

Investing in rural women and girls, 'essential' for everyone's future: UN chief

Marking [International Day of Rural Women](#), on Monday, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres called on countries to ensure that women and girls living in rural areas can enjoy their human rights as this would enable making "progress for all".

"The empowerment of rural women and girls is essential to building a prosperous, equitable and peaceful future for all on a healthy planet," [he said](#), stressing that "it is needed for achieving gender equality, ensuring decent work for all, eradicating poverty and hunger and taking climate action".

Rural women make up 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries, in work that is often informal and poorly paid, offering little access to social protection or income security.

As child labour is common in the countryside, girls form a significant part of the agricultural workforce. This means rural women and girls remain disproportionately affected by poverty, inequality, exclusion and the effects of climate change.

"I call on countries to take action to ensure that rural women and girls fully enjoy their human rights," said Mr. Guterres, explaining that that includes the right to land and security of land tenure; to adequate food and nutrition and a life free of all forms of violence, discrimination and harmful practices. He added that every woman and girl should expect the highest attainable standard of health, including sexual and reproductive health; and has a right to quality, affordable and accessible education.

Women and girls are responsible for water collection and fuel collection in most rural households without access to drinking water or electricity. The arduous journey often takes several hours, poses many safety risks and hampers their ability to get an education or make a living.

In addition, cooking with unclean fuels can result in long-term and even fatal health problems for women, said Mr. Guterres. In countries that rely heavily on fuels like coal, wood, manure or crop waste for cooking, women account for 6 out of every 10 premature deaths through household air pollution.

Stating that improving the lives of women and girls in rural areas requires "legal and policy reforms" and their inclusion in the decisions that affect their lives, the UN chief stressed that "investing in [their] well-being, livelihoods and resilience, we make progress for all".

Noting the critical role that women's groups play in sustainable development, the UN's gender-quality agency, UN Women, noted that enhanced access to safe drinking water and sanitation brings gains in girls' education and eventually increases women's paid work to generate goods and provide services. Extending the reach of water grids and continuous piped drinking water to rural communities, is therefore an important priority with multiple benefits.

In addition, rural women's cooperatives are providing childcare services for – and by – their members around the world.

“But small-scale solutions are not enough,” said [UN Women's statement](#), explaining that these efforts “must be joined by large-scale institutional initiatives that invest in a different future, in which women and girls participate and benefit equally, to men and boys”.

[Overseas investment falling, developing countries largely unscathed: UN trade agency](#)

Foreign direct investment (FDI) has dropped 40 per cent year-on-year so far, the UN Conference on Trade and Development ([UNCTAD](#)) said on Monday, but the \$470 million decline is happening mainly in wealthy, industrialized nations, especially in North America and Western Europe.

Overall, the global financial picture is “gloomy”, said UNCTAD's James Zhan, Director, Division on Investment and Enterprise. He explained that foreign direct investment is important because it gives countries access to external capital, technology, market access and tax contributions.

According to UNCTAD, the development is mainly owing to recent tax reforms in the U.S. which have encouraged big firms there to bring home earnings from abroad – principally from Western European countries.

He said that the agency had warned in early January that there was “about \$2 trillion of stock in the form of cash or in the form of reinvested earnings of retained earnings outside the US”, which may be repatriated in some form, following wholesale tax reform.

“And indeed, it's happening,” he added. “We have seen that outward FDI from the US was from \$147 billion last year to a negative \$247 billion this year.”

Trade disputes another negative factor

Other factors have contributed to this year's “huge difference in

repatriation” of overseas profits by US multinationals, Mr. Zhan said. These include uncertainty about the detail and impact of tax reform and the potential impact of unresolved international trade disputes; such as the tit-for-tat tariffs imposed by the United States and China.

In contrast to the overall decline in foreign investment, the UNCTAD report highlights a 42 per cent increase in so-called “greenfield” projects, to \$454 billion.

These initiatives can involve building operations in a foreign country from scratch and they are seen an indicator of future trends, Mr. Zhan explained, before noting that investment in this sector had been at “relatively low levels” in the same period last year.

‘Only slight’ fall in developing country investment

While the fall in foreign direct investment has happened mainly in richer nations, including Ireland (down \$81 billion) and Switzerland (down \$77 billion), developing economies saw FDI flows declining “only slightly” in the first half of the year by four per cent, to \$310 billion, compared with 2017.

This includes developing Asia – down four per cent – to \$220 billion – in the same period, driven mostly by a 16 per cent decline in investment in East Asia. China, the notable exception, was in fact the largest recipient of foreign direct investment in the first half of 2018, attracting more than \$70 billion.

Latin America and the Caribbean, meanwhile, saw a six per cent drop in investment, amid uncertainty over upcoming elections that were offset by higher commodity prices, UNCTAD said.

This indicates that the country “is seeing a return to earlier levels of investment after a steep slowdown in the preceding years”, UNCTAD said, noting that Egypt remains Africa’s largest recipient of foreign investment – up almost a quarter – compared with the first half of 2017.

Turning to Western Africa, the data indicates a 17 per cent fall in investment there in the first half of the year, from \$5.2 billion to 4.3 billion. This is blamed partly on the “volatile global economic environment” and mixed commodity prices, and it could be turned around by advances in regional integration, including an African Continental Free Trade Agreement, the UNCTAD report suggested.

But that still leaves a significant gap in the investment that will be required for poorer countries to achieve Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, a list of ambitious objectives including extreme poverty eradication and ending world hunger, agreed three years ago.

Rural migration contributions should be maximized, new UN report suggests

Agricultural policies should work to maximize the contributions of rural migration to economic and social development, while minimizing the costs, says a major new report released on Monday by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)).

The agency's annual report titled, *The State of Food and Agriculture 2018* (SOFA), points to migration as a choice, its costs and benefits, and lays out the implications arising from important investment decisions surrounding rural development.

The objective must be to make migration a choice, not a necessity, and to maximize the positive impacts while minimizing the negative ones- *FAO chief Jose Graziano da Silva*

FAO Director-General Jose Graziano da Silva said in his forward to the report, that "the objective must be to make migration a choice, not a necessity, and to maximize the positive impacts while minimizing the negative ones."

With a focus on rural migration, the report notes that while international migration has grabbed the headlines, movement within national borders is a significantly larger phenomenon, accounting for more than a billion people.

Mr. Graziano said that it often makes sense to support migration, helping migrants overcome any possible constraints, and, "allowing them to take advantage of the opportunities that migration offers." He said this means providing attractive opportunities, especially when it involves boosting sustainable development.

For rural communities, this means reinforcing agricultural value and jobs, according to the report's recommendations. In cases where communities are forced to flee, strategies should include having approaches that will promote independence and resilience for the displaced.

For migrants, relocation could mean access to improved livelihoods and champion development in countries of origin, through remittances, which could contribute to overall socio-economic development.

The cost of migration for the poor can be overwhelming, especially where the young and educated leave rural areas.

The report notes that development paves the way for more, not less, international migration. Low- and lower-middle income countries benefit from development, as it assists with income growth and thus, enables communities

to cover costs associated with migration.

Overall, the general improvement of infrastructure and services in small cities, towns and rural areas makes communities less isolated, creating more incentive for people to stay, and slow the flight to big cities.

[UN relief official in Yemen condemns 'horrific' attack on passenger buses](#)

Condemning an attack on passenger buses in Yemen's Hudaydah governorate, the top United Nations humanitarian official in the country has called on warring parties "to do everything possible" to protect civilians.

"This is a horrific incident," Lise Grande, the Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen, said in a [news release](#) on Sunday.

"The UN agencies working in Yemen unequivocally condemn the attack on civilians and extend our deepest condolences to the families of the victims," she added

Ms. Grande also reiterated that under international humanitarian law, parties to the conflict are obliged to respect the principles of precaution, proportionality and distinction.

Belligerents must do everything possible to protect civilians – not hurt, maim, injure or kill them – *UN relief official Lise Grande*

"Belligerents must do everything possible to protect civilians – not hurt, maim, injure or kill them," added the UN official.

At least 15 civilians have been reported killed and 20 others injured when the minibuses they were traveling in were struck in Jabal Ras district in war-ravaged Yemen's western Hudaydah governorate, on Saturday.

A number of injured have been transported to the towns of Zabid and Bait al Faqiah where they are being treated at hospitals supported by the UN [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) and its partners. Other UN agencies are standby to provide whatever other assistance may be needed, noted the news release.

According to humanitarian organizations, some 170 people have been killed and over 1,700 injured in Hudaydah since fighting escalated in June 2018. Furthermore, more than 425,000 people have been forced to flee their homes.

Across Yemen – the world's worst humanitarian crisis – more than 22 million

people, or 75 per cent of the population, need some form of assistance and protection. However, response efforts remain constrained due to limited resources. A \$3 billion Humanitarian Response Plan launched by UN and aid partners for 2018 lacks almost a third of the funds it needs.

[Violence will not deter Somali people in their pursuit of peace, says UN chief, in wake of lethal attacks](#)

Strongly condemning twin suicide attacks in Baidoa, southwestern Somalia, United Nations [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) has reiterated the Organization's support and solidarity with the country's people and Government.

In a statement by his spokesperson, Mr. Guterres expressed his deep condolences to the families of the victims and wished a speedy recovery to those injured.

"He is convinced that indiscriminate violence and attacks will not deter the Somali people in their pursuit of peace and stability," added the statement.

According to media reports, at least 16 people died and 50 wounded after two suicide bombers attacked a restaurant and a hotel in the town of Baidoa on Saturday. Baidoa is located about 220 kilometres (130 miles) west of capital Mogadishu.

The blasts came on the eve of the one-year anniversary of a [suicide bombing](#) in Mogadishu that [killed](#) more than 500 people.