BALANCING URBAN AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT – CHINA’S CHONGQING METROPOLITAN REGION

The Chongqing development plan demonstrates how the right kind of balance between urban and rural areas, and between a metropolitan area and small towns, can be achieved. Chongqing in 1997 became China’s fourth centrally administered municipality after Beijing, Shanghai and Tianjin and has become the largest urban region in China with a population of 31 million spread over a land area of 82,000 square kilometres. The region includes 40 county-level administrative divisions. Of these, nine districts form the core of the Chongqing metropolitan region with 5.5 million people. The largely rural remaining area is host to 75 per cent of the municipal population.

In a bid to become a communication hub and a gateway to the western region under the development plan, Chongqing is establishing itself as a modern production base as well as a business and trade centre and a ‘knowledge hub’. The basic pattern, known as “One Circle and Two Wings”, radiates around the “One-Hour Economic Circle” which takes in the ‘core urban’ areas that can be reached within one hour by bus from the city centre and are expected to attract services and manufacturing; the ‘two wings’ refer to the elongated territories stretching out to the north-east and south-east, which are to reap the spillover effects. The region as a whole is to become an engine of growth in the upper Yangtze River valley. The scheme is designed to narrow the gap between urban and rural areas, enhancing agricultural productivity and upgrading grain production capabilities, on top of improved infrastructures, healthcare and education, including water conservation facilities, road construction, use of clean fuels and rural power grids.

The Chinese government’s US $20 billion plan for the Chongqing municipal region is one of the most ambitious of all those aimed at balancing rural and urban development. The attendant massive infrastructure development has already begun to transform local state-owned enterprises and attract fresh capital into the manufacturing and services sectors.

State of Asian Cities Report 2010/11, Ch. 3, Box 3.7