

Myanmar and UN agriculture agency agree framework to improve nutrition and food security

The Myanmar Government and the UN's agriculture agency signed on Tuesday a multi-year agreement that will create conditions to help improve nutrition and food security in the south-east Asian country, while safeguarding and sustainably managing the use of natural resources.

"The [agriculture sector has a major role to play](#) in addressing [the] sustained rates of food insecurity and malnutrition through agricultural diversification and rural income generation," Kundhavi Kadiresan, Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific of the UN [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) (FAO), said at the launch of the accord in Nay Pyi Taw.

The Country Programming Framework (CPF) was signed by U Than Aung Kyaw, Director General, Foreign Economic Relations Department (FERD), Ministry of Investment and Foreign Economic Relations (MIFER) and Ms Xiaojie Fan, FAO Representative in Myanmar.

The launch of the CPF follows intensive consultations and agreements with the Ministry of Planning and Finance and relevant line ministries, civil society organizations (CSOs), the private sector and other development partners.

Specifically, the CPF intends to help the Government achieve three primary goals.

Enhanced food security, nutrition and food safety

Strengthened governance and sustainable management of land, forests, water resources and ecosystems

Enhanced resilience of local communities and farming households to natural and humanitarian disasters, climate change and transboundary and emerging infectious disease risks.

Despite having reached a state of self-sufficiency in staple foods, food insecurity, particularly seasonal food insecurity, remain a concern across Myanmar, which risks being worsened due to climate and weather-related shocks and instances of social instability.

Myanmar had experienced a rapid decline in malnutrition figures in just a few decades. The prevalence of stunting among children below the age of five was reduced from around 40 per cent in the 1990's to less than 30 per cent in 2016 but the improvements have since slowed.

"With nearly one child in three stunted much work remains to be done for

Myanmar to achieve SDG-2, the Sustainable Development Goal of Zero Hunger by 2030,” said Ms. Kadiresan. “But the fact that the Government and FAO have produced and published this comprehensive framework sets us on a clear path forward.”

“FAO is ready to do its part to help,” she added.

[UN rights chief ‘alarmed’ by upsurge in attacks against civilians in Syria’s Idlib](#)

Civilians in Syria’s north-western city of idlib continue to be used “as pawns”, caught in the crossfire of bombardments by the Government and its allies, and attacks by non-State armed groups, the United Nations human rights chief, Michelle Bachelet, warned on Tuesday.

Since December, the intensified ground-based bombardment of the city, located in the north-west of the country, coupled with a series of attacks by non-State actors, has led to numerous civilian casualties and left close to a million people, including hundreds of thousands of displaced people, in an extremely vulnerable situation, her [statement](#) explained.

“Large numbers of civilians, including hundreds of thousands of displaced people, in Idlib and northern Aleppo are living an intolerable existence,” said Ms. Bachelet.

“They are trapped between the escalation of hostilities and bombardment on the one hand, and, on the other, are forced to live under the extremist rule of Hay’at Tahrir Al-Sham and other extremist fighters who regularly carry out targeted killings, abductions and arbitrary detention.”

The High Commissioner called on “all parties involved, as well as external governments with influence, to ensure that the protection of civilians is held paramount in the planning and execution of all military operations in accordance with international law”.

Idlib and areas of northern Hama and western Aleppo governorates, are part of a “demilitarized buffer zone” but, for over two months, violence has escalated again, including an increase of infighting amongst non-State actors and in the use of improvised explosive devices in areas they control, including by the extremist group, Hay’at Tahrir Al-Sham.

While the UN human rights office ([OHCHR](#)) notes that a comprehensive count of civilian casualties has not been possible, some of the most recent incidents

include: 11 civilians killed and nine injured on 29 January following a ground-based bombardment in a residential and market area; 11 civilians killed by shelling in different areas on 12 February; at least nine killed and nine injured on 15 and 16 February in Khan Shaykun in southern Idlib; 16 civilians killed and more than 70 injured on Monday by two explosive devices in the Qusour neighbourhood of Idlib.

The list of fatalities includes a high number of women and children.

“I urge all the parties involved to, first and foremost, ensure that civilians themselves, and civilian infrastructure, are protected as required by international humanitarian and international human rights law,” the High Commissioner said.

“The principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution must be fully respected, and military objects must not be placed in the vicinity of civilians,” she added.

Ms. Bachelet also expressed concern about the well-being of some 20,000 people who fled ISIL-controlled areas in eastern Deir-ez-Zor Governorate in recent weeks and are now being held in makeshift camps for displaced persons run by Kurdish armed groups.

According to OHCHR, these include the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), who are reported to be preventing IDPs from leaving the camps in what appears to amount to deprivation of liberty.

She added she remains “particularly concerned” about the situation of some 200 families, including many women and children, who are reportedly trapped in the tiny area still under the control of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and are apparently being actively prevented from leaving by ISIL.

The UN rights chief said they “continue to be subjected to intensified air and ground-based strikes by the US-led coalition forces and their SDF allies on the ground”.

“Civilians continue to be used as pawns by the various parties,” Ms. Bachelet lamented, calling on responsible parties “to provide safe passage to those who wish to flee, while those who wish to remain must also be protected as much as possible”.

“They should not be sacrificed to ideology on the one hand, or military expediency on the other. If protecting civilian lives means taking a few more days to capture the last fraction of land controlled by ISIL, then so be it,” she stated.

Central African Republic: UNICEF outlines key actions so fresh peace deal can make real difference for children

Hailing the [recent peace agreement](#) signed by 15 warring parties in the Central African Republic (CAR), the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) stressed on Monday that "now is the time for action" and outlined concrete steps that armed groups, judicial authorities and the Government can take so the future of millions of children can be safeguarded.

"The peace agreement signed by the Government of the Central African Republic and other parties to the conflict is a welcome step towards lasting peace and the hope of a better future for the country's children," said UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore in a statement.

"We particularly welcome commitments to protect children's rights and put an end to grave violations against children, but commitments are not enough. Now is the time for action," she added, regretting that "for too long, violence, instability and chronic underdevelopment have devastated children's lives in the Central African Republic".

She listed three "concrete steps that can help translate the peace agreement into meaningful action for children" affected by six years of brutal conflict and the resulting humanitarian crisis:

- parties to the conflict to release all children who were enrolled or associated with armed groups;
- the judicial system to treat children arrested or detained due to their association with armed groups as children and victims first, and to ensure that their rights are upheld;
- the Government to adopt as soon as possible the Child Protection Code and to align the country's juvenile justice system with international standards.

Since conflict began in CAR in 2012, due to fighting between the mostly Christian anti-Balaka militia and the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition, thousands of civilians have been killed and two out of three people became dependent on humanitarian aid. Children have been [particularly affected](#), according to the UN children's agency: one in four is displaced within the landlocked country or in neighbouring countries, and millions remain out-of-school, malnourished and vulnerable to disease, abuse and exploitation.

Peace talks started on 24 January this year and an agreement was reached 10 days later under the auspices of the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in CAR, led by the African Union (AU), with the UN's support.

The deal was [formally signed](#) on 6 February.

“UNICEF stands ready to support national efforts to help children affected by the conflict and is hopeful that this agreement will be a fundamental step towards long-lasting peace for the country’s children,” said Ms. Fore.

[UN agency plan tackles ‘hidden cost’ of gold, pave way for safer, mercury-free mining](#)

From smartphones to wedding rings, the [hidden cost of everyday gold](#) is its threat to human and environmental health, according to a new United Nations-driven initiative launched on Monday that aims to tackle mercury-based mining methods.

As gold production exposes millions of men, women and children globally to toxic levels of mercury every year, a new \$180-million [Global Environment Facility](#)-backed Global Opportunities for the Long-term Development of the artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) sector (GEF GOLD) programme will improve conditions for miners across eight countries while slashing harmful mercury emissions.

“The widespread use of mercury in the artisanal and small-scale sector affects the environment and people, particularly in developing countries” said Philippe Scholtès, the [UN Industrial Development Organization](#)’s (UNIDO) Managing Director of Programme Development and Technical Cooperation.

The ASGM, which accounts for 20 per cent of the world’s annual gold production, is the single largest source of man-made mercury emissions, responsible for releasing of as much as 1,000 tonnes of mercury to the atmosphere annually.

“Mercury emissions impact health and ecosystems, contaminating the food we eat, the water we drink and the air we breathe,” explained Joyce Msuya, Acting Executive Director of [UN Environment](#) (UNEP). “This is a long-term problem we need to confront now” to protect health, provide livelihoods and save the planet, she added.

Moreover, some 15 million people work in the ASGM sector, including 4.5 million women and over 600,000 children.

“By phasing out mercury use and connecting miners to markets for responsibly produced and sourced minerals, GEF GOLD will help to ensure the gold value chain both supports miners and provides consumers with access to ethically

produced, environmentally sustainable gold,” said Jacob Duer, Head of UNEP’s Chemicals and Health branch.

Working on the edge

To sate the appetite for gold for jewelry, investment and consumer products, miners and processors often work in harsh conditions without industry protections on pay, health or safety, with many relying on toxic, mercury-based extraction methods.

“It is important to transform the extremely harmful practice using mercury in ASGM to protect the human health and ecosystem,” stressed Abdoulaye Mar Dieye, [UN Nations Development Programme](#), (UNDP) Director of the Policy and Programme Support Bureau.

Studies indicate that ASGM mercury exposure is a major, largely neglected global health problem that put miners and their communities at risk of brain damage; vision and hearing loss; and delayed childhood development.

While ASGM offers employment for rural populations, miners frequently operate on the edges of legality, with ASGM either banned outright or limited by legislation. GEF GOLD intends to secure miners’ livelihoods by supporting regulatory and policy reforms to formalize ASGM across the programme countries – opening market and finance access to increase incomes and enable mercury-free technology.

Additionally, the GEF GOLD programme will work with the private sector to promote compliance with international standards on responsible mineral supply chains.

Spanning eight countries, the five-year programme is a partnership between UNEP, UNDP, UNIDO, the Global Environment Facility, Conservation International and the governments of Burkina Faso, Colombia, Guyana, Indonesia, Kenya, Mongolia, the Philippines and Peru.

[In West Africa, UN Security Council visits Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea-Bissau](#)

Members of the [United Nations Security Council](#) are mid-way through a mission to West Africa where they are reviewing strides made in peacebuilding by both Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea-Bissau.

Arriving Thursday 14 February in the Ivoirian capital, Abidjan, Ambassador Anatolio Ndong Mba of Equatorial Guinea, Council President and co-lead of the mission along with Côte d’Ivoire, and the Council delegation, met with

Foreign Minister Marcel Amon-Tanoh and Vice-President Daniel Kablan Duncan.

The Council also participated in a roundtable on the transition from peacekeeping to peacebuilding with United Nations Resident Coordinators in Côte d'Ivoire and neighbouring Liberia.

Côte d'Ivoire has been a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council since the beginning of 2018. The UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) [closed in June 2017](#), after 13 years deployed in the country which was plunged into instability from 1999 to 2011. The end of UNOCI's mandate was hailed as a UN peacekeeping success.

At a press conference on Friday, the Representative of Côte d'Ivoire to the UN and co-lead of the Council mission, Leon Kacou Adom, said the visit had provided an opportunity to exchange experiences and information, including on best practices on transitions from peacekeeping to peacebuilding, among representatives of Member States, Ivorian authorities and experts from UN country teams in Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia.

"At a time when United Nations peacekeeping operations are at a crossroads, and in a context marked by the reform launched by [Secretary-General António Guterres](#), it is clear that the Security Council, which is in charge of peacekeeping and international security, should highlight successful experiences in this regard, in this case in Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia," he stressed.

Legislative elections on March 10 in Guinea Bissau

The Council delegation flew Friday afternoon to Guinea Bissau, kicking off the second leg of its visit to West Africa. The purpose of this visit was to monitor and evaluate the crisis resolution process in this country.

Legislative elections are scheduled for March 10, 2019 in Guinea Bissau. They are to be followed by a presidential election whose date has not been set.

During the visit, the delegation met with Prime Minister Aristides Gomes, UN Deputy Special Representative David McLachlan-Karr, as well as representatives of partner organizations involved in the peacebuilding process in Guinea Bissau, according to a Twitter post by the UN Department of Political Affairs and Peacebuilding.

The delegation also met with the Speaker of the National Assembly, the leaders of political parties, the President of the National Electoral Commission, the President of the Supreme Court and representatives of civil society. It also met with President José Mario Vaz.

After more meetings in Guinea-Bissau, the Council delegation will head back to New York later on Sunday 17 February.