

**Side Event at
2016 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
New York, Ministerial Segment**

Integrated Regional Development Approach for Building Inclusive and Resilient Societies

**20 July 2016
1:15 p.m. – 2:30 p.m., Conference Room B**

Summary

United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD), United Nations Department Programme (UNDP), United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) and International Recovery Platform (IRP) co-organized a side event, entitled ***Integrated Regional Development Approach for Building Inclusive and Resilient Societies*** at the 2016 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development on 20 July 2016 from 1:15 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. in the Conference Room B in the Conference Building, United Nations Headquarters in New York. The theme of the 2016 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) was “Ensuring that no one is left behind”.

In opening the side event, Mr. Noboru Sekiguchi, Minister, Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations, emphasized the importance of promoting disaster risk reduction. Noting the need to incorporate all phases of disaster risk reduction, which are disaster preparedness, emergency response, recovery and reconstruction, he emphasized that reconstruction phase was the best opportunity to make the cities more resilient. In his opening remarks, Mr. Marcos Bonturi, Director of the Global Relations Secretariat, OECD, pointed out the need to take coordinated action at multiple levels of government in order to achieve SDGs. Noting the long experience of OECD in working on regional development, he introduced that OECD has developed regional database, which would contribute in localizing SDGs. Agreeing with Mr. Sekiguchi, he noted the importance of holistically addressing risk reduction, risk transfer and ex-post response. In his statement delivered by Ms. Chikako Takase, Director of United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD), Mr. Juwang Zhu, Director of the Division for Sustainable Development, UN DESA pointed out the importance of integrating pre-disaster recovery plans in the development plans. He noted that UNDP would represent the International Recovery Platform (IRP), which is a coalition of UN system and other organizations working towards Building-Back-Better, which was part of the basis of the side event. He also introduced the collaborative efforts on promoting urban-rural linkages among UNCRD, UN-Habitat and other organizations, aiming to contribute to Habitat III, which also formed as the basis of the side event. He also welcomed the presentation of Bhutan on pre-feasibility study for integrating mass transit options in the 11th Five-Year Plan (2013-2018) as a good example of country efforts in addressing SDGs.

After making a brief introduction of the side event and Integrated Regional Development Planning (IRDP), a planning approach that UNCRD has been promoting, Ms. Takase handed the floor over to the first speaker, Mr. Krishna Vatsa. Representing UNDP and IRP, Mr. Krishna Vatsa presented on the importance of Building Back Better in a wake of disasters and for it, the need for pre-disaster recovery planning. More successful and effective recovery in a country is a reflection of good governance. It also requires effective institutional arrangement, coordination capacity, preparedness for recovery and dedicated

financial mechanism. On behalf of the International Recovery Platform (IRP), he introduced IRP that it was established in 2005 to help address a huge knowledge gaps in recovery as well as the constraints experienced in the context of post-disaster recovery. After a decade of operation, IRP has embarked on a more specialized role as an “international mechanism for sharing experience and lessons associated with build-back-better” in support to the implementation of the Sendai Framework.

Mr. Thomas Forster, Fellow, EcoAgriculture Partners and Faculty of New School Food Studies presented on “Enhancing city region food systems through strengthening rural-urban Linkages (URL)”. Describing the international policy debate, he explained that there has been increasing support for the concept of integrated territorial development (ITD) and food systems in the global policy debates on New Urban Agenda in the process towards HABITAT III. In particular, he highlighted the concept of city region food systems, which aims for sustainable and resilient food security and nutrition systems for all scales of human settlements linking urban and rural areas.

In her presentation, Ms. Yamina Djacta, Director, UN-Habitat New York Office focused on the role of small and intermediate towns in enhancing urban-rural linkages. Small and intermediate towns are important because they are more accessible to rural populations and act as a bridge between rural populations and large cities. However they are struggling to manage urbanization, attract investment and meet the demand for housing, land, infrastructure and basic services. If equipped with adequate infrastructure and amenities, small and intermediate towns can attract populations to them, being in a better position to offer land, housing and labour at a fraction of what they would cost in a big city. She also noted their role in enabling resilience, by reintegrating, adapting Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), especially the vulnerable groups since they have agricultural and non-farm activities, as well as offering stronger social networks. In concluding, she noted that infrastructure is key and road networks are a prerequisite in ensuring their vibrancy.

As one example of country efforts, Mr. Gyaltsen Penjor, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Bhutan to the United Nations, presented on “Bhutan’s plan for integrating mass transit options in the 11th Five-Year Plan (2013-2018)”. UNCRD recently conducted a pre-feasibility scoping exercise of the plan. Mr. Penjor started by presenting the current situation of Bhutan, which is going through rapid transition with its economy rapidly emerging. The country is experiencing rapid urbanization. It is conducting proactive planning with focus on SDGs 9 and 11 with strong commitment for the protection of environment. He noted that Bhutan considers safe, efficient and environment friendly transport system is the backbone of the urban structural plans. Accordingly, their “Transport 2040: Integrated Strategic Vision for Bhutan’s Transport System” is ambitious and presents current and emerging challenges and opportunities. The current challenges include rapid motorization with the transport sector accounting for 44 % of CO₂ emission and difficult, mountainous terrain. Building a mass rail-based transit system is one such option for Environmentally Sustainable Transport (EST) presented in Transport 2040. The recent UNCRD preliminary scoping study showed that “Development of an integrated railways system could form the core of Bhutan’s transportation system”. Noting the need for financial and technical assistance, he highlighted SDG 17 on partnership to achieve Transport 2040.

A comment was made by an audience that disaster risk relief should start with understanding where the increasing disaster risks come from and that what the panellists all talked about

was counter-disaster response. She observed that most of the current practice sees to let the disaster situation develop until ultimately we would not be able to respond to.

To this, panellists pointed out the importance of planning first and that being prepared better, it would let us respond better. In addition, Ms. Djacta noted that while we would try to prevent disasters as much as possible, we would also try to be able to recover quickly when disaster happens, pointing out that it is also part of being resilient. Being resilient is not just preventing, but also being able to recover quickly. The panellists were in agreement that even though there are so many challenges, there is an awareness of inter-dependency, interlinkages and the complexity, and that they have to be addressed in an integrated and more comprehensive manner.

On another point about people moving into cities, Ms. Djacta agreed that now people are pushed out from the villages because they are looking for jobs and better opportunities. She noted, however, that the key idea is to look at all kinds of human settlements, and see how they can complement and support one another. The panellists agreed that although the trend could not be prevented, it would be possible to help cities better prepared and planned, including to guide people not to settle only in megacities, but also in intermediate and small cities, which are also important for sustainability.