

Efficient national tax systems critical for sustainable development and inclusive growth, urge UN, partners

Countries need to strengthen the effectiveness of their tax regimes to unleash much-needed domestic resources to ensure the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as the promotion of inclusive economic growth, United Nations and as key international economic and financial organizations have urged.

At a three-day conference, from 14-16 February, held at UN Headquarters, in New York, under the theme of taxation and SDGs, the United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) also urged support for developing countries to address tax transparency and base erosion and profit shifting, including on treaties.

“I call upon the international community to establish effective mechanisms to combat tax evasion, money laundering and illicit financial flows, so that developing countries could better mobilize their own resources,” the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, said at the opening of the forum

In the same vein, IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde underscored that funding the global development goals is an economic and ethical imperative and that it has major implications for taxation.

“Countries themselves need to raise more revenue in an equitable way. And the entire international community needs to eradicate tax evasion and tax avoidance,” she noted.

Domestic resource mobilization presents a challenge for developing countries, who need to raise tax revenue of at least 15 per cent of their gross domestic product (GDP) to be able to provide basic services, such as infrastructure, health care and public safety.

Presently, in almost 30 of the 75 poorest countries, tax revenues are below this threshold.

At the same time, more advanced economies need to pay greater attention to spillovers from their tax policies and step up their support for stronger tax systems in developing countries.

All countries and stakeholders need to continue working together on establishing a fair and efficient system of international taxation, including efforts to fight tax avoidance and tax evasion, the organizations urged.

At the same time, good governance is also critical.

According to Jim Kim, the President of the World Bank Group, fair and efficient tax systems, “combined with good service delivery and public accountability, build citizens’ trust in government and help societies prosper.”

“Effective taxation is essential to promote a more inclusive and sustainable growth. It is fundamental to making globalisation work for all,” added Secretary-General of the OECD, Ángel Gurría, noting that this is crucial for achieving the global development goals.

The conference, organized by the Platform for Collaboration on Tax (PCT), also provided a unique opportunity to address topics related to eradication of poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring prosperity for all.

It also provided an avenue to discuss the social dimensions of taxation, such as income and gender inequality and human development, as well as capacity development and international tax cooperation.

In a statement issued at the end of the conference, the four organizations announced the establishment of the Platform for Collaboration on Tax.

Subject to resource availability, the Platform intends to undertake or continue work in a range of areas, including strengthening international tax cooperation, building Institutions through medium term revenue strategies, and promoting partnerships and stakeholder engagement.

They also announced a list of immediate and concrete actions in these three areas, including the launch of a multi-year tax and SDGs programme, that will include components on taxation and health, education, gender, inequality, environment, and infrastructure; as well as establish a regular dialogue between the Platform and stakeholders – including, most importantly, the developing country.

- Read the full conference statement [here](#).

Haiti: UN determined to support authorities in strengthening rule of law

Strengthening the rule of law and improving the national police and the judicial system in Haiti will require political will on the part of the authorities, and the United Nations is determined to support this goal, said Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Bintou Keita.

Ms. Keita, who took up her post last September, traveled to Haiti from 5 to 9 February to support the efforts of the new UN Mission for the Support of Justice in Haiti (MINUJUSTH), to discuss the Mission's mandate with the Haitian Government and other partners, and to ensure that human rights are at the heart of the country's sustainable development agenda.

Established in October 2017, MINUJUSTH succeeded a previous UN peacekeeping mission, known as MINUSTAH, with a smaller mandate from the Security Council, focused on helping the Haitian Government strengthen its rule-of-law institutions.

In an interview with *UN News*, Ms. Keita said that the Security Council has given the Mission a brief two-year timeframe, starting in April 2018, to help Haiti overcome "systemic problems" and "to ensure that fundamental progress is taking place in the justice sector, the judiciary, security and human rights." She added that all interlocutors in Haiti agreed that the judiciary was the weakest of the three branches of Government.

Her visit focused mainly on discussing the milestones, or benchmarks, that will make it possible to measure the gradual assumption of responsibilities by the Haitian authorities of those critical rule-of-law issues, to allow the Security Council to withdraw the peacekeeping presence all together by Spring 2020.



MINUJUSTH/Leonora Baumann

UN Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Bintou Keita (2nd from left) meets with President Jovenel Moïse of Haiti in Port-au-Prince.

The Assistant Secretary-General also made a field visit to Jeremie, in the south-west of the country, to see and hear for herself the realities on the ground, where MINUJUSTH mobile teams engage with the local communities to hear how the justice system works in practice. She described her "emotional" visit to a civilian prison, where she saw the living conditions of the

prisoners, the majority of whom are on pre-trial detention.

“The overall system is really showing the symptoms of a sick system and dysfunctional system ... It’s been years since the diagnosis was made. What we need now is a real political will to address the issues that will allow to deliver real change and create trust between the people and the justice system,” she said.

The next steps for MINUJUSTH and Haiti, as Ms. Keita said in her joint statement on 9 February with President Jovenel Moïse, is to move forward in partnership and seize the opportunity of the Mission’s presence over the next two years to consolidate gains and to redouble efforts to achieve ambitious but realistic common goals, thus preparing the exit strategy for the peacekeeping operation.

Efforts will focus on the fight against impunity and corruption, on improvements to the judicial system, and on measures in the field of preventive detention.

According to Ms. Keita, strengthening the institutions of the rule of law is a long-term goal. In the short term, however, the goal is to “show visible results” so that people can regain confidence in the will of the authorities “to do things with the support of the international community.”

[UN development agency remains committed to support Lebanon, says agency head](#)

Reverberations of the Syrian conflict – which has now lasted longer than World War II – are being felt throughout the region, including in Lebanon, which shares most of its land border with the war-torn country, and hosts hundreds of thousands of its refugees, the head of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) warned on Friday.

“Almost seven years into the Syrian conflict, Lebanon remains at the forefront of one of the worst humanitarian crises of our time and continues to show exceptional commitment and solidarity to people displaced by the war in Syria,” said Achim Steiner, the UNDP Administrator, [wrapping up](#) his first official visit to the country.

“[We] remain committed to supporting the Lebanese Government and local communities hosting refugees in their efforts to maintain stability and to continue its support to local communities hosting refugees.”

The ongoing Syria crisis has impacted Lebanon's social services, infrastructure and jobs.

Almost seven years into the Syrian conflict, Lebanon remains at the forefront of one of the worst humanitarian crises of our time –
UNDP Administrator Achim Steiner

During his visit, Mr. Steiner met with the Lebanese Prime Minister, Saad Hariri, as well as many other senior officials and discussed the challenges the nation faces, seven years into the Syria crisis.

The UNDP chief also visited Bourj Hammoud, an area hosting close to 20,000 Syrian refugees, and saw the impact of the crisis at the local level and how the Lebanese community and Syrian refugees manage day to day issues such as their children's education, earning an income and accessing essential health services.

"Every refugee would like to return home but, in the meantime, until conditions permit, our role is to assist Lebanon in managing the global public good it provides," he said, underscoring UNDP's support for the upcoming Paris and Brussels Conferences.

During his visit, Mr. Steiner also attended a roundtable discussion on Lebanon's efforts in pursuit of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with officials from the Parliament and Government, alongside representatives of civil society and the private sector.

[In crisis-torn eastern DR Congo, UN food relief agency expands operations to stem hunger](#)

Escalating violence, daunting logistical challenges and insufficient funding have prompted the United Nations food relief agency to broaden its emergency operation in the war-ravaged Kasai region in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

To prevent famine in the Kasai region, the World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) is stepping-up cash distributions to the most vulnerable, and specialist support to check acute malnutrition in women and young children.

"The nutrition and [cash programmes are life-saving](#), and must quickly expand," Claude Jibidar, WFP's Representative in DRC, said Friday.

Since last week's cash initiative launch – a cost-efficient alternative to in-kind support that allows beneficiaries to buy what they want in recovering local markets – 38,000 people have each received the equivalent of \$15 for a month, enough to meet their basic food needs with the intention to more than double that reach in the coming weeks.

“We're not doing nearly as much as we could in Kasai because the obstacles are huge,” Mr. Jibidar continued, “but unless we collectively rise to the challenges, many more people, including the weakest women and children, will die.”

Plumpy'Sup, a micronutrient-rich ready-to-use supplementary food, has been airlifted from France to enable a significant scale-up of WFP's nutrition interventions in Kasai. Up from 21,000 in the final quarter of last year, 56,000 malnourished children were reached there in January with the expectation of a 20,000 a month increase to 140,000 by June.

Following the eruption of brutal political and ethnic violence in mid-2016, which claimed countless lives, razed entire villages and forced hundreds of thousands of families from their homes, WFP launched its assistance programme.

Assessments showed that 3.2 million people, a quarter of the region's population of mostly subsistence farmers, were desperately short of food.

AUDIO CLIP: Claude Jibidar, WFP Country Director for Democratic Republic of Congo, by UN News – Audio

With no prior presence in Kasai, between September and December WFP achieved a tenfold increase in the number of people receiving food rations – to 400,000. However, lagging donations forced cereal, beans, vegetable oil and salt rations to be halved in November.

Continued funding constraints, an upsurge in fighting between pro- and anti-Government forces and a rapid, rainy season deterioration of the already poor road network saw the number receiving half-rations drop to 130,000 in January.

“That reversal has to be corrected, and quickly,” continued Mr. Jibidar.

Limited funding is also a major challenge in the eastern DRC provinces of Tanganyika and South Kivu, where WFP is scaling up to meet the needs of growing conflict-displaced populations as part of a broad push by UN agencies and non-governmental organizations.

“We've shown we have capacity to deliver, but to reach sufficient scale we need the fighting to stop and donors to step up,” he concluded.

[New UN high-profile panel set to take on noncommunicable diseases, cause of seven in 10 deaths globally](#)

Bold, innovative solutions are now on the table to accelerate the prevention and control of deadly noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) – such as heart and lung disease, cancers and diabetes – as a new United Nations health agency high-level commission gets set to begin its work.

“NCDs are the world’s [leading avoidable killers](#), but the world is not doing enough to prevent and control them,” said Tabaré Vázquez, President of Uruguay and co-chair of the World Health Organization’s ([WHO](#)) Independent Global High-level Commission on NCDs.

“We have to ask ourselves if we want to condemn future generations from dying too young, and living lives of ill health and lost opportunity. The answer clearly is ‘no.’ But there is so much we can do to safeguard and care for people, from protecting everyone from tobacco, harmful use of alcohol, and unhealthy foods and sugary drinks, to giving people the health services they need to stop NCDs in their tracks,” he added.

The NCD Commission is also co-chaired by President Maithripala Sirisena of Sri Lanka; President Sauli Niinistö of Finland; Veronika Skvortsova, Minister of Healthcare of the Russian Federation; and Sania Nishtar, former Federal Minister of Pakistan.

Each year, seven in 10 deaths globally are from NCDs, mostly from tobacco and alcohol use, unhealthy diets and physical inactivity.

More than 15 million people between 30 and 70 years old die annually from NCDs. Low- and lower-middle income countries are increasingly affected – with half of premature deaths from NCDs occurring in those countries.

“For the first time in history, more people are dying of noncommunicable diseases, such as heart disease and diabetes, than infectious diseases. This loss of human life spares no one – rich or poor, young or old – and it imposes heavy economic costs on nations,” said Michael R. Bloomberg, WHO Global Ambassador for Noncommunicable Diseases and Commission member.

Many lives can be saved from NCDs through early diagnosis and improved access to quality and affordable treatment, as well as a whole-of-government approach to reduce the main risk factors.

“The more public support we can build for government policies that are proven to save lives – as this Commission will work to do – the more progress we’ll be able to make around the world,” Mr. Bloomberg added.

The Commission was established by WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom

Ghebreyesus and runs until October 2019. It will contribute actionable recommendations to the Third UN General Assembly High-level Meeting on NCDs scheduled for later this year.

“Everybody deserves the right to a healthy life,” Mr. Tedros stressed. “We can beat the drivers of the NCD epidemic, which are among the world’s main obstacles to health.”

Dr. Nishtar argued that while there have been improvements in some countries and regions, the overall rate of progress has been unacceptably slow, “resulting in too many people suffering and dying needlessly from NCDs, and leaving families, communities and governments to bear the human and economic costs.”

“This year, governments will be held to account on progress they have made in protecting their citizens from NCDs,” she underscored.