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Addressing Rural-Urban Disparities for Harmonious Regional Development

At the beginning of the 20th century, as European cities began to spread with the rise of industrialization, British author and intellectual H.G. Wells made a prescient prediction: that soon, modern urbanites would see little distinction between the city and the countryside. “The old antithesis will cease, the boundary lines will altogether disappear,” he wrote. “It will become merely a question of more or less populous”.¹

Today, the sprawling urban landscapes of the developed world seem to have confirmed Wells’s prediction. Talk of edge cities, post-suburban territories and regional development takes for granted the disappearance of clear rural and urban boundaries in countries whose populations became primarily urban more than 50 years ago.

In developing countries, too, distinctions between rural and urban are becoming blurred as urbanization spreads.



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Recognition of rural-urban systems and the interdependencies of populations living and working in both areas have created new prospects for poverty alleviation in the rapidly changing economic, technological and informational environments of many regions in the developing world.² Policies and development initiatives, however, largely remain tied to traditional concepts of growth poles and simple urban diffusion models that assume separate rural-agricultural and urban-industrial objectives. Development theorists have viewed rural-urban interactions alternately as parasitic and exploitative or supportive, but planning efforts have remained separate, disconnected from the real networks and flows of people, goods and ideas throughout what can be described as a porous rural-urban *interface*.

Evidence about the flaws of assumptions and planning efforts that adhere to an urban-rural dichotomy is giving rise to a new view that focuses on promoting positive two-way interactions and reciprocal relations between rural and urban areas, focusing on developing networks to improve quality of life and create harmonious regions. Regional growth and development is changing the way people relate to their environments today; addressing disparities and promoting harmonious development requires that policy-making catch up to the reality of the connected and interdependent lives led by rural and urban dwellers around the world.

From rural and urban to “ruralopolis” and “*desakota*”: The changing rural-urban interface

The geography of rural and urban space is changing, creating ambiguous landscapes in different regions of the developing world, from suburban and peri-urban environments around fast-growing large cities on one extreme to “ruralopolises” on the other: rural economic and social systems fused with metropolitan spatial arrangements.³ Research in East and Southeast Asia points to the emergence of high-density rural areas dubbed “*desakotas*” (“city villages”),⁴ formed as a result of the expansion and influence of metropolitan economies. These terms refer to a new process of *region-based*—as opposed

to city-based—urbanization and can be understood in relation to changing international divisions of labour, international networks and regional spill-over from one mega-urban region to another. The *desakota* constitutes a spatial by-product of high-tech production spilling out of heavily congested cities—particularly Jakarta, Manila and Bangkok—into nearby cheaper but still easily accessible rural areas. In physical terms, the landscape still appears to be predominantly rural with vast areas devoted to cultivation, while a large proportion of household income is derived from non-agricultural activities.

Globalization and its associated forces also seem to be changing the structure of major Latin American cities such as Buenos Aires, Lima, São Paulo, and Mexico City to a polycentric form, where much of the growth is not necessarily within the urban perimeter, but in hot-spots—smaller towns and secondary cities—within the wider metropolitan regions.⁵ In this context, “urban archipelagos” are emerging with diffuse boundaries between the urban and the rural.⁶

From an ecological perspective, the changing rural-urban interface can be characterized as a heterogeneous mosaic of “natural,” “productive” or “agro-ecosystems” and “urban” ecosystems, affected by material and energy flows demanded by urban and rural systems. This interface is not only distinctive because of its ecological features but also because of its socio-economic heterogeneity and fragmented institutional context. In socio-economic terms, the composition of the rural-urban interface is diverse and subject to rapid changes over time. Small farmers, step-wise migrants, informal settlers, industrial entrepreneurs and urban middle-class commuters may all coexist in the same territory but with different and often competing interests, practices and perceptions. The interface is also characterised by a lack of institutions capable of addressing the links between rural and urban activities.

The box below describes the main characteristics that differentiate poverty in rural and urban areas, and also some of the many ways in which the rural and the urban rely on each other. The table suggests that rural-urban interdependencies among the poor are likely to intensify in the “urban transition”.

Urban plus Rural as opposed to Urban versus Rural

A number of trends regarding rural-urban linkages have been observed in the last decade.

1. Urban agriculture is increasingly practised by the poor to supplement declining incomes and to mitigate food and income insecurities.
2. Retrenchment and deepening of urban poverty occasioned by structural adjustment has triggered a process of “return migration”, with households returning to their rural homes in order to survive.

3. Urban-to-rural household remittances are declining, while spiralling transport costs reduce the ability of poorer urban households to import food from their rural relatives.
4. In a number of countries, large numbers of temporary agricultural workers employed by commercial farms, especially during the harvest season, are urban-based, giving rise to a diversification of income sources among poor urban households. This, together with urban agriculture, is putting to test traditional

definitions of “urban” and “rural”, as both their physical and occupational boundaries are becoming increasingly blurred.

5. Technological advances are fuelling the “metropolitanization” of the world economy, further strengthening and creating linkages between rural and urban areas through a web of horizontal and vertical networks among settlements, which are further creating a system of “city regions” in various parts of the world.

Poverty in the rural-urban interface: Is the dichotomy obsolete?

The dynamics of the rural-urban interface have yet to be fully recognized by policymakers and development agencies, which typically refer to rural and urban experiences of poverty as distinct from each other. Addressing disparities across the rural-urban interface and understanding how they influence and interact with each other is critical, but how to do so remains a challenge. On the one hand, discussing and treating rural and urban poverty separately fails to understand the extent to which the livelihoods and assets of many poor (and, indeed, non-poor) draw on resources and opportunities in both rural and urban areas.⁷ On the other hand, an understanding of poverty that no longer distinguishes between “rural” and “urban” runs the risk of ignoring the differences between the contexts, which above all imply differences in the level of income needed to avoid poverty, but also differences in “the possibilities for household food production, the price and availability of food and basic services, the cost of housing, the nature of environmental hazards and the influence of government on access to employment, housing and basic services”.⁸ The risk of facing deprivations and the nature of those deprivations depend in large part on where people live and work.⁹

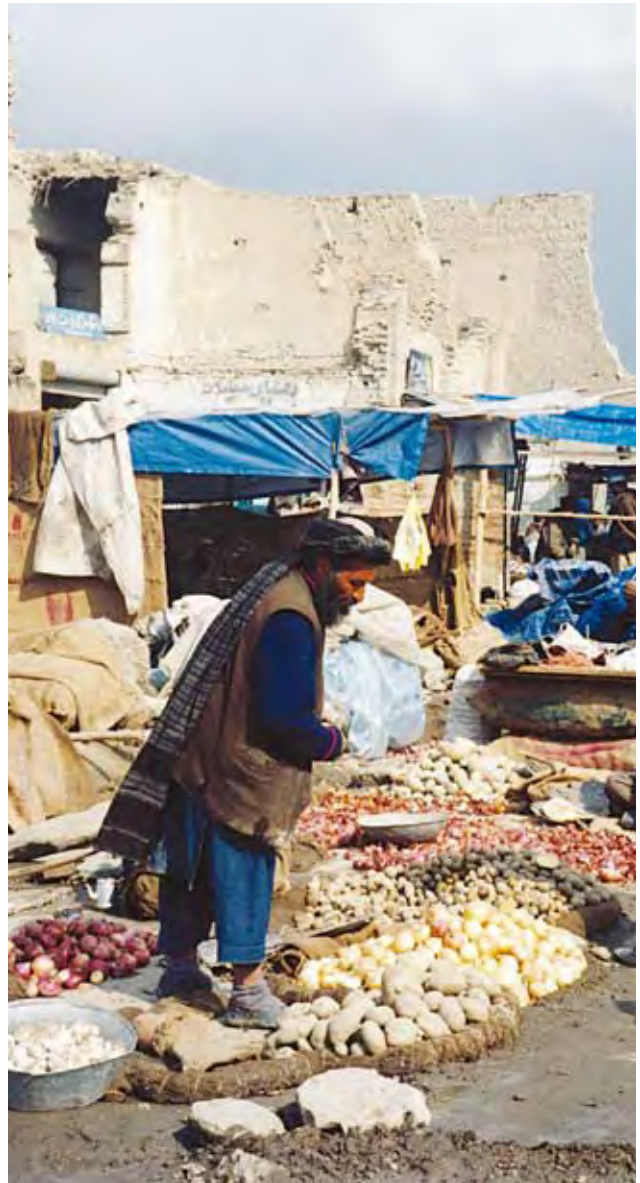
The interdependencies of populations in rural and urban areas cannot be understood simply in terms of income-level measurements of poverty.¹⁰ First, conventional methods of poverty measurement link income to the cost of food but fail to establish the income needed for non-food items, such as health care, education, housing, water provision, and sanitation. Second, such methods say little about how the poor manage by deploying multi-spatial household strategies and diversified livelihoods and by drawing on rural-urban linkages and flows. Socio-economic relations differ not only in terms of income inequality but also inequality in access to land, credit, information and other resources, and these differences encompass a host of socially created categories, including ethnicity, class and gender.¹¹ The simple rural-urban dichotomy belies a much more complex reality for people living in the ambiguous environments in between.

A closer look at flows of people and resources across the rural-urban interface reveals the existence of a system in that defies rural and urban distinctions, suggesting a need for better, more regionally focused ways of conceptualizing how populations get their own needs met and create opportunities for improving their lives.

Rural-urban flows

Complex interactions are influencing social and environmental change at the rural-urban interface, including flows of people, money, information, natural resources, and wastes.¹² These flows can start in either rural or urban areas, and, in fact, it is often difficult to identify their source, as processes driven by factors and decisions at different levels

might be cumulative and mutually reinforcing, converging on a single process. Migration from rural to peri-urban areas, for example, might be promoted by deteriorating physical environments and restrictive political conditions for agricultural practice. This might be seen as a “rural problem”, but decreasing opportunities in rural areas can result from commercialization of crop production driven by city-based demand. In most cases, environmental and social changes in the rural-urban interface are not simply the result of either the movement of rural households into ecologically vulnerable areas or a unidirectional spread of urbanisation into agricultural land.



▲ Open-air vegetable market in Kabul.
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Flows of people

Rural-urban migration has been the central focus of much of the body of research on rural-urban linkages and interactions. However, recent studies have identified a broad range of people's movements between rural and urban areas, revealing a significant diversity of situations with regard to migration patterns and their justification, including the following.

- *Rural-rural migration*: A synthesis study commissioned by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) Natural Resources System Programme revealed that people facing diminishing access to and control over land and other natural resources do not always step directly from rural- to urban-based livelihoods but rather to other natural-based production systems located in other rural and nearby peri-urban areas.¹³
- *Urban-rural migration*: Several recent studies show that “despite widely held beliefs that flows are always rural-to-urban, migration from the urban to the rural areas is increasing. This type of movement is often associated with economic decline and increasing poverty in urban areas. In sub-Saharan Africa, significant numbers of retrenched urban workers are thought to return to rural ‘home’ areas, where the cost of living is lower”.¹⁴
- *Circular migration*: Studies of temporary and circular migration in Asia reveal that these patterns are more common and greater in impact than permanent rural-urban migration. A study in Roi-et Province, Thailand, revealed that “much of the interaction of rural households with cities is temporary, comprising often a month or two and not simply on an agricultural slack season basis”.¹⁵
- *Step-wise migration*: In India, poor migrants often settle in rural and peri-urban areas close to the city and commute on a daily basis, as they cannot afford to live in the city. Sharing dwellings and other facilities with other migrants helps them to reduce their costs. They even distribute unemployment within the group, “absorbing the risk of uncertainty”.¹⁶
- *Straddling* is a commonplace practice among Kenyan migrants: keeping one foot in the town and the other in the countryside. In Durham, South Africa, maintaining both an urban and a rural base provides not only a safety net for poor urban dwellers in times of economic hardship but also in times of political violence.¹⁷
- *Commuting* from rural to peri-urban and urban areas is another commonplace practice. In some respects, commuters take the “best of both worlds”, benefiting from the service, marketing and job opportunities offered by urban areas while retaining land and the possibility of growing their own food, and, unlike households with migrants, avoiding labour shortages during the farming seasons. Of course, the possibility of commuting is highly dependent on affordable and regular transport connections.¹⁸

Clearly, households actively search for ways to diversify their livelihoods and adapt dynamically to different threats and opportunities. Reciprocal links between rural and urban households often persist after migration, such as when urban households take advantage of social connections to get the food they need from rural relatives. A study in Windhoek, Namibia, revealed that, over a one-year period, two-thirds of all households surveyed in the city regularly received food from rural areas, mainly from relatives. The most vulnerable and marginal households in urban areas were typically those with weaker or no links to their relatives in rural areas.¹⁹

Reciprocal rural-urban links are also made clear in studies that illustrate how rural workers diversify their sources of income to meet needs of both rural and urban populations. Studies have found that the proportion of rural households' income earned from non-farm activities can be as high as 80 to 90 per cent in Southern Africa and 30 to 50 per cent in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa.²⁰ In Southern Asia and Latin America, this proportion represents around 60 and 40 per cent, respectively, of the total income of rural households.²¹ In Nigeria, the growth of urban-type income-generating activities in rural areas is associated not only with increasing suburbanization and industrial activities, but also with people bringing back ideas from cities, as an offshoot of rural-urban migration.²² Rural household demand for non-agricultural commodities may, in fact, be the single most important factor in the growth of rural towns.²³

Flows of money

The impact of monetary flows on poverty alleviation differs between rural and urban areas because urban households typically rely more on a cash economy than rural ones. However, considering the significance of remittances from urban migrants for rural household budgets, the poor in rural areas may be negatively affected by unemployment, income reduction or high expenses faced by their urban counterparts. The bulk of migrant remittances appear to be dedicated to supplementing rural households' expenditures on food, consumer goods, health and education,²⁴ but there is also evidence of the role remittances can play in enhancing investments in local productive activities. In Viet Nam's Red River Delta, for example, “seasonal migration to work in the urban construction sector is an essential source of cash, which in turn is invested in the intensification of agricultural production in migrants' home villages”.²⁵

Flows of information

Along with media and communication technologies, informal and interpersonal networks act as vehicles of rural-urban communication and exchange, and as conduits for new ideas. Interpersonal networks, especially, constitute a powerful vehicle by which rural and urban dwellers exchange experiences, information and ideas. Such networks might be confined to close webs of family members and friends – often

enhanced through migration and commuting – or open to wider groups. In some cases, distant sources of information about livelihood opportunities might be more powerful than local and national sources. A study of rural-urban linkages among a number of villages in Indonesia revealed that recruitment of migrant labourers for work in Malaysia was channelled through migrant networks in Malaysia to specific villages and not from urban centres in Indonesia.²⁶

Flows of natural resources, waste and pollution

The rural-urban interface can be defined as a highly dynamic and complex system of land use, constituted by a singular mosaic of ecosystems. The breaking down of supportive reciprocal relations between rural and urban areas tends to aggravate unsustainable patterns of natural resources use and the transference of environmental problems, as when cities draw resources from regions beyond their physical and jurisdictional limits and transfer pollution and wastes to their

hinterlands and beyond. The wealthier the city, the larger the area from which it draws environmental resources – the larger its “ecological footprint” becomes.²⁷ The expansion of the ecological footprint of a city has important implications for the rural-urban interface, both in terms of increasing pressures on its carrying capacity and in terms of missing opportunities, as when food is imported from distant regions rather than supplied from the city’s hinterland.

Land in the rural-urban interface is often under intensive pressure, owing to processes of use conversion and commercialization. These are not only the result of urban sprawl, but also of the loss of farming land in rural areas because of “de-agrarianisation” or even to the abandonment of customary practices of land occupation, as illustrated by several studies in East and West Africa.²⁸ Other factors include immigration of the poor from rural areas; the urban poor moving towards the outskirts where rents and land prices are lower; the better-off building new houses in less-congested areas; loss of agricultural land because of expansion of the city



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Garbage dump in South America
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(usually along major transport routes); speculation and land use changes prompted by industrial location policies or by the development of special and large-scale infrastructures. Land use changes might also respond to the relatively “spontaneous” strategies of the poor (both from rural and urban areas) to access land in proximity to diversified livelihood opportunities, to market forces, or to public policies aimed at restraining urban sprawl, dispersing industrial development, or locating special physical infrastructure with high potential environmental impacts away from densely populated areas.²⁹

Because of the availability of open space and accessibility from urban areas, the rural-urban interface can become the “backyard” for urban waste disposal, often surpassing the absorptive capacity of receiving areas and imposing severe impacts on the health of ecosystems and human populations. Solid and liquid waste disposal in the rural-urban interface requires specific management approaches, given the combination of different pollutants from multiple sources – domestic, industrial and agricultural. In spite of the fact that many waste treatment facilities are located in the rural-urban interface, capital resources invested in environmental quality monitoring and management facilities are often fewer than in core urban areas.

Planned interventions: Towards harmonious regional development

Recognizing the flows of people, resources and wastes throughout rural-urban systems, and the disparities experienced by people in both rural and urban communities, creates opportunities for planned interventions and policy-making that both enhance the use and state of natural resources and improve the livelihoods and living conditions of poor women, men and children. Interventions are typically associated with one of three main planning perspectives: *rural*, which tends to focus on localised and discrete actions; *urban*, which seeks the transformation of planning systems and their allied institutions; and *regional*, which attempts to act upon rural-urban pressures and flows. The rural and urban perspectives remain most common, but the regional perspective offers the greatest opportunities for understanding the dynamic needs of populations and creating linkages for harmonious development.

The rural perspective: Localized and discrete actions

Initiatives based on a rural perspective aim to improve living conditions and the social infrastructure necessary to increase rural production and to improve the living conditions of the poor through localized actions. The geographical focus here is either on rural areas or peri-urban villages, which often retain land-based livelihoods and fall under the jurisdiction of rural authorities while being increasingly influenced by urban areas, regardless of their proximity. A common shortcoming of this perspective is that it tends to focus on only the immediate and medium-term concerns of specific

localities and communities, often neglecting the urban and regional dimension and the long-term perspective required for the sustainable management of resources and services in the rural-urban interface.

The urban perspective: Transformation of planning systems

A number of initiatives at the city level seek to address two sets of issues: the management of the relationship between urban systems and their hinterlands, and the quality of life of urban and peri-urban dwellers.³⁰ A general evaluation of this approach suggests that projects tend to focus initially on immediate issues of concern traditionally associated with basic infrastructure and sanitary engineering projects, such as piped water supply and sanitation. It takes a long time to build consensus and to move away from the direct interests or concerns of participating stakeholders to more strategic long-term issues affecting the development process as a whole. The main constraint of many initiatives under this perspective is that all too often they operate outside mainstream government decision-making, so results remain marginal to the development process.

The regional perspective: Actions upon rural-urban pressures and flows

The third intervention model characterises programmes that purposely focus on the development of reciprocal links between rural and urban areas. This model is based on a regional planning perspective that acknowledges that current urbanization trends are leading to, and being shaped by, rural-urban linkages. According to the regional perspective, a country's settlement pattern is the source of its planning problems, a reflection of deeper socio-economic difficulties and inequalities, which requires tackling critical socio-economic and political issues rather than localized urban or rural solutions. Interventions that act upon rural-urban pressures and flows think of the territory as a networked model, in which planning and policy initiatives are developed for multi-sectoral, interrelated and complementary activities. They emphasize connectivity of the system and development of infrastructure in both rural and urban areas and between minor centres, rather than concentrating just on linkages with major cities.

The regional perspective emphasizes acting upon the vacuum generated by urban and rural institutions and by sectoral policies that reinforce the rural-urban divide. The approach is strategic rather than comprehensive in that it focuses on key entry points with the potential to reinforce rural-urban links: mobility; agricultural and non-agricultural production; trade and commodities; and natural resources and wastes.

Mobility

Conventional planned interventions on people's mobility and poverty reduction have tended to address rural-urban

migration only as a unidirectional flow, mostly perceived as negative. Countries have developed a wide repertoire of policies to curb rural-urban migration, including: outright bans on urban migration in South Africa and strict migration controls in China; forcible return to rural areas in Mozambique; promotion of scattered urbanization through resettlement policies in Ethiopia and the Brazilian Amazon region; creation of new capitals or growth poles in Nigeria, Tanzania and Brazil; and territorial decentralization through the promotion of small and medium-sized towns as in Pakistan and Egypt.³¹ In contrast, current research on people's mobility between rural and urban areas suggests that rather than aiming to organize such flows to redress rural-urban demographic and economic imbalances, policymakers need to understand them in their full complexity.

Agricultural and non-agricultural production

Enhancing production and trade between rural and urban areas is a popular option among those concerned with rural-urban linkages to ease disparities. Many interventions have focused on promoting increased trade of tools needed for agriculture production and better flow of consumer goods demanded by rural households.³² Likewise, linking rural food production and urban consumers can help ensure food security, as can assisting people in the peri-urban context to find sustainable livelihoods.³³ In the same way in which agriculture is being increasingly promoted in urban areas, rural non-agricultural industrialization is starting to be promoted in a number of countries, as well. Examples include the strategy adopted for the promotion of Town and Village Enterprises (TVEs) in China. TVEs expanded rapidly in China in the post-reform period. As a result of the promotion of TVEs between 1978 and 2000, the number of workers in the rural non-farm sector grew by 27 per cent per year, while the rural labour force recorded an annual increase of 2.6 per cent.³⁴

Trade and commodities

In economic terms, planned interventions aimed at promoting reciprocal rural-urban linkages tend to distinguish among consumption linkages (demand for final products), production linkages ("backward" or "forward" supply of inputs among producers), and financial linkages (e.g., rents extracted by urban landlords, remittances by migrants, rural savings channelled through urban institutions).³⁵ Interventions are increasingly emphasising the development of both formal and informal cooperative and contractual systems aimed at improving rural producers' access to urban markets. They aid production and consumption linkages through programmes that support rural agro-industry and income-generating activities, such as the Cooperative Programme for the Development of Rural Agro Industry (PRODAR). PRODAR links a variety of institutions concerned with promoting the potential of rural agro industry in Latin America and the Caribbean, providing support from production to broker.³⁶ In Ethiopia, "milk groups" – established with the help of

the government and the Finnish International Development Association – provide an alternative market and connect smallholders to the formal milk market.³⁷

Natural resources and wastes

From an environmental perspective, the rural-urban interface confronts two sets of challenges, and the articulation between them is crucial to the design of strategic interventions that benefit the poor and enhance the reciprocal sustainable development of both rural and urban areas.

The first group of challenges relates to the environmental conditions of the rural-urban interface as a support system for low-income people in developing countries, who face health and life risks and physical hazards related to the occupation of inappropriate sites, lack of access to basic water and sanitation, and poor housing conditions. They also face environmental changes that impact their livelihood strategies, decreasing or increasing their access to different types of capital assets. The second group of challenges is linked to the sustainability of regional patterns of renewable and non-renewable resource extraction and to minimizing transfer of environmental costs from rural and urban systems to the interface between both. The rural-urban interface is subject to many competing interests, often without adequate institutions to strike balances that ameliorate poverty, protect the environment, maximize the productivity of human and natural resources, or draw synergy from urban and rural relationships. Both sets of challenges are interconnected, and the principles and goals laid out in the UNCED Agenda 21 (1992) and the Habitat Agenda (1996) stress the need to address them as such. Environmental degradation in the rural-urban interface cannot be considered in isolation from the processes taking place in a wider region. Environmental problems affecting the quality of life of the poorest communities demand urgent attention, but these issues cannot be disassociated from the long-term problems affecting the sustainability of the natural resource base. This ultimately demands broadening the focus of planned interventions beyond localized environmental problems to a consideration of the sustainability of the urban bioregion.

More sustainable forms of urbanization therefore require a more coherent approach to the rural-urban interface. Successful approaches tend to work through the concept of the urban region, where the comparative advantages of cities and their adjacent peri-urban and rural jurisdictions are combined to promote a more balanced use of natural resources such as land, water and energy, and to support mutually reinforcing social and economic development initiatives. Many approaches are emerging that seek to create sustainable linkages between rural and urban areas.³⁸ One example is Nakuru, a rapidly growing city in Kenya's Rift Valley, where proposals for future growth through a Localizing Agenda 21 exercise have been closely tied to resources such as water and a national park in the city's hinterland. This initiative combines the use of Strategic Structure Plans with Urban Pacts, creating a process of vision, action and communication.³⁹

A new kind of policy for harmonious regional development

There is now a considerable and expanding body of evidence supporting the notion that rural-urban interactions can result in harmonious regional development outcomes. However, unless carefully managed, rural-urban linkages can also increase the vulnerability of the urban and rural poor. The increasing interdependency of urban and rural systems is not only spawning new forms of urbanization but also new rural-urban coping strategies to avoid poverty and to reduce poor communities' vulnerability to socio-economic,

environmental and political shocks and stress.⁴⁰ Rural-urban interactions therefore demand serious consideration both in terms of the likely impacts of existing policies focused on either urban or rural areas and in terms of future planned interventions that take the dynamics of these interactions into account, seeking to adapt to shifting economic, political, environmental and social conditions and transcending conventional geographic categorizations.

TABLE 4.4.1: POVERTY AND THE RURAL-URBAN CONTINUUM

RURAL >>	RURAL-URBAN INTERDEPENDENCIES	<< URBAN
<p>Livelihoods drawn from crop cultivation, livestock, forestry or fishing (i.e. key for livelihood is access to natural capital)</p> <p>Access to land for housing and building materials not generally a problem</p> <p>More distant from government as regulator and provider of services</p> <p>Access to infrastructure and services limited (largely because of distance, low density and limited capacity to pay?)</p> <p>Fewer opportunities for earning cash; more for self-provisioning. Greater reliance on favourable weather conditions.</p> <p>Access to natural capital as the key asset and basis for livelihood</p>	<p><< Funding flows (remittances) from urban migrants for rural development.</p> <p>>> Rural-urban food transfers, rural support in bringing up urban dwellers' children</p> <p><< Accommodation and support for family or fellow villagers who come to urban areas to study or seek employment</p> <p>>> Cheaper accommodation for low-income urban workers in nearby rural areas</p> <p><< Access to different branches of government and public services</p> <p>>> Access to customary institutions</p> <p><< Stimulus for more diversified livelihood options</p> <p>>> Rural markets for urban dwellers who derive an income from selling goods and services</p> <p><< Information about urban opportunities and alternative/ additional income sources to potential migrants and commuters.</p> <p>>> Seasonal employment for urban dwellers in agriculture or rural development projects or on collecting or purchasing resources from nearby rural areas</p> <p>>> Support to protect the assets of urban dwellers retaining land and livestock in rural areas</p> <p><< Urban refuge for some of the poorest rural dwellers whose livelihoods were destroyed by development projects, wars, oppression or disasters</p> <p>>> Rural refuge for poor urban dwellers in times of economic and political hardship</p>	<p>Livelihoods drawn from labour markets within non-agricultural production or making/selling goods or services</p> <p>Access to land for housing very difficult; housing and land markets highly commercialized</p> <p>More vulnerable to 'bad' governance</p> <p>Access to infrastructure and services difficult for low-income groups because of high prices, illegal nature of their homes (for many) and poor governance</p> <p>Greater reliance on cash for access to food, water, sanitation, employment, garbage disposal, etc.</p> <p>Greater reliance on house as an economic resource (space for production, access to income-earning opportunities; asset and income-earner for owners – including de facto owners)</p>
<p>Urban characteristics in rural locations, including: prosperous tourist areas, mining areas, areas with high value crops and many local multiplier links, rural areas with diverse non-agricultural production and strong links to cities.</p>	<p>Many of these interdependencies tend to intensify in emerging landscapes such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peri-urban (PU) areas • Clusters and networks of villages and small and medium size towns and cities • Ruralopolises • Extended metropolitan regions 	<p>Rural characteristics in urban locations (urban agriculture, 'village' enclaves, access to land for housing through non-monetary traditional forms, etc.)</p>

Source: Analysis based on Satterthwaite, 2000.

Achieving Spatially Balanced Human Settlements in Cuba

In the 1950s, Cuba's capital city, Havana, was home to 21 per cent of the population as a whole and 40 per cent of the country's urban population. It also accounted for 70 per cent of the country's industrial activity not related to sugar, 90 per cent of imports, 55 per cent of the construction industry, 61 per cent of hospital beds, 63 per cent of doctors, 80 per cent of university graduates and most of the country's tourism capacity. The concentration of productive activities and services in Havana encouraged migration to the capital, which absorbed more than half of all rural-urban migrants in the country.

Havana's advanced development stood in stark contrast to conditions in the rest of the country. While the western areas around Havana were densely settled and developed with improved infrastructure and communications systems, Cuba's eastern areas were sparsely populated and dedicated to agricultural activities, and people in its mountain communities lived at subsistence levels. The disparities among Cuba's residents prompted the government to institute a new political and administrative structure in 1976 that prioritized decentralization and the development of provincial centres. Since then, Havana's share of employment in the country's industrial and service sectors has diminished as provincial capitals and smaller urban and rural settlements have gained the capacity to absorb the country's growth and provide attractive opportunities for residents. While Havana maintains its political and administrative primacy, the city now plays a less dominant role as a population centre and the migratory pressure on it is negligible.

Owing to the Cuban government's social policies, human settlements in the country have developed over time into a spatially balanced network: 593 urban settlements are home to more than 8.5 million (76 per cent) of Cuba's inhabitants; another 2.7 million people live in some 6,500 rural settlements, and only 835,000 (7 per cent) live outside such structures. Twelve provincial capitals are home to a significant proportion of industrial enterprises and account for a high percentage of employment in the administrative and service sectors. These cities are able to provide top-quality services and act as development centres for their respective regions. Another 142 administrative centres of various sizes cover a territory of about 670 square kilometres and act as intermediate service centres. Smaller urban and rural settlements that have no political or administrative functions have acquired the necessary infrastructure to provide basic ser-



▲ Havana, Cuba
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vices in the fields of education, health, culture, and sport, and are reasonably well connected to higher-level centres.

Cuba's network of cities, towns, villages, and hamlets of various sizes cover most of the country, enabling significant integration of urban and rural settlements. The diversification of livelihoods is an indicator of the parity urban and rural settlements have reached, and the interdependence of their residents: 46 per cent of agricultural workers live in urban settlements, while 30 per cent of workers based in rural settlements or scattered throughout the countryside are engaged in non-agricultural activities. The country's diverse network of settlements has also enabled the efficient distribution of facilities for the provision of social services, leading to a significant improvement in the quality of life and higher and more consistent levels of health, education, and access to drinking water and sanitation around the country.

Key to Cuba's development of a spatially balanced and harmonious network of human settlements has been the decentralization of economic leadership and the provision of essential infrastructure and services to both provincial centres and rural agricultural communities. At the same time that

the government invested in industrial development programmes and high levels of services in major administrative centres, it also developed the agricultural sector and encouraged the rural population to form compact settlements, so that even the smallest communities could be provided with infrastructure for electricity, drinking water, connecting roads, and basic facilities for education, health, culture, and sport.

As is the case with all practical systems, the Cuban approach has its limitations and drawbacks. Development levels in the eastern provinces are still lower than those in the west, indicating a need for more emphasis on local economic development in eastern cities and towns, and more decentralized planning and urban management that encourages sustainable, strategic and participatory approaches. Overall, Cuba's experience shows that, to achieve a more balanced development of human settlements, political will to move the process forward is of primary importance. It is also essential to implement policies with an emphasis on sustainable development, taking into account the economic, social and environmental factors in different areas, the interrelationships between them, and the wants and needs of citizens.

The European Spatial Development Perspective

European Structural Funds have been instrumental in helping European Union (EU) countries meet their economic and physical development targets, but disparities in development and quality of life persist in the region. Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of several of the emerging-market countries that have joined the EU since 2004 – including Poland, Latvia, Bulgaria, and Romania – remains less than half the European average. Structural Funds aim to reduce such regional imbalances and promote social and territorial cohesion.

One of the EU's Structural Funds, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), is supporting the development of spatial planning and policy-making focused on fostering a harmonious polycentric urban system, enhanced accessibility to infrastructure and knowledge, a new relationship between urban and rural areas, sustainable development, conservation of the environment, and the protection of cultural heri-

tage around the continent. Realizing this new approach to planning and development is the objective of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), a voluntary, pro-active shared scheme that aims to reframe planning and policy-making ideas throughout Europe. It addresses the functional integration of cities, and cities, regions and rural areas to increase competitiveness and socio-economic cohesion. Through ESDP, the EU aims to promote local, regional and interregional networking, cooperation and exchange of experiences that can help reduce inequality within European regions and cities – an issue of particular importance for the new member countries in which cities are not yet strong engines of growth, innovation and development.

A polycentric urban system – with sustainable and competitive “regional cities” – requires a well-balanced spatial structure at all levels, as well as the acknowledgment of social and cul-

tural differences. The approach is working well in several European city-regions, including the Belfast-Londonderry region in Northern Ireland. Belfast has been hailed as a leader in regional planning with the successful implementation of its Northern Ireland Regional Development Strategy, known as *Shaping Our Future*. The strategy was adopted in 2001 to develop regional planning that recognizes the diversity of Northern Ireland's people and places; achieves a more cohesive society based on equal opportunity, spatial equity, sensitivity to the city's divided community, a more sustainable approach to transport, and an outward-looking perspective; and makes the region more competitive. Since its implementation, *Shaping Our Future* has stimulated strategic planning in Belfast-Londonderry and provided a proactive framework for local communities to work together. Such efforts, with the guidance of the ESDP, illustrate the importance of a spatial perspective for harmonious regional development.

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NOTES

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