



Cities and their rural surroundings. The urban- rural interface

Media brief

- Every year, 19.5 million hectares of agricultural land is converted to spreading urban centres and industrial developments.
- In the urban-rural interface, many actors compete for the available water resources.

Main challenges

- Cities can no longer be treated as distinct spaces unconnected to the regions surrounding them. The functioning of urban settlements depends on land in the surrounding rural areas for food and water supply, waste disposal, recreational value and the growth of settlements. In order to sustain both urban and rural livelihoods and ecosystems, there is a need for the sustainable management of the resources requirements of urban and peri-urban areas.
- Sustainable forms of urbanisation require a coherent approach to the rural-urban interface. This interface is a highly dynamic and complex system of land use, constituted by a singular mosaic of ecosystems. On many city borders, peri-urban and urban agriculture, industry and transport compete for water resources. Furthermore, the rural-urban interface can become the “backyard” for urban waste disposal, imposing severe impacts on the health of ecosystems and human populations.
- In 2000, the UN Commission on Sustainable Development urged governments at national and local levels and the international community to *“take a strategic land management approach aimed at promoting interaction between urban and rural areas.”*
- Rural-urban linkages can increase the vulnerability of the urban and rural poor. However, the recognition of rural-urban systems and the interdependencies of populations living and working in both areas create new prospects for poverty alleviation in many regions in the developing world. When carefully managed, rural-urban interactions can result in harmonious regional development outcomes.

Cities’ approaches

- Promoting positive two-way interactions and reciprocal relations between rural and urban areas.
- Focus on 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 water and energy.
- Recycling urban wastewater for rural agriculture, after ensuring that its quality is suitable for crops and human health.
- 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.



Cities

Alexandria, Egypt (4 million inhabitants, population increases to 6 million in the summer)

- **Main challenges**

- **Urban encroachment** on agriculture land.
- **Migration** of population from informal rural settlements to urban areas.
- Sense of **inequity** in service provision in rural areas and water theft from water conveyance systems.
- **Competition** from urban sector on freshwater for domestic use of water currently used for agriculture

- **Focus and objectives**

- Social inclusion.
- Reuse of treated wastewater to relieve conflict between domestic and agriculture uses.
- Explore alternative resources to reduce competition on scarce resources.

- **Activities**

- Develop a 2030 Integrated Urban Water Management Strategic Plan for the City of Alexandria.
- Reuse of treated generated from urban areas in existing agriculture areas and potential agriculture expansions in rural areas
- Use of desalinated sea water in remote coastal areas to avoid water theft from conveyance systems crossing rural areas and to provide decentralized water supply systems
- Upgrade of water and sanitation systems in rural areas and informal settlements
- Improved and expedited urban development and expansion plans in uninhabited areas to provide new housing and to prevent urban encroachment on agriculture lands in rural areas.

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