

'Shadow' of persistent inequality is growing, key UN human development report reveals

While health, education, and income levels have improved overall across the globe, "wide inequalities" both among and within countries, are casting a shadow on sustained human development, a new United Nations report shows.

Looking at the widening gap in real terms, a child born in Norway today – the country with the highest human development index (HDI) – can expect to live beyond the age of 82, and spend almost 18 years in school. But the same child, if born in Niger – the lowest HDI – can expect only to live to 60, with just five years of formal education.

"While these statistics present a stark picture in themselves, they also speak to the [tragedy of millions of individuals whose lives are affected](#) by inequity and lost opportunities, neither of which are inevitable," said Achim Steiner, the Administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), which released the [report](#) today.

Inequality occurs in many countries, including in some of the wealthiest ones, but it ends up taking a much bigger toll on countries with lower HDI levels; with low HDI countries losing almost a third of their human development capacity. For countries with a high HDI, the average loss is 11 per cent.

The striking differences both within and among countries, are stifling progress and the trend can be seen again and again, according to UNDP.

"Inequality in all its forms and dimensions, between and within countries, limits people's choices and opportunities, withholding progress," explained Selim Jahan, Director of the Human Development Report Office at UNDP.

Women's empowerment remains a particular challenge

A key source of inequality within countries is the gap in opportunities, achievements and empowerment between women and men. On average, the HDI for women is 6 per cent lower than that for men, notes the report.

Furthermore, while there has been "laudable progress" in the number of girls attending school, there remain big differences in other key aspects of men and women's lives – for instance labour force participation rates for women globally are lower than for men – 49 per cent, versus 75 per cent.

And when women are working, their unemployment rates are 24 per cent higher than their male counterparts. Women globally also do much more unpaid domestic and care work than men.

“Women’s empowerment remains a particular challenge,” underscored UNDP.

Data tells a part of the story, quality of growth matters

The Human Development Report 2018 update also shows [“tremendous” variation](#) between countries in quality of education, healthcare and many other key aspects of life.

This quality-difference can be illustrated by looking at the number of students per teacher, in primary schools. Sub-Saharan Africa has, on average, 39 pupils per teacher while in developed regions, there is an average of one teacher for every 16-18 primary school pupils.

Similar difference exists in terms of health care: OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries and East Asia and the Pacific have, on average, 29 and 28 physicians for every 10,000 people respectively. In South Asia overall, there are only eight per 10,000, falling to less than two, in Sub-Saharan Africa.

“Much of the world’s attention is on data that tells only a part of the story about people’s lives,” said Mr. Jahan, highlighting that it is clearly not enough simply to count how many children are in the classroom. The important dimension is to know whether they are learning anything.

“Focusing on quality is essential to foster sustainable and sustained human development progress.”

[DR Congo: new cases of deadly Ebola virus, as UN steps up response](#)

In eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the UN has stepped up community-based efforts to tackle Ebola disease, following confirmation that the virus has reached the city of Butembo, near the Ugandan border, where it has claimed three lives.

On Friday, [WHO](#), the [World Health Organization](#), said that there were 137 confirmed and probable cases and 92 deaths in the latest outbreak in the east of the country.

[UN Children’s Fund UNICEF](#), announced that “everything is being done” to ensure that the disease is controlled in Butembo “at this early stage”.

Working with the communities, alerting them, informing them, and getting them to treat Ebola cases... is the challenge – *Christian Lindmeier, WHO*

Apart from widespread insecurity, one of the biggest challenges is overcoming communities' hostility to strict health directives, that go against centuries-old cultural traditions, including burial practices.

"I remember when I was going in West Africa a few years ago during the Ebola (outbreak) how dangerous it was to go to some villages," spokesperson Christophe Boulierac said.

"We know, based on our experience and our work, that it should never be underestimated, this community resistance. And it's an incentive to work at a more deeper level," he added. "It's an incentive to understand more accurately what people feel and why...What are the cultural beliefs?"

He added that it was important to respond on that level, "using agents of change, using people who have some influence in the community."

Specialist help deployed in Ebola zone

In a bid to help protect communities, UNICEF has dispatched a team of 11 specialists in community communication, education and psycho-social assistance, as well as water, sanitation and hygiene. The UN agency is also working with anthropologists specializing in local cultural beliefs and practices to help overcome possible concerns.

"If we don't do that, this resistance can really increase and can really cause serious obstacles to the fight against the disease," Mr. Boulierac said. "It's about knowing the people to whom we are talking."

More than 250 community leaders have also been alerted about the outbreak in Butembo, along with religious leaders and journalists. They have been told about prevention measures and an emergency number to call to treat anyone with Ebola-like symptoms.

The current Ebola outbreak in the Kivus region is DRC's 10th since 1976. It was officially declared on 1 August. More than 1,750 people are under active surveillance, according to World Health Organization, [WHO](#), and more than 52 vaccination "rings" have been set up around known Ebola patients.

"Working with the communities, alerting them, informing them, and getting them to treat Ebola cases or suspected Ebola cases in the right way, is the challenge," said WHO spokesperson Christian Lindmeier.

In total, more than 8,900 people have been vaccinated, including more than 2,000 children. Treating the sick and protecting people who have come into contact with them is complicated, because the vast Kivus area is home to more than 100 armed groups.

The last Ebola outbreak in DRC was some 2,000 miles away, to the west, in Equateur province, which includes the Congo River. It was declared over in July after claiming 33 lives.

Yemen: mortar attack on UN food silo 'could affect vital aid deliveries to millions'

Fighting in the Yemen port city of Hudaydah which has damaged a World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) storage facility, threatens to hamper efforts to feed millions of people in the war-torn country, it said on Friday.

Briefing journalists in Geneva, WFP spokesperson Herve Verhoosel, said that on-going clashes taking place near the Red Sea Mill Silos, which is “a critical facility for WFP operations”, could impact the agency’s ability “to feed up to 3.5 million very hungry people in northern and central Yemen for one month.”

He added that a mortar shell launched by “an unidentified armed group” also hit a WFP warehouse in Hudaydah city, holding enough food to assist 19,200 in need.

According to WFP, the security situation in Hudaydah is “deteriorating rapidly” and threatens humanitarian assistance to the city and surrounding areas, where food supplies are critically low.

In another incident at the end of last month, a WFP truck was hit by shellfire while carrying out a delivery to Al Tuhayta, in southern Hudaydah. The truck, clearly marked with a WFP banner, was carrying around 30 tons of food assistance, enough for nearly 2,000 people for one month.

It was hit by an unidentified armed group two kilometres from its final destination, seriously injuring the driver.

WFP warehouses, trucks, facilities, silos and most importantly staff are neutral and should not be ...targeted by any party to the conflict. – Herve Verhoosel, WFP Spokesperson

The continuing violence is part of an offensive launched on Hudaydah in June by coalition forces supporting the internationally recognized Government of President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi.

It marks the latest escalation in more than three years of conflict between Government forces and the Houthi opposition, which controls the Red Sea port and the capital, Sana’a.

Hudaydah port is critical to the humanitarian effort in Yemen, the UN insists, because it is a primary gateway for food, fuel and medicine into the

impoverished country, which imports nearly all of its daily needs.

Despite the deteriorating security situation, WFP's operations are ongoing, Mr Verhoosel said, "and we will do everything we can to ensure our operations continue throughout the region without interruption".

He explained that in August "and despite high levels of conflict in southern Hudaydah, we provided emergency food assistance to around 700,000 people, out of 900,000 people in the governorate considered to be at highest risk".

Throughout Yemen, around eight million people are close to famine "and we cannot afford any activities that would disrupt our operations aiming to provide food and nutrition", the UN spokesperson said.

He also reminded the warring sides that humanitarian workers should not be targeted and that the UN agency would "hold parties accountable" for any attacks on its facilities.

"We condemn any attempt by any side of the conflict to use humanitarian aid and facilities as a tool in this violent conflict and appeal to all parties to the conflict to let aid workers do their work," he said. "WFP warehouses, trucks, facilities, silos and most importantly staff are neutral and should not be used by any party to the conflict or targeted by any party to the conflict."

On Thursday, Lise Grande, the [UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen](#) gave the stark warning that "hundreds of thousands of lives hang in the balance in Hodeidah."

"The situation has deteriorated dramatically in the past few days. Families are absolutely terrified by the bombardment, shelling and airstrikes," she added.

"People are struggling to survive", she said. "More than 25 percent of children are malnourished; 900,000 people in the governorate are desperate for food and 90,000 pregnant women are at enormous risk. Families need everything—food, cash, health care, water, sanitation, emergency supplies, specialized support and many need shelter. It's heart-breaking to see so many people who need so much."

[Security Council extends mandates of UN peace operations in Libya, Colombia through next September](#)

By unanimous agreement on Thursday, the Security Council extended the

mandates of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) and the Organization's Verification Mission in Colombia.

Adopting [resolution 2434 \(2018\)](#) the Security Council extended, until 15 September 2019, [UNSMIL's](#) mandate as an integrated special political mission to support an inclusive political process, taking into account economic development and improvements in national security, within the framework of the Libyan Political Agreement and the UN Action Plan for the country.

The 15-member Council also decided that UNSMIL should undertake a range of other tasks, including supporting key national institutions, monitoring and reporting on human rights, coordinating international assistance and providing advice and assistance to the Government of National Accord (GNA) in its efforts to stabilize post-conflict zones – including those liberated from Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh).

Adopting a separate [resolution 2435 \(2018\)](#), the Security Council also extended by a year, the mandate of the [UN Verification Mission in Colombia](#).

In the resolution, the Council reaffirmed its “full commitment” to the peace process in Colombia and expressed its willingness to work with the Government to further extend the mandate of the Verification Mission, with the assent of all the parties involved.

The UN Verification Mission was established in July last year, to verify the reintegration of former FARC-EP rebels into civilian life, as well as the security guarantees for former rebels, their families and wider community.

[Somalia's destiny lies in the hands of the people, highlights outgoing UN envoy](#)

Despite remarkable achievements in Somalia in the recent past, structural challenges remain and continue to undermine the country's security and political stability, the United Nations envoy for the country has warned.

Briefing the Security Council for the last time in his capacity as UN Special Representative for Somalia, Michael Keating called on all Somalis to draw strength from the positive transformations going on inside the country and work collectively for the common good.

“The future of Somalia is in the hands of the Somalis,” he declared.

In particular, Mr. Keating – who also heads the [UN Assistance Mission in](#)

[Somalia](#) (UNSOM) – urged unity among political leaders.

“The more [they] show unity, the greater the opportunity, and the responsibility, of international partners to invest in all parts of the country and its leadership,” he said.

In his remarks, Mr. Keating highlighted four key concerns the country’s leaders need to address, and issues that the international community should keep focusing on.

These include the threat posed by the Al Shabaab and other extremist groups; the risk of political differences overshadowing progress in legislative, reform and security areas; fragmentation within the international community; and the danger of a humanitarian “catastrophe”, especially with most of the population already living in precarious circumstances due to climate change and other vulnerabilities.

“Future crises will result from the combination of climate related shocks; armed conflict provoked by Al Shabaab and unresolved grievances; competition over natural resources; and systemic marginalization of certain groups,” warned Mr. Keating. He underscored the need to reduce the vulnerability faced by ordinary Somalis, through job creation and smart investments that safeguard natural resources and help unlock the enormous economic potential of the country.

Besides political will, Mr. Keating underscored, success will depend on leaders from the political, business and traditional spheres “working together for the common good, leveraging the country’s potential wealth to transform prospects for people – especially the young.”

On 1 October, [Nicholas Haysom will replace](#) Mr. Keating as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia and the head of UNSOM. Mr. Keating was appointed the top UN official in the Horn of Africa nation in November 2015.

Women have brought ‘important voices’ to Somali politics

Alongside Mr. Keating, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the Executive Director of the UN gender equality and empowerment agency for women and girls (UN Women) highlighted the “once-in-a-generation opportunity” that Somalia currently has to establish lasting peace, and gender equality.

She commended the nation for improving representation of women in public office, illustrated by the “jump” in women’s representation in parliamentary elections from 14 to nearly 25 per cent of seats in the most recent elections.

This progress, she underscored, has brought many “important voices” to Somali politics.

She said it had brought to the centre “the fight to end child marriage, end female genital mutilation (FGM), and change laws that discriminate against women,” noting that the participation of women will be further boosted if

more leaders, especially clan leaders, embrace gender equality and support women.

She also called on the international community and the Security Council to support Somalia's federal and provincial authorities, advance gender equality, act strongly against sexual and gender-based violence, advocate for meaningful participation and recognition of women in all sectors, and support women's groups in the country.

"Women's organizations in Somalia are organized. They are dedicated to their country: they are activists, advocates, entrepreneurs, professionals, and patriots," said Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka, noting that as the country prepares to confront the challenges in the days ahead, "women will make the difference."