



# URBAN-RURAL LINKAGES Newsletter 10<sup>th</sup> Edition | April 2026



International Dialogue on Urban-Rural Linkages.  
Photo: Songyang

## EDITORIAL NOTE

Welcome to the 10<sup>th</sup> edition of the Urban-Rural Linkages Newsletter which coincides with the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the approaching 10th anniversary of the New Urban Agenda.

As we mark this milestone, we take a moment to reflect on how far the initiative has come since releasing our very first edition in 2019, right after the launch of the Guiding Principles of Urban-Rural Linkages (URL-GP) at the first United Nations Habitat Assembly.

This edition begins with **nine highlights** from previous editions of the newsletter, then shifts to the developments of 2025, including a spotlight on the International Dialogue on Urban-Rural Linkages. You'll also find interview snippets from three long-standing experts, reflecting on what's worked -and what hasn't -for urban-rural linkages since the SDGs were adopted in 2016, and also sharing their views on the road ahead.

This edition also features an article contribution from the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES). The newsletter then closes with an overview of what lies ahead for UN-Habitat as we continue to support Member States and partners addressing the global housing crisis via urban-rural linkages. Please reach out to us if you have interesting examples and approaches via [unhabitaturl@un.org](mailto:unhabitaturl@un.org).

Thank you for staying engaged and for your continued interest in urban-rural linkages

## In this edition



The Big Nine from Previous Editions



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Expert reflections on urban-rural linkages since the adoption of the SDGs



Partner feature article



What next for UN-Habitat urban-rural linkages work?

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## The Big Nine from previous editions

This section synthesizes key highlights from the previous nine editions, mainly looking at what featured in each of the previous nine editions, to capture the milestones reached and progress made in the urban-rural linkages space.



Edition 1

### Launch of the URL Guiding Principles

Introduced the **Urban-Rural Linkages Guiding Principles and Framework for Action**, outlined their development process, and highlighted early milestones including expert meetings, COP events, and the UN Habitat Assembly resolution that formalized global commitment to strengthening urban-rural linkages.

November 2019



Edition 2

### IFURL1 and WUF10 as global catalysts

Focused on the outcomes of the **First International Forum on Urban-Rural Linkages (IFURL1)** and urban-rural linkages activities at the **tenth World Urban Forum (WUF10)**. Also introduced **short articles** and announced **key publications** such as the first URL Compendium of Inspiring Practices on Urban-Rural Linkages

May 2020

March 2021



Edition 3

### COVID-19 and territorial resilience

Centered on lessons from **nine global COVID-19 webinars**, showing how territorial systems and urban-rural flows shaped resilience. Featured short articles on intermediary cities and International Building Exhibition in Thuringia (IBA), and highlighted partner events such as the Urban-Rural Assembly (URA), **Territorial and Landscape Days**, and Urban-Rural partnerships **2020 (URP)**.



Edition 4

### IFURL2 and scaling up URL implementation

Spotlighted the **Second International Forum on Urban-Rural Linkages (IFURL2)** held in Songyang, emphasizing themes of health, territorial development, and intermediary cities. It also presented progress on URL implementation projects, new global collaborations, and key webinars on climate, food systems, and intermediary cities.



Edition 5

### Urban-Rural Linkages at WUF11 and global policy momentum

Highlighted the prominence of **urban-rural linkages at WUF11**, including multiple URL-focused events and discussions on biodiversity, food systems, and territorial governance. It also featured guest articles on market systems and land, and advances in global policy spaces such as **UNCCD COP15** and **CBD COP15**.

May 2022

October 2023

COP15.

January 2023



Edition 6

### Progress after UNHA2 and expanding the global URL agenda

Reviewed follow-up actions from early 2023, including major URL related outcomes from the **Second UN Habitat Assembly**, the launch of the **Center for Urban-Rural Linkages in Africa (CURLA)**, and expert interviews offering perspectives on various URL thematic areas.



Edition 7

### IFURL3, expanding partnerships, and Intermediary Cities

Showcased key outcomes of **IFURL3**, including practical demonstrations from Songyang and thematic sessions on youth, resources, transport, and rural development. Also emphasized the growing importance of **intermediary cities** through an expert group meeting focused on territorial resilience.

June 2024



Edition 8

### WUF12 + Strengthened Partnerships

Highlighted the strong presence of **urban-rural linkages at the 12<sup>th</sup> World Urban Forum (WUF12)**, with multiple URL-focused events across governance, food systems, land, and regeneration. Also featured partner perspectives on advancing integrated territorial development, and UN-Habitat’s contributions to other partner-led events.

December 2024

July 2025

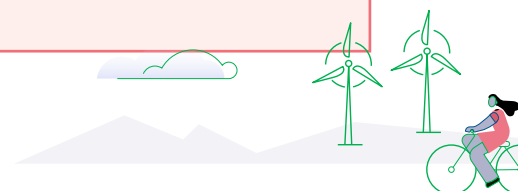


Edition 9

### URL Strategic Positioning + expanding knowledge and advocacy

Highlighted UN-Habitat’s strategic positioning of urban-rural linkages (URL) within the 2026–2029 Strategic Plan, outlining progress in policy integration, capacity development, and global knowledge production. Also showcased local impact through a Niger State (Nigeria) story on improved rural water access and presented new knowledge contributions.

Together, these newsletters show how urban–rural linkages have steadily advanced from concept to practice. Global forums such as the World Urban Forum, UN Food systems summit, UNCCD Conference of parties, UNCBD conference of parties and the International Dialogue on Urban–Rural Linkages, coupled with growing partnerships have strengthened the focus on intermediary cities, food systems, and territorial governance. At the same time, country stories and partner contributions illustrate how this work is improving local services and supporting more resilient, connected communities. Overall, the agenda is gaining momentum, widening its partnerships, and aligning more closely with global development priorities.





## Special Feature: IDURL 2025

### International Dialogue on Urban-Rural Linkages 2025: *Advancing Urban-Rural Linkages: Culture, Housing and Basic Services*

In the serene landscapes of Songyang County, China, the **2025 International Dialogue on Urban-Rural Linkages (IDURL)** became a living showcase of how **culture, housing, heritage, and basic services** can bridge urban and rural realities. Co-organized by UN-Habitat and the China International Communications Group (CICG), the Dialogue convened over 120 participants from 15 countries to share ideas, experiences, and innovations driving inclusive and sustainable territorial development.

Over two days, participants explored **Songyang’s integrated approach**, combining cultural heritage preservation, adaptive reuse, and modern service delivery. Highlights included a revitalized water system serving 32,800 residents, the transformation of an old bus station into a public fitness center, and the adaptive reuse of historic sites like puppet theatres and high-pitch opera museums. Field visits and thematic sessions illustrated how **urban acupuncture**, digitalization, and intelligent transport systems can strengthen urban-rural linkages, improve access to services, and foster climate resilience. Drawing on global examples from **Asia, Africa, and Europe** and related contexts, discussions emphasized **heritage-led regeneration, participatory governance, and community engagement** as critical elements for context-specific, sustainable development.

The 2025 International Dialogue on Urban-Rural Linkages in Songyang reaffirmed a **global call to action by UN-Habitat**: bridging urban and rural areas through **inclusive, innovative, and culturally grounded approaches** to achieve balanced, resilient, and sustainable development for all.

# IDURL



100+ attendees



15 countries represented



12 media outlets (TV, social media, websites and magazines)

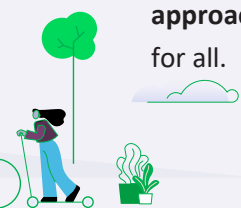


Social media impact (UN-Habitat and CICG) platforms



1M+ views

50K Engagements and interactions





*The goal is not to make the countryside the same as the city, but to realize the complementarity and win-win potential of urban and rural functions.*

**Xie Gang,**  
China International  
Communications Group



*At IDURL, we have realized that in the process of modernization, urban and rural areas are never 'either/or' options, but a cohesive whole with a shared destiny.*

**Liang Haigang,**  
CPC Songyang County  
Committee



*Balanced territorial development goes beyond infrastructure - it is about dignity, identity, and opportunity, ensuring no one and no place is left behind*

**Rafael Tuts,**  
UN-Habitat



*Infrastructure is the body; heritage is the soul*

**Abdul Husaini,**  
Minna, Nigeria



# Expert reflections on urban–rural linkages since the adoption of the SDGs

A decade into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), our partners look back on the gains made in strengthening urban–rural linkages and offer perspectives on how to accelerate impact moving forward



**Jackson Kago,**  
*Urban and Regional  
Planner*

**Q:** In your view, to what extent has the adoption of the SDGs truly elevated urban–rural linkages in policy and practice– or have they remain an assumed connection rather than a deliberate planned one in the past 10 years?

**A:** Ten years on, the SDGs have elevated urban–rural linkages (URL) from an implicit reality to a recognized policy concern, but practice still lags behind intent. URL interventions cut across several SDGs making it possible for multi–disciplinary engagement across various sectors and institutions. In particular, SDG 11 target 11.a has helped profile the concept globally, encouraging more integrated thinking around territorial approaches. The SDGs have also justified national and international agencies’ work on URLs, leading to new programmes, partnerships, and analytical frameworks, and have unlocked targeted funding streams.

**Q:** Where do you see urban–rural linkages to have actually been acted on– through planning, investment, or governance– or just acknowledged in policy language?

**A:** In practice, some areas have moved beyond aspiration to planning and governance actions on urban–rural linkages. For example, UN–Habitat’s Urban–Rural Linkages Guiding Principles and Framework for Action have been applied in efforts to embed integrated spatial and territorial planning, governance coordination and investments in infrastructure to connect rural–urban systems. The integration of URL in the national urban policies also has potential to mainstream application of the concept.

**Q:** Between now and 2030, what one concrete policy, planning, or financing shift could most decisively move urban–rural linkages from aspiration to implementation?

**A:** Institutionalization of urban–rural linkages within government systems through National Urban Policies and identification of URL champions across key ministries can accelerated adoption of the approach. In addition, inter–departmental coordination mechanisms, and dedicated budget lines can ensure sustainability of initiatives.



**Florence Egal,**  
*Food security and nutrition expert, sustainable diets and local food systems*

**Q:** In your view, to what extent has the adoption of the SDGs truly elevated urban–rural linkages in policy and practice– or have they remain an assumed connection rather than a deliberate planned one in the past 10years?

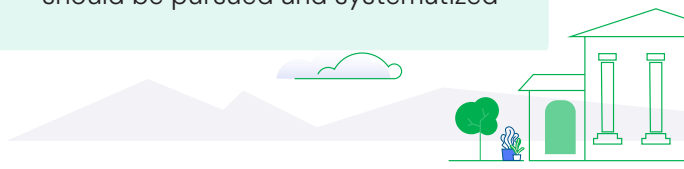
**A:** The SDGs evolved from the MDGs and reflected awareness of the need for a more systemic approach. For institutional and policy reasons, they however remained essentially sectorally-driven (food, health, environment, cities...) and missed the opportunity for improved dialogue and governance, maintaining existing gaps and further complicating processes (each of them requiring multi-disciplinary and inter-institutional mechanisms). Territorial approaches and in particular urban–rural linkages would be the most pragmatic approach to integrate SDGs and improve governance. But this is not yet acknowledged by major stakeholders at government and international level who want to maintain visibility, leadership and access to resources. This should have been deliberately planned.

**Q:** Where do you see urban–rural linkages to have actually been acted on– through planning, investment, or governance– or just acknowledged in policy language?

**A:** There are a variety of examples of concrete multi-disciplinary and inter-institutional governance at territorial level around the world. But these are seldom given appropriate recognition at national level and lessons learnt are not fed back into sectoral policies. Such experiences are insufficiently connected and reflected in relevant international events. There is a lot to learn from pooling and lessons learning from territorial approaches across countries (in particular cross border) and within bioregions.

**Q:** Between now and 2030, what one concrete policy, planning, or financing shift could most decisively move urban–rural linkages from aspiration to implementation?

**A:** Inventories of who does what and where at territorial level are urgently needed with a view to ensure convergence and joint ownership. This would allow a better use of existing human and financial resources in planning and implementation as well as capacity building of institutions directly engaged in social, economic and environmental issues. Eliciting and agreeing on guiding principles emerging from concrete experience should be pursued and systematized





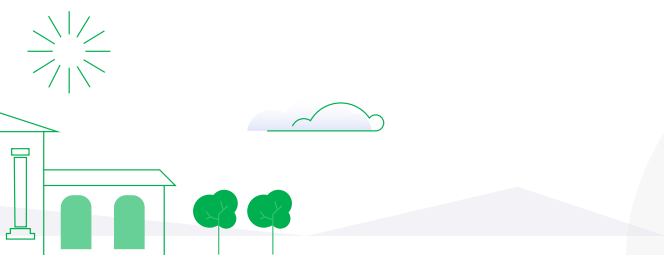
**Thomas Forster,**  
*Urban-Rural Linkages  
Expert*

**Q:** In your view, to what extent has the adoption of the SDGs truly elevated urban–rural linkages in policy and practice– or have they remain an assumed connection rather than a deliberate planned one in the past 10 years?

There is only one target among 169 targets in the 17 SDGs explicitly calling for integrating urban, peri-urban and rural planning for sustainable development. This target (11.a) is part of SDG 11 calling for sustainable and resilient cities. The framework document for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, *The Future We Want*, does include one reference to strengthening urban–rural linkages (para 110) in relation to sustainable agriculture. It is the New Urban Agenda (NUA) that pays far more attention to urban–rural linkages. After the launch of the NUA, UN-Habitat began to promote integrated urban and rural policy and action by first developing the Urban–Rural Linkages Guiding Principles and Framework for Action, adopted by Member States in 2019. Since then, an increasing number of local, subnational and national governments have addressed the importance of URLs to address pressing challenges including the realization of the SDGs, as documented by the Urban–Rural Linkages Programme.

**Q:** Where do you see urban–rural linkages to have actually been acted on– through planning, investment, or governance– or just acknowledged in policy language?

Because urban–rural linkages had only modest treatment in the 2030 Agenda, cities and countries have emphasized the importance of URLs through diverse entry points and more in response to crises that demand an integrated approach, including rural to urban migration, adapting to climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, among other drivers. UN-Habitat and its partners in have documented efforts at integrated urban–rural planning related to nutrition, agrifood systems, market systems, adaptation to the impacts of climate change, etc. Investment specifically to strengthen urban–rural linkages through existing and new governance mechanisms has only just begun and yet there are increasing examples of collaboration between cities and territories to address cross-jurisdiction challenges.



Between now and 2030, what one concrete policy, planning, or financing shift could most decisively move urban–rural linkages from aspiration to implementation?

A:

Deep, lasting urban–rural collaboration faces many barriers that are political, economic, and cultural in most countries. Just because such collaboration may be more efficient or better from a planning perspective will not be enough to further URL linkages. It will take learning from crises that require collaboration to truly institutionalize urban–rural cooperation. The greatest crisis that humanity will face in the coming decades, dwarfing all other challenges, will be the impacts of climate change. To build resilience to impacts of severe weather events, including heavier rainfall and longer drought, to adapt food, energy, and health systems, will necessarily require integrated urban and rural policy and practice. The contours of such collaboration have emerged at local and territorial levels but are not fully supported at national and international levels. City networks, UN agencies and non–state civil society and private sector actors have taken initiative in every region, and in some cases are being scaled out and up. One example is the effort of cities to address nutrition and food security at the same time as the protection of ecosystems and biodiversity through support of smallholder farmers, e.g. in school feeding programs.. This example addresses many of the SDGs in one comprehensive urban–rural agenda.



# Partner feature article

## Circulating and Ecological Sphere (CES) Asia Regional Platform: Localizing Sustainable Development by Strengthening Urban–Rural Linkages

### Why localization matters for sustainable development

Localization is central to achieving sustainable development, as global goals can only be realized through actions that respond to local needs, resources, and capacities and are implemented through practical, inclusive and place-based approaches. By strengthening urban–rural linkages and using local resources, localization translates global sustainability commitments into tangible outcomes, enabling cities and their surrounding rural areas to collaborate in building resilient, equitable, and self-reliant development pathways.

### CES Concept for localization of sustainable development

The Circulating and Ecological Sphere (CES) is an integrated policy approach that promotes a self-reliant, decentralized, and sustainable society by harnessing the complementary strengths of urban–rural linkages. It seeks to simultaneously advance decarbonization, resource circulation, harmony with nature, economic revitalization, and community well-being. The concept was articulated through Japan’s 5th Basic Environment Plan (2018) and has since evolved into a broader development paradigm applicable in diverse regional contexts. By encouraging regions to make optimal and interconnected use of their local resources, CES offers a practical framework for maximizing regional vitality and fostering balanced, inclusive, and sustainable development across cities, agricultural areas, mountainous regions, and fishing communities.

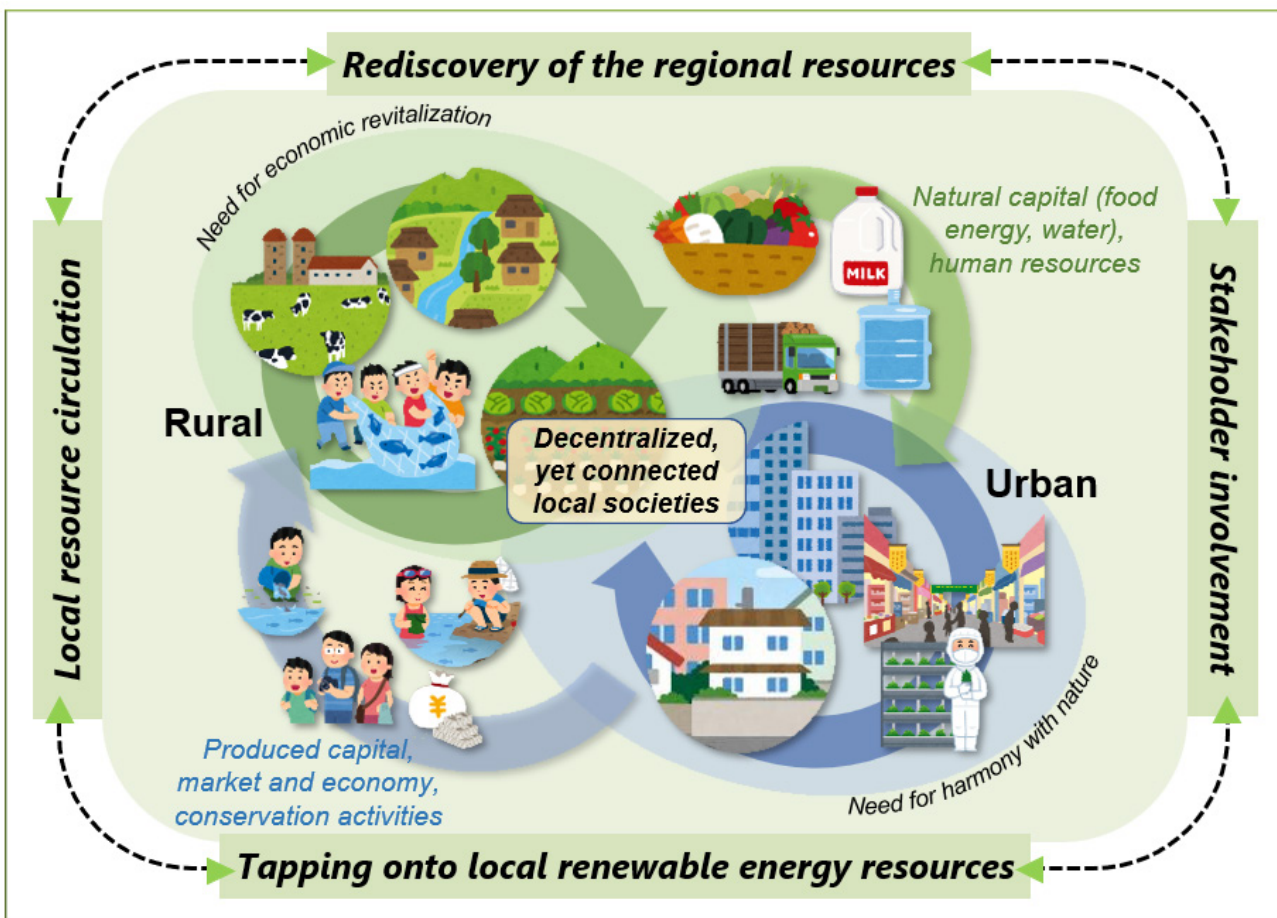


Image 1: Conceptual Illustration of the CES approach © IGES

## The CES-Asia Consortium: A regional collaboration platform

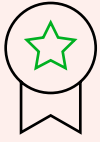
Established in October 2021, the CES-Asia Consortium brings together several leading academic and research institutes across South, Southeast, and East Asia to advance the application of the Circulating and Ecological Sphere (CES) concept. The platform fosters research collaboration, knowledge exchange, and capacity building to address regional sustainability challenges through integrated urban-rural planning and localized solutions. The consortium actively engages local governments, civil society, farmers, researchers, and private sector actors through participatory processes such as field and household surveys, stakeholder consultations, and co-development workshops. These activities enable evidence-based planning, co-design of

solutions, and the integration of CES principles into policy and practice. Image 2 (below) highlights ten city-regions across Asia where CES activities are underway, illustrating both the regional scope of the initiative and the diversity of solutions being developed across different urban-rural contexts.

The consortium also develops practical, locally tailored solutions, including decision support tools for urban-rural planning, local resource-based models for energy, agriculture, and the circular economy, and policy guidance to mainstream CES strategies into development planning. One notable example is the AgriVolt Navigator, an interactive mapping tool that helps local authorities and farmers in Hachinohe (Japan) to identify suitable sites for agrivoltaic systems and quantify associated benefits.



Image 2: Geographic footprint of CES Regional Collaboration and Action Areas © IGES



## Key achievements

Since its inception, the CES platform has:

- Established a **multi-country learning and action network** linking research, policy dialogue, and capacity building
- Engaged over one thousand stakeholders through **regional workshops, national consultations, and community dialogues**
- Generated **evidence-based knowledge** on local resource potential across ten city regions
- Built **technical capacities and cross-country learning**, enabling co-designed, locally relevant interventions
- Developed **decision support tools**, including the Agrivoltaic Navigator, to facilitate planning and implementation of innovative urban–rural solutions
- Formalized **partnerships with local governments**, creating institutional mechanisms for sustainable action. For example, IGES and Hachinohe City Signed a Basic Agreement of Cooperation to address climate change and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

## Scaling impact for resilient and connected city-regions

Since its inception, the CES–Asia Consortium has co-organized three regional workshops (in Cambodia and Thailand), bringing together consortium partners, local governments, civil society, and private sector actors to share experiences, co-develop solutions, and identify priorities for CES-based urban–rural planning. Looking ahead, the Consortium is strengthening efforts to scale and sustain impact by expanding regional networks and partnerships to reach new city-regions across Asia.

The Consortium will continue efforts to co-develop replicable CES model cases that demonstrate integrated urban–rural planning in diverse local contexts, while further mainstreaming CES

approaches into national, regional, and global policy processes, including post-2030 discussions. To co-design practical interventions, the Consortium is also actively collaborating with private sector partners such as HSBC, TERRA, and Bright Green Energy Foundation, as well as local organizations like Aomori KenminEnergy.

Through evidence-based, practice-oriented solutions, the CES–Asia platform aims to continue reinforcing urban–rural linkages and accelerate SDG localization across Asia. Simultaneously, sustained knowledge sharing and capacity-building activities continue to strengthen the ability of local governments and stakeholders to design and implement inclusive, resilient, and locally grounded development pathways.



Image 3. Co-development exercise in Kadholi village of Nagpur, India © IGES



Image 4. 3rd CES Asia Regional Workshop held at Phnom Penh, Cambodia © IGES



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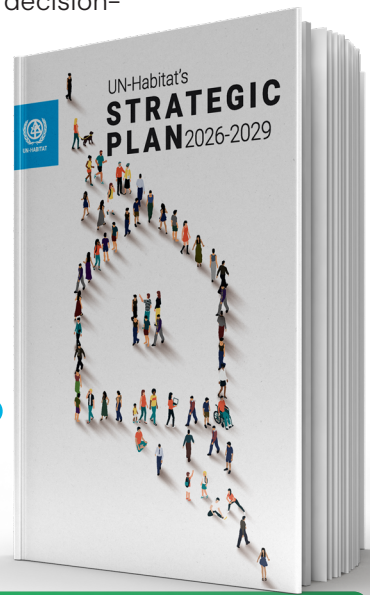
**Brief description:** The Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES), Japan, is a sustainability think tank dedicated to advancing sustainable development in the Asia-Pacific region. IGES conducts innovative, practical, and policy-oriented research on pressing environmental challenges, while promoting strategic collaboration, knowledge exchange, and capacity building. With a strong focus on localizing global goals, IGES works with regional partners to advance integrated and synergistic solutions such as the Circulating and Ecological Sphere (CES). Emphasizing active engagement with local stakeholders, IGES supports co-designing, co-implementing, co-producing, and co-delivering impactful actions, and actively contributes to national, regional, and global processes to bridge science, policy, and society.

# What next for UN-Habitat urban-rural linkages work?

As 2026 moves through its first quarter, UN-Habitat's 2026-2029 Strategic Plan aims to address the global housing crisis alongside the interconnected challenges of poverty, inequality, climate change, and humanitarian crises. The global housing crisis cannot be addressed in isolation from land, livelihoods, mobility, and basic services that span the urban-rural continuum.

By highlighting patterns of migration, land conversion, informal settlement growth, and unequal service provision, there is a need for territorial approaches that distribute housing opportunities beyond congested metropolitan areas.

Strengthening secondary cities, rural hubs, and peri-urban areas can ease housing pressure, improve access to land, and connect housing to livelihoods and basic services. Aligned with the Strategic Plan's focus on land, housing, and basic services, with the means of implementation as integrated territorial planning, multi-level governance, data-driven decision-making, and climate-resilient development—urban-rural linkages is positioned as a practical pathway to delivering adequate and affordable housing for all.



## CALL FOR COLLABORATION

Interested in collaborating ?

UN-Habitat remains open to partner contributions and experiences, including case studies that could support UN-Habitat work in addressing global housing crisis via urban-rural linkages lens. Please fill this [quick survey](#), or reach out to us via [unhabitaturl@un.org](mailto:unhabitaturl@un.org)



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