

Short-sighted investment imperils sustainable development for hundreds of millions of people – UN report

While a moderate upturn in the global economy in 2017 drove progress in development financing, a new United Nations report out Friday revealed that the vast majority of investment is still short-term oriented and global commitments to create sustainable economies are not being met.

“The world has the resources to deliver, but they are not allocated where they are needed most,” said [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) in the foreword to the 2018 report, “Financing for Development: Progress and Prospects.”

The report cites ‘short-termism’ – an excessive focus on projects that will yield immediate profit at the expense of long-term interests like infrastructure enhancements and job training – as among the major funding challenges to implementing the [2030 Agenda](#) on Sustainable Development.

The UN chief warned: “The choices we make now on financing will be pivotal.”

The prospects of some 800 million of the world’s poorest remain dire, as the annual progress report on how to finance the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) revealed that the current system rewards investors, financiers and project managers that prioritize short-term profits – correlating to policy makers’ excessive focus on short-term considerations.

The results are shelved infrastructure projects in favour of short term priorities that leave small businesses and women excluded from the financial system.

“The good economic news in some regions masks the very real risk that the poorest will be left behind,” said Liu Zhenmin, Under-Secretary-General for the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

“There is no room for complacency,” he added.

According to the report, an increasing interest in socially responsible investing is no substitute for a broader transformation in the financial system.

Pension funds, insurance companies and other institutional investors hold around \$80 trillion in assets. But the majority of their resources are invested in liquid assets, such as listed equities and bonds in developed countries.

Investment in infrastructure still represents less than three per cent of pension fund assets, with investment in sustainable infrastructure in

developing countries even lower.

The lack of long-term investment horizons also means that major risks, such as those from climate change, are not incorporated into decision-making.

“If we don’t invest in infrastructure projects like bridges, roads and sewage systems, if the poorest and women are cut off from access to credit and other financial services, we have little prospect of achieving our global goals,” stressed Mr. Liu.

Overcoming the short-term outlook

The report maintains that the solution to the issue lies in a multifaceted approach, which includes changing payment practices and becoming more transparent.

“We have to reach beyond the quick fix if we are going to create a world that can sustain all of us,” said Navid Hanif, Director of Financing for Sustainable Development Office. “Political leadership and public policies are indispensable.”

The report emphasized that in donor countries, political leaders must do more to meet their commitment to provide financial assistance to the world’s most vulnerable countries.

[At Security Council, UN chief pushes for creation of body to determine perpetrators of chemical attacks in Syria](#)

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres on Friday again called for the creation of an independent panel that could determine who used chemical weapons in Syria, as the absence of such a body increases the risks of a military escalation in a country already riven by “confrontations and proxy wars.”

“Syria indeed today represents [the most serious threat](#) to international peace and security,” the Secretary-General said in a [briefing](#) to the Security Council.

“In Syria, we see confrontations and proxy wars involving several national armies, a number of armed opposition groups, many national and international militia, foreign fighters from everywhere in the world, and various terrorist

organizations,” he added.

His plea comes after the mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), which was created as a body to attribute responsibility for the use of chemical weapons in Syria in 2015, [expired](#) in November 2017.

Due largely to divisions among its five permanent members – China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States – the Council could not adopt three draft resolutions that would have responded to a suspected chemical weapons attack in the Syrian town of Douma.

Mr. Guterres, in a letter to the Council two days ago, he expressed his “deep disappointment” at the failure of establishing an accountability mechanism similar to JIM.

On Wednesday, he also called the Ambassadors of the five permanent members to reiterate his “deep concern about the risks of the current impasse” and stressed the need to “avoid the situation spiralling out of control.”

In today’s briefing to the Council, the UN chief warned that “increasing tensions and the inability to reach a compromise in the establishment of an accountability mechanism threaten to lead to a full-blown military escalation.”

“For eight long years,” he said, “the people of Syria have endured suffering upon suffering. I reiterate: there is no military solution to the conflict.”

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons ([OPCW](#)) – the body monitoring and facilitating implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which entered into force in 1997 – has [dispatched a fact-finding mission](#) to Syria in response to latest allegations of chemical weapons use.

But this body’s work does not go beyond “establishing the facts,” such as whether or not banned chemical substances were used.

Sweden, a non-permanent Council member, on Thursday circulated a new proposal that asks for four things.

It condemns “in the strongest terms” any use of chemical weapons in Syria and expresses alarm at the alleged incident in Douma last weekend; demands full access and cooperation for the OPCW fact-finding mission; expresses the Council’s determination to establish a new impartial and independent attribution mechanism, based on a proposal by the Secretary-General; and requests the Secretary-General to dispatch immediately a high-level disarmament mission to Syria.

Mr. Guterres, in today’s meeting, also highlighted dangerous circumstances encompassing the wider Middle East region, which he said is facing “a true Gordian knot – different fault lines crossing each other and creating a highly volatile situation with risks of escalation, fragmentation and division.”

“The Cold War is back with a vengeance, but with a difference,” said the UN

chief.

The mechanisms and the safeguards to manage the risks of escalation that existed in the past no longer seem to be present, Mr. Guterres said.

Those “fault lines” also include the Palestinian-Israeli divide as well as the Sunni-Shia divide, evident from the Gulf to the Mediterranean.

“Many forms of escalation are possible,” he warned.

[Donors pledge over \\$500 million to tackle growing needs in DR Congo; UN warns humanitarian crisis cannot be ignored](#)

The first-ever [international conference](#) to help the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) opened at the United Nations Office at Geneva on Friday amid dire warnings of a growing humanitarian crisis in the vast African country.

Despite massive natural resources and major socio-economic changes driven by Government-led initiatives, years of violence by armed groups vying for control – along with ethnic strife in the country’s restive east, and political and ethnic instability – have created massive food insecurity, according to the UN [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) (OCHA).

In Geneva, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock [told](#) donors that more than two million children are suffering from severe acute malnutrition in DRC and 13 million people require assistance there urgently – double the number of those in need last year.

He added that DRC is also facing “the worst outbreak of cholera in fifteen years,” as well as “an epidemic of sexual violence,” committed mainly against children.

“As I speak, the resurgence of an inter-ethnic conflict in Ituri in February is killing many people and leading to internal and cross-border displacement of even more,” he said.”

And thousands of farmers in the crisis gripped Kasais have missed three successive agricultural seasons, resulting in a drop in agricultural production.

Speaking to journalists in Geneva during a break in the conference, Mr.

Lowcock said that he expected to confirm more than \$500 million in [pledges](#) before the end of the day.

Total needs for the DRC for this year are estimated at \$1.7 billion – nearly four times more than the amount secured last year.

An additional \$500 million is needed to support 807,000 Congolese refugees in neighbouring countries and more than 540,000 refugees from other countries who are in DRC.

The question of securing sufficient funding was underlined by UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) in his opening address to the pledging conference.

He urged Member States in Geneva via a [video message](#) to show solidarity for the “millions of people who are suffering” in one of the world’s largest humanitarian crises as the UN and the DRC Government work together to respond to needs.

During the conference, Jean-Philippe Chauzy, from the UN migration agency, spoke of the need to strengthen international support for the people of the DRC.

“Confronted with rising intercommunal tensions, political instability and an increasingly insecure environment, the international humanitarian community needs to [strengthen its support](#) and commitment to the Congolese people,” said Mr. Chauzy, who is DRC Chief of Mission for the [International Organization for Migration](#) (IOM).

He added: “We simply cannot ignore the speed, and magnitude of [this] crisis.”

Alongside the UN, the pledging conference was co-hosted by the Netherlands and the European Commission.

Sigrid Kaag, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands, described the DRC as a “forgotten” conflict that desperately needed more support from the international community.

She highlighted the impact of gender-based violence on girls and young women whom she had met on a recent visit to DRC.

Some had requested help in the form of rape kits, while others had asked how to look after the babies they had given birth to after their sexual assault.

That message was underlined by conference co-host Christos Stylianides, European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, who spoke of the violence and “stories of unbelievable pain” that he heard while visiting the country in recent weeks.

Asked at the press conference about the decision by the DRC authorities not to attend the pledging conference, Mark Lowcock underlined the scale of the problems in the country – and the importance of securing funding for some 150 organizations working to support humanitarian action “under the leadership”

of the DRC authorities in 20 provinces.

“I think everybody recognizes that there is a substantial crisis in the DRC, the Government recognizes that themselves, which [acknowledges] their own very substantial financial commitment to it,” he said, in reference to its \$100 million pledge to provide additional aid.

[Conditions ‘not yet conducive’ for Rohingya refugee to return home to Myanmar – UN agency](#)

The United Nations refugee agency and the Government of Bangladesh on Friday signed a cooperation agreement on the safe, dignified return of Rohingya refugees to their homes in Myanmar, “once conditions there are conducive.”

Noting that such conditions are not present at the moment, the UN refugee agency urged Myanmar authorities to create them as well as to take concrete measures to address the root causes of displacement.

“[The responsibility for creating such conditions](#) remains with the Myanmar authorities, and these must go beyond the preparation of physical infrastructure to facilitate logistical arrangements,” the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#) (UNHCR) stressed.

The agency also noted that in the absence of a UNHCR-Myanmar-Bangladesh agreement, it has continued to engage with both Governments in negotiations on two separate memoranda of understanding (MOUs), meant to ensure that any future returns are conducted in line with the international standards.

More than 670,000 members of the Muslim minority Rohingya community fled violence in Myanmar since August 2017, joining an estimated 200,000 Rohingya who have sought shelter in Bangladesh, arriving in waves over the past decades.



UNHCR/Susan Hopper

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Filippo Grandi (centre right) and Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Mohammad Shahidul Haque (centre left) sign a MoU relating to voluntary returns of Rohingya refugees.

According to UNHCR, the refugees have said that before considering return to Myanmar, they would need to see concrete progress in relation to their legal status and citizenship, security, and their ability to enjoy basic rights at home in Rakhine state.

UNHCR also urged the Myanmar Government to immediately provide full and unhindered access to refugees' places of origin in Rakhine, which would enable it to assess the situation and provide information to refugees about conditions in the places of origin, as well as to monitor any possible future return and reintegration of refugees.

"Another practical measure would be to ease restrictions on movement for the internally displaced persons encamped in the central townships of Rakhine state, which would also help to build confidence among refugees in Bangladesh," it added.

"Such concrete measures would help demonstrate to refugees that the Government of Myanmar is committed to a sustainable solution."

[More than 1,000 children in](#)

[northeastern Nigeria abducted by Boko Haram since 2013 – UNICEF](#)

At least 1,000 children have been abducted by the Boko Haram insurgent group in northeastern Nigeria since 2013 amid repeated attacks on schools, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said Friday, calling for an end to such violence and the release of those who have yet to be returned.

Since the conflict started in northeastern Nigeria nearly nine years ago, at least 2,295 teachers have been killed and more than 1,400 schools have been destroyed. Most of these schools have not reopened because of extensive damage or ongoing insecurity.

The issue of child abduction drew renewed attention when 276 girls were taken from a school in the town of Chibok in 2014.

Four years on from this tragic incident, more than 100 girls have yet to be returned to their families, said UNICEF.

The recent attack on a school in Dapchi, in which five girls lost their lives is just the latest indication that there are few safe spaces left for children in the northeast.

"These [repeated attacks against children](#) in schools are unconscionable," said UNICEF Representative in Nigeria Mohamed Malick Fall. "Children have the right to education and protection, and the classroom must be a place where they are safe from harm."

UNICEF stands with Nigerian authorities, who have made a commitment to make schools safer by protecting educational facilities from violence and military use during armed conflict.