

UN HABITAT

FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

United Nations Human Settlements Programme

Programme des Nations Unies pour les établissements humains - Programa de las Naciones Unidas para los Asentamientos Humanos

**THERE IS
NO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
WITHOUT SUSTAINABLE URBANISATION**

**17th Session of the
Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-17)
High-Level Segment**

**Statement by
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New York, 13 May 2009

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Distinguished Delegates

It is my great pleasure to be with you all today to discuss the critical issue of responding to the food crisis through sustainable development.

Some of you may be wondering what the Head of the United Nations agency for cities has to say on the issue of food security. I will show you that **cities are fundamental to the food security issue** and that without putting them into the equation we will not solve the food security problem.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For UN-HABITAT, our departure point is the recognition that there can be **no sustainable development without sustainable urbanization**. The world is becoming increasingly urban and this trend is irreversible.

While 50 percent of the world's population currently lives in cities, this number is expected to grow to 70 percent by 2050. Even Africa – the least urbanized of all the regions – is undergoing a process of rapid urbanization. While some 35 percent of Africans live in cities now, the number will increase to 50 percent by 2019 and will reach 60 percent by 2050.

The process of urbanization brings with it both challenges and opportunities. The **food crisis is both a challenge and an opportunity**.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Particularly in Africa, we are witnessing the **urbanization of poverty**. Because of weak purchasing power, the **urban poor** cannot get all their food through the market place, and many therefore continue to **grow their own food**, both in small patches **within the city** and in peri-urban areas. This urban farming, although tolerated, is not officially recognized. It fulfils the same function as many other parts of the informal economy in that it provides an affordable product. But it also shares many of the shortcomings of the informal sector – especially in terms of quality assurance. And much like the rest of the informal economy, **urban agriculture in Africa needs to be encouraged** and supported as an important variable in the affordability equation and as an element of any food security strategy.

The urban rural continuum

Another important aspect of planning for food security is the need for policy makers to realize that **urban and rural areas are inseparable**. Apart from contributing directly to agricultural production through know how, technology and inputs, **cities and small towns constitute the marketplace for rural production**. A big mistake that all of us have been guilty of in many parts of the developing world, and especially in Africa, has been to view cities and rural areas as separate entities. We need to stop thinking along the lines of urban and rural divides or biases, and begin to **think of a production-consumption chain or continuum**.

The reality of urbanization is evident in the present food crisis threatening to fuel chaotic political change. More and more we are seeing the **globalization of food consumption** with food imports from one region or country to another being critical – particularly for Africa, as

well as **countries and companies buying up land in other countries** to support their own food security.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This food crisis is linked very closely to other factors such as climate change, rapid urbanization, an increased competition for water and natural resources and the dissociation between the **brown and green agendas which need to be merged for environmental sustainability**. An underlying aspect of all these crises is **land, how it is distributed, managed and used** and how the ever **increasing conflicts over land** are managed.

Land governance

I fully realize that having a fully integrated urban and rural development strategy is not something we can achieve overnight. But there is a critical starting point and that point is land governance. While land is finite, it is overlaid by a complicated web of rights and responsibilities, uses and users and - perhaps most importantly - of interests and stakeholders. **Reconciling these competing objectives makes land a critical governance** issue and UN-HABITAT is currently finalizing a joint publication with FAO in this area.

What do we mean by land governance?

Land governance concerns the rules, processes and structures through which decisions are made about access to and use of land, the manner in which the decisions are implemented and enforced, and most importantly, **the way that competing interests in land are managed**.

Fundamentally, **land governance is about power and the political economy of land:**

Who has access, who does not? Whose rights are secure, whose are not? Who participates in decision making? How are conflicting interests resolved? How are agreements enforced? Who gets to use the land and who gets the revenue streams from its use? And what is the role of cities in driving the agricultural production and distribution systems?

Ladies and Gentlemen

What can be done to improve the quality of land governance?

It requires a bridging of the gap between the so-called informal and formal institutions. It means **forging new partnerships** between Government and grassroots, private and professional sectors. It requires improved coordination between development partners, be they donors or investors. And, finally, it requires significant **institutional reform** and behaviour change.

I would like to highlight a few specific measures:

First, **promote the recognition of a range of land rights**. We need to move beyond a narrow focus on titling as the silver bullet for development. There is an almost universal consensus that security of tenure can deliver many of the benefits of titling, but without the

costs in terms of, for example, gentrification and unaffordable and unsustainable land registration systems. Recognition of customary land rights and **intermediate forms of tenure** is increasing, but needs to be strengthened. New tools are required to record these forms of land rights at scale. UN-HABITAT, through the Global Land Tool Network, is collaborating with the International Federation of Surveyors and the ITC to develop and pilot the Social Tenure Domain Model, an information system that will allow for land records for pastoral rights, secondary rights and the over-lapping rights often resulting from rapid and unplanned urbanisation.

Second, **strengthen women's land and property rights**. Despite being 50 percent of the population, only some **2 percent of land is registered in the names of women**. Violent conflict, the HIV/Aids pandemic and paternalistic social norms prevent women from enjoying equal rights to land and property. Joint registration, information campaigns, legal support and education are required to strengthen women's land rights. UN-HABITAT, working with the Huairou Commission and other partners has identified key elements which form part of successful gender responsive land systems.

Third, promote a **more holistic view of urban and rural**. For many years there has been an artificial divide and debate between rural and urban issues. There is a growing appreciation that the two are connected in a larger system characterized by the dynamic flow of information, finances, resources and, people. Public policies related to investments in infrastructure, measures to promote social inclusion and strategies to promote economic growth need to take this reality into account.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In closing, I would like to reaffirm UN-HABITAT is committed to the sustainable development agenda and to the CSD process. We are pleased with the progress that has been made thus far, particularly in closing the conceptual gap between rural and urban, as well as recognizing the important land-related challenges faced by Africa.

In response to increased urbanization, population growth and migration pressures, I can report that sustainable urban development, particularly as it is related to land and housing, is at the core of our Medium Term Strategic and Institutional Plan for 2008-2013. This means that, within its mandate, UN-HABITAT will continue to work with member States and its partners to support sustainable development endeavors.

I thank you for your kind attention.