoral systems make up complex city region systems that are evolving rapidly around the world in response to a variety of economic, environmental and political forces.
4. **The multiplicity of challenges recognized in the paper leading to the call for inclusive and integrated multi-level governance across urban and rural areas needs more operational clarity.** The paper needs to go beyond the rhetoric of breaking institutional and disciplinary silos. There should be a clear demonstration in this paper that spatial planning, resulting from assessment and better understanding of urban rural territories, may help identify optimal subnational level management units for integrated sustainable planning and development. Only with more manageable subnational units can synergy across multiple goals be achieved, from adaptations for economic and environmental resilience to concrete ways to honor the rights of all citizens, especially women, children, smallholders and the urban and rural poor equally. Beyond the balance between urban and rural, there also is a balance needed between the respective roles of government, civil society and the private sector and protection against unproductive concentrations of power in normative language that will be acceptable in a variety of national contexts.⁶
5. **The paper should conclude with a strong recommendation that the New Urban Agenda incorporate the new narrative combining urban and rural sustainable development as recognized in Habitat II and updated in the context of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.** Spatial integration of urban and rural is called for in SDG target (11.a), calling for integrated urban, peri-urban and rural planning at the national level. While the global indicator to monitor progress is difficult for this target, there could nonetheless be a reinforcement of integrated planning in the New Urban Agenda. Specifically, national urban policy can provide enabling support to local and territorial policy initiatives that do combine the needs of rural and urban communities. Examples include improving short supply chains and market access for smallholder rural producers while improving the nutrition of the urban poor, or providing urban procurement and investment support that creates a more resilient rural economy with decent employment opportunities outside larger cities. These are among the concrete examples called for in number 2 above.

⁵ Two recent and ongoing collections of such experiences can be found in the FAO and RUAF Foundation managed City Region Assessment Project supported by Germany and the Daniel and Nina Carasso Foundation, and the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact: Good Practices from Cities.

⁶ Examples of normative policy addressing urbanization and rural transformation may be forthcoming in the time needed to influence the New Urban Agenda from the Committee on World Food Security, which is having a technical consultation in late February, 2016.