

Promoting biodiversity across all agricultural sectors 'fundamental' – FAO chief

Changing how countries across the world produce food is “fundamental” to protecting the future of the Earth’s ecosystem, said the head of the Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) on Tuesday.

With large swathes of the planet’s surface used to grow food, raise animals or produce products such as timber; the agricultural sector – if managed sustainably – can make significant contributions to protecting biodiversity, said FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva.

Addressing a three-day [international dialogue](#) on mainstreaming the key issue into agricultural policies and practices, he called for transformative changes in food production, aimed at producing healthy and nutritious food while simultaneously safeguarding the planet’s biodiversity.

“Biodiversity is essential for safeguarding global food security and nutrition, improving rural livelihoods, and enhancing the resilience of people and communities,” he said in keynote remarks.

However, planetary biodiversity – at the genetic, species and ecosystem levels – faces a number of threats, the FAO Director-General noted, adding that food production “is a big part of the problem”.

“Biodiversity is essential for safeguarding global food security and nutrition, improving rural livelihoods, and enhancing the resilience of people and communities” – *FAO chief, José Graziano da Silva*

Pointing out that the world still produces food based mainly on 50-year-old principles, often using environmentally unfriendly chemicals, he also described how the loss of agricultural biodiversity poses a direct risk to food security.

“Only three staple crops – rice, maize and wheat – and three animal species – cattle, pigs and chicken – provide the majority of food energy intake in the world,” he said.

Diversifying food sources could play a critical role in ensuring food security; such as genetically diverse plants which are more tolerant to hotter and drier conditions, he said. Similarly, more diverse livestock would allow farmers and pastoralists to breed animals which could adapt to changing environmental conditions.

“This is especially important nowadays in the face of emerging challenges such as the impacts of climate change, rapid urbanization and also a growing population with changing diets,” Mr. Graziano da Silva said.

At the farm level, implementing production practices that prioritize safeguarding biodiversity can also ensure that food can be produced sustainably.

To that end, this week’s FAO conference gathers together people from across the whole sector, to consider real-world examples of how agriculture, fisheries and forestry have been successfully managed to safeguard biodiversity.

A series of working groups will also focus on avenues for mainstreaming biodiversity in agriculture, including global governance; national policies and legislation; financial incentives and investments; and supply chain measures.

[‘Positive’ community building helps combat hate online: UN counter-terrorism chair](#)

In an increasingly interconnected world, the glorification of terrorism online impacts everyone, the chair of a United Nations counter-terrorism body said on Tuesday, calling for a renewed effort to combat hateful propaganda and promote community solidarity.

Gustavo Adolfo Meza-Cuadra Velasquez, the Peruvian Ambassador to the UN, and chair of the Security Council [Counter-Terrorism Committee](#), said that although it was important to deny voices that incite and glorify violence access to the internet, the huge public benefits of being online, had to be acknowledged.

“Every measure taken to fight against terrorist narratives, like all counter-terrorism measures, must be in line with international human rights law, including the rights to privacy and freedom of expression,” he said.

In that context, Mr. Meza-Cuadra highlighted the importance of public-private partnerships to keep the Internet space “as hostile as possible to terrorist groups,” while at the same time “as open as possible for society at large”, pointing to the Comprehensive International Framework to Counter Terrorist Narratives.

Effective counter-narratives should include positive messaging that promotes community solidarity – *Counter-Terrorism Committee chairperson*

Adopted in 2017, the Framework consists of three elements: legal and law enforcement measures, based on relevant United Nations resolutions; the development of public-private partnerships; and the development of counter-narratives, that push back against terrorist propaganda.

In his remarks, Mr. Meza-Cuadra said that in addition to counter-narratives, positive messages must be amplified, so that vulnerable audiences are given assurances that genuine concerns are being addressed, without resorting to violence.

“Effective counter-narratives should include positive messaging that promotes community solidarity and peaceful avenues for addressing conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism. This is one way to achieve effective and long-term results,” he said.

[UN chief arrives in Mali to honour fallen peacekeepers](#)

The north-west African country is the most dangerous place in the world to be a UN ‘blue helmet,’ and last year, 21 troops serving with the UN Stabilization Mission in Mali ([MINUSMA](#)) lost their lives, along with seven civilians.

The UN chief was greeted by President Ibrahim Keita and other officials upon his arrival in the capital, Bamako, and he then took part in a ceremony to pay tribute to fallen colleagues.

The Secretary-General said he was honoured to be spending Peacekeepers’ Day with the “brave men and women” serving with MINUSMA, adding that “at their own personal risk, they save lives serving the cause of peace,” according to a statement from UN Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric.

UN News has a multimedia team travelling with Mr. Guterres and we will be bringing you a full report from them, later in the day.

UN releases \$2.7 million to help cyclone-hit 'Somaliland'; urges focus on longterm rebuilding

Following a visit to a cyclone-hit community in 'Somaliland', the United Nations has released close to \$3 million to help people affected by an unprecedented storm which delivered a full year's worth of rain in just a few days, compounding damage caused by recent severe flooding.

"We are on the ground, both the UN and NGOs, and we have already been providing assistance, particularly in the form of immediate food security assistance, and also non-food items, shelter items in particular, and health assistance – and this has kicked in, basically, from day one," said the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia, Peter de Clercq, on Monday, in the wake of a visit to Borama, located some 180 kilometres south-west of Hargeisa, the capital of 'Somaliland.'

We really need to not just work on the relief, but on the increased resilience of the families that live in this area – *Peter de Clercq (UNSOM)*

"Just to reinforce the rebuilding of livelihoods I, moreover, pledged \$2.7 million," Mr. de Clercq added, with the money coming from the international donor-backed Somalia Humanitarian Fund (SHF), designed to address the most urgent humanitarian needs in Somalia, which also covers 'Somaliland.'

The recent landfall of Cyclone Sagar on the northern Horn of Africa has affected some 160,000 people, killing dozens and causing severe damage to infrastructure and economic hardship, especially for traditional pastoralists.

Mr. de Clercq had been in Borama to see its impact first-hand, as well as meet with local partners, including government officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations, community elders and people directly affected by the storm.

"It was an opportunity to interact with people who were immediately affected by it," he said. "They've lived through this year of near-famine already, and they had to endure not only this very difficult period of drought, but then floods, immediately followed by the cyclone."

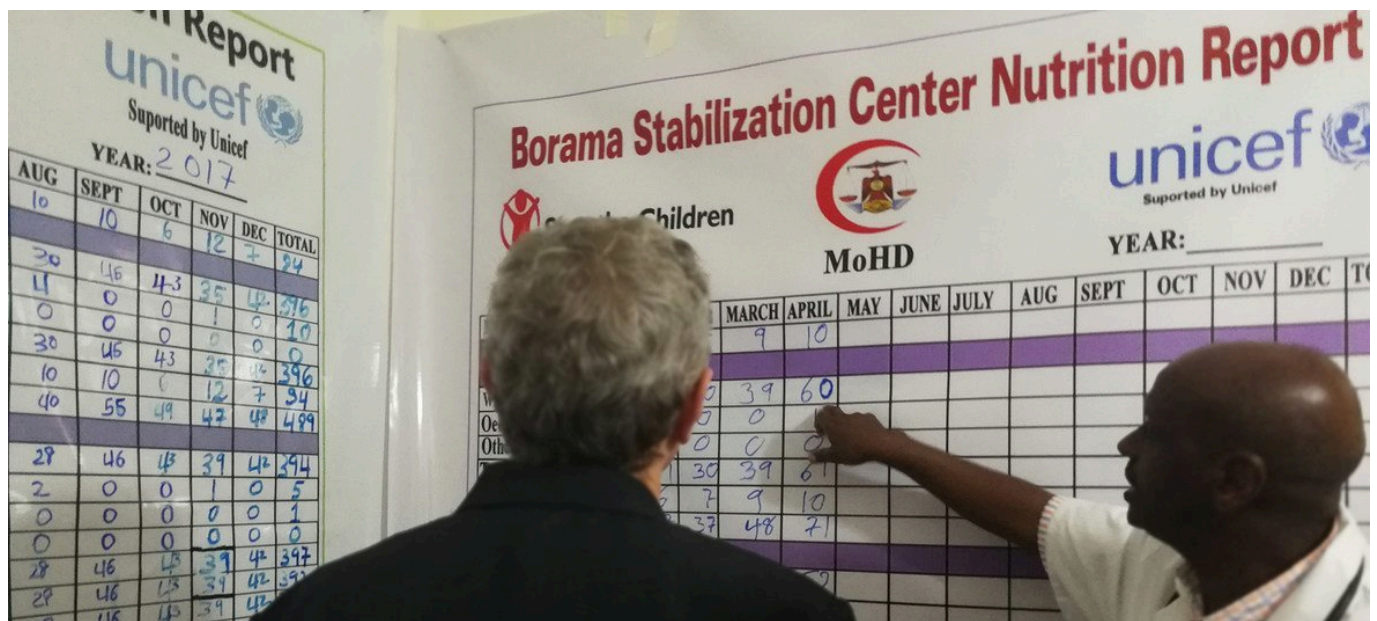
Need to focus on short- and long-term needs

The UN official said the response to the combination of events – storm, floods and drought – highlighted the need for a response which addresses both the short- and longer-term humanitarian needs with the short-term; the

longer-term being centred on building the resilience of communities like that of the Awhal region.

This will help to tackle the effects of climate change among the most vulnerable local populations, as resilience in these communities had already been extremely strained due to at least four failed rainy seasons.

“We still are dealing with the food insecurity, the lack of livelihoods as a result of the drought, and at the same time we’re dealing with people who’ve been displaced because their houses have been flooded, or because their livelihoods have been washed away,” said Mr. de Clercq, who also serves as the UN Secretary-General’s Deputy Special Representative for Somalia, and noted the need for increased funding of the SHF.



UNSOM/Carlos Gomez del Campo

On a visit to the Borama Regional Hospital, 180 kilometres southwest of Somaliland’s capital, Hargeisa, medical staff brief the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia, Peter de Clercq, on the hospital’s work, particularly in relation to the impact of Cyclone Sagar, but also on other humanitarian challenges, such as recent severe flooding and a years-long drought.

Currently, the Humanitarian Response Plan funding stands at \$390 million – less than 50 per cent of the amount that was pledged at this stage in 2017.

“We really need to not just work on the relief, but on the increased resilience of the families that live in this area, the families that have to go through this kind of terrible humanitarian challenges year after year after year,” Mr. de Clercq said. “So, we should not be waiting until the next crisis hits us – we haven’t seen the last drought yet, we very well may not have seen the last cyclone here.”

UN aid chief highlights 2 million Syrians in greatest need

Less than 20 per cent of the “desperate” civilians living in Syria’s hard-to-reach areas have got the humanitarian aid they need so far this year, a senior United Nations official warned on Tuesday, calling for the Security Council to help ease their plight.

“Those two million people, in places like northern rural Homs, Douma and southern Damascus, are some of [the most desperate](#) in the country,” Mark Lowcock, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, said during his briefing to the 15-member body.

Only six inter-agency convoys have reached those areas since January, providing relief for 169,000 people, which is “less than 20 per cent of the people we would like to be reaching,” he added.

Updating members on the situation in formerly rebel-held eastern Ghouta, Mr. Lowcock, who is also Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, said he had released \$16 million from the Syria Humanitarian Fund to support people in that area – now under government control.

The Damascus suburb was recaptured after years of siege in April, following an intense battle, and the Syrian government asked the UN to provide assistance to local people there.

During a recent visit to Saqba and Kafr Batna in eastern Ghouta, UN staff observed the resumption of some services, with electricity, education and health facilities starting up once more, and a limited number of businesses and markets reopening.

“But it was clear that there are huge unmet needs, and extensive destruction of civilian infrastructure,” Mr. Lowcock said.

There had been almost 200,000 people who reportedly stayed in the suburb throughout the fighting. The authorities report that more than 10,000 people have returned to eastern Ghouta from Rural Damascus over the past two weeks, makes access to the area even more critical.

The Government has already approved an inter-agency convoy to provide aid for 70,000 people living in the capital of the enclave, Duma, but it has not yet left, he said, reiterating a request to the government to move ahead with providing greater access to eastern Ghouta.

The situation in the northwestern province of Idlib is alarming, Mr. Lowcock said, noting that on-going airstrikes, clashes between armed groups,

overcrowding and severely stretched basic services, are deepening the suffering of both displaced people who have fled there and host communities.

More than 80,000 newly-displaced people have arrived in the area since March, which is the last remaining Syrian province not under the control of government forces. "Keeping pace with the increase in needs in Idlib has involved redirecting resources from other activities," he said.

Many of the most recent new arrivals in Idlib have come from northern rural Homs. Some 35,000 people were evacuated from this area earlier this month, after a significant escalation in violence there.