

Opening speech of the **Networking Session Cultivating Sustainable Cities** (RUAF Foundation – IDRC) at World Urban Forum III, Thursday 23 June, 13.30 hours, MR 08 Conference Centre, Vancouver.

After consultation with and also on behalf on **Ms Sybilla Dekker, Minister of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment of the Netherlands**

Dear Ladies and Gentleman

#### *Introduction*

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to this networking session on Multi-actor Policy making and Action planning for Urban Agriculture jointly organised by the RUAF Foundation (the Netherlands) and IDRC (Canada). I am very pleased that Canada and The Netherlands are collaborating on this important issue and look forward to the exchange of experiences during this event.

#### *Dutch experiences*

My country the Netherlands is densely populated with over 16 million people living in an area of about 41,000 square km (a size comparable with Switzerland, Costa Rica or Taiwan). Most of the rural areas are within short range of a city or town and might be called peri-urban rather than rural areas.

Consequently, the Dutch government is adopting a spatial planning approach that promotes the **multi-functional use** of the scarce open spaces and seeks to achieve an **optimal balance** between various uses, such as agricultural production, recreation, and the conservation of landscapes with their ecological and historic-cultural values, water storage and infrastructure.

Since long, the Dutch policy seeks to prevent the spread of cities over the rural areas and promotes the development of **network cities** that include various compact cities as well as large multi-functional open green spaces.

#### *Multi-stakeholder planning*

Ladies and Gentlemen, in the Netherlands we prefer a decentralised and **multi-actor approach** to regional spatial planning, involving different levels of government, civic society organisations and the private sector in the planning process.

The functions of the rural areas are rapidly changing and related problems are complex and can only be solved if various government sectors engage with civic society and private sector partners in a **joint learning process** to develop an optimal balance between the various land uses.

In various regions of the Netherlands, provincial and local governments together with local key actors are formulating a joint vision on the **optimal future land use** of their region and define effective strategies to realise this vision.

In this process the **Municipal authorities** play an important role. We have come to learn in the past years that spatial planning should be **development oriented and participatory**. My Ministry promotes a proactive approach that engages local organisations and leads to **revitalisation and innovation** in the rural areas. We have abolished blue print plans made by technocrats since without **social acceptance**, created through active participation of the local actors in the planning process, such plans will have little impact.

### *Urban – Agriculture*

The inclusion of **multi-functional agriculture as an integral part of a network of smaller cities** has a range of advantages since it creates possibilities for synergy and symbiosis.

Under this approach:

- Farmers are recognised stewards of the peri-urban landscape and foster biodiversity
- Farmers offer recreational services to urban citizens and farms can serve as educational centres or as a place to recover for people with psychological problems
- Farms can efficiently recycle resources by warming their greenhouses with excess heat from residential heating systems and using organic wastes from households and agro-industry as animal feed or compost
- Agricultural areas act as buffer zones between the various residential and industrial areas of the network city or as areas where the effluent of municipal wastewater plants gets its final cleaning or where excess storm water can be stored
- Agriculture enables urban greening and helps regulate the urban climate

Both my Ministry and the Ministry of Agriculture are **funding various innovative programmes** to further explore and develop these potentials and we are taking measures to **remove unnecessary legal or other barriers** that hamper the realization of integrated and action oriented planning of multi-functional green open spaces.

### *Developing countries*

The **urbanization** in most developing countries is progressing at alarming rates. With the growth of the urban population being about 3 times faster than that of the rural areas, many cities in the South have difficulties to create sufficient formal employment opportunities and provide basic services for their residents. As a consequence **urban poverty and food insecurity are** on the rise.

Various studies and projects indicate that the **legitimisation and official support of urban and peri-agriculture** contributes to poverty reduction by enhancing access of the urban poor to fresh and nutritious food at affordable prices, generating additional income and stimulating micro-enterprise development.

In that perspective, the Dutch Government is supporting initiatives of international organisations regarding agriculture in and around cities, like the **Urban Management Programme** of UNDP-UN Habitat (that assisted various municipalities in Latin America to develop policies and projects on urban agriculture) and by funding bilateral and NGO projects. An example of the latter is the **Cities Farming for the Future** programme of the **RUAF Foundation** that will present some of its experiences today in this session.

### *Conclusion*

Ladies and gentlemen,

I started my speech by explaining that Holland is a small country. Maybe this is the reason that we have come to value **international partnerships** so highly. I sincerely hope and expect that this networking session will contribute to more international exchange of experiences and cooperation in the field of sustainable urban development including multi-functional agriculture as one its essential elements.

Thank you.