

Environment and health at increasing risk from growing weight of 'e-waste'

To highlight the rising challenge posed by mountains of discarded electronics worldwide, seven UN entities came together to launch the report at the [World Economic Forum](#) in Davos, Switzerland, on Thursday, in a bid to offer some solutions to a behemoth-sized problem that is making the world sicker and adding to environmental degradation.

The joint report, entitled, "A New Circular Vision for Electronics – Time for a Global Reboot", calls for a new vision for e-waste based on the "circular economy" concept, whereby a regenerative system can minimize waste and energy leakage.

"E-waste is a growing [global challenge](#) that poses a serious threat to the environment and human health worldwide", said Stephan Sicars, Director of the Department of Environment at the UN Industrial Development Organization. "To minimize this threat, UNIDO works with various UN agencies and other partners on a range of e-waste projects, all of which are underpinned by a circular economy approach".

According to the report, a deliberative process must be instilled to change the system – one that collaborates with major brands, small and medium-sized enterprises, academia, trade unions and civil society.

Walking the talk

Considerable work is already under way to harness a circular economy. For example, the Nigerian Government, the Global Environment Facility and UN Environment announced a \$2 million investment to formalize an e-waste recycling industry in Nigeria. The new investment will leverage over \$13 million in additional financing from the private sector.

"Thousands of tonnes of e-waste is disposed of by the world's poorest workers in the worst of conditions, putting their health and lives at risk", maintained Guy Ryder, Director-General, [International Labour Organization](#) (ILO). "We need better e-waste strategies and green standards as well as closer collaboration between governments, employers and unions to make the circular economy work for both people and planet."

Despite growing e-waste, "A New Circular Vision" points to the importance of technologies from the so-called Internet of Things – a network of devices that contain electronics and the connectivity that allows them to exchange data – through to cloud computing advances, which can all result in smarter recycling and tracking of e-waste.

"A circular economy brings with it tremendous environmental and economic

benefits for us all” said Joyce Msuya, Acting Executive Director, UN Environment Programme (UN Environment). “Our planet’s survival will depend on how well we retain the value of products within the system by extending their life.”

The report supports the work of the E-waste Coalition, which includes International Labour Organization ([ILO](#)); International Telecommunication Union ([ITU](#)); United Nations Environment Programme ([UN Environment](#)); United Nations Industrial Development Organization ([UNIDO](#)); United Nations Institute for Training and Research ([UNITAR](#)); United Nations University ([UNU](#)) and Secretariats of the Basel and Stockholm Conventions.

[‘Forgotten crisis’ in Cameroon, with attacks on the rise, millions in need of ‘lifesaving assistance’](#)

Around 4.3 million Cameroonians, mostly women and children, are now in need of lifesaving assistance, the UN announced on Thursday, [presenting it’s 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan](#) for the West African country, in coordination with the Government and aid partners.

[UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Cameroon](#), Ms. Allegra Baiocchi, and Cameroon’s Civil Protection Director, Ms. Yap Mariatou, warned at the launch in Geneva, that there was a drastic increase in humanitarian need across the country.

Cameroon today can no longer be a forgotten crisis; it needs to be high on our agenda – *UN Humanitarian Coordinator, Allegra Baiocchi*

“Hundreds of thousands of people on Cameroon’s territory need urgent assistance and protection,” Ms. Baiocchi said, adding that “attacks against civilians have increased and many conflict-affected people are surviving in harsh conditions without humanitarian assistance due to the dramatic underfunding of the response. Cameroon today can no longer be a forgotten crisis; it needs to be high on our agenda.”

With needs rising by 31 per cent in a year, the UN today estimates that around 4.3 million people in Cameroon – one in six people and mostly women and children – require lifesaving assistance.

The joint Humanitarian Response Plan 2019 seeks \$299 million to assist 2.3 million vulnerable people, more than half of those in need. Last year, a \$320

million response plan for Cameroon was only 40 per cent funded.

The aggravation of the conflict in western regions is the main driver behind the increase, with armed attacks in the far north, and new refugees coming from the Central African Republic also increasing demand for urgent aid.

Insecurity and violence in these regions have uprooted 437,000 people from their homes and forced over 32,000 to seek refuge in neighbouring Nigeria. Four million people are affected by the conflict in Cameroon's west, says the UN.

In addition, due to the deteriorating situation in northeast Nigeria, more than 10,000 new refugees arrived in Cameroon in 2018, bringing the number of Nigerian refugees to 100,000.

Needs 'likely to increase in coming years'

"The Government of Cameroon is responsible for the protection and wellbeing of its people and has been at the forefront of the response with its national and international partners," added Ms. Yap Mariatou. "We acknowledge the scale of the different crises we face, and we encourage all the actors to work in close partnership to address the needs of Cameroonians and of the people we host."

"Humanitarian needs are likely to increase in coming years," said Ms. Baiocchi, adding that budgets had failed to increase adequately in recent years.

"Underfunding means we cannot do all we can to make a difference in the life of most vulnerable people across Cameroon, whether it is the girl who is missing school due to violence, the displaced mother struggling to feed her children, or the father who has lost his entire family."

'Education transforms lives' says UN chief on first-ever International Day

"Education transforms lives", United Nations [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) said, recounting his personal story of teaching in "the slums of Lisbon" where he saw first-hand that "education is an engine for poverty eradication and a force for peace".

At the heart of the SDGs today, education serves as a basis for achieving the other goals, including reducing inequalities; improving health; achieving gender equality; fighting hate speech, xenophobia and intolerance; protecting the planet's resources and nurturing global citizenship.

Education is a human right, a public good and a public responsibility –*UNESCO chief*

“Yet”, the UN chief flagged, “at least 262 million children, adolescents and youth are out of school, most of them girls. Millions more who attend school are not mastering the basics”.

Calling it “a violation of their human right to education” he stressed that the world could not afford a generation of youth who lack the necessary skills to compete in the 21st century economy, “nor can we afford to leave behind half of humanity”.

“Let us prioritize education as a public good; support it with cooperation, partnerships and funding; and recognize that leaving no one behind starts with education” concluded the Secretary-General.

For her part, Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), called the Day an occasion to “reaffirm fundamental principles”.

“Education is a [human right](#), a public good and a public responsibility” she said, calling it “the most powerful force in our hands to ensure significant improvements in health, to stimulate economic growth, to unlock the potential and innovation we need to build more resilient and sustainable societies”.

Guterres in Davos: ‘Dysfunctional’ response to common problems, shows need for effective multilateralism

In his “State of the World” address, delivered at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland, Mr. Guterres gave a comprehensive assessment of current global risks and challenges, while also noting “a wind of hope” for potential conflict resolution in the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Yemen and Syria.

Much greater solidarity is needed to counter the many challenges facing the world, he insisted, highlighting the “paralysis” of the [UN Security Council](#) on certain issues, and the fact that relations between the world’s three superpowers – China, Russia and the United States – had “never been as dysfunctional” as they are today.

In light of this “multipolar” situation, and the involvement of other States such as Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia in the Syrian conflict, Mr. Guterres called for greater involvement in multilateral organizations, suggesting that

it was an absence of these mechanisms that had led to the First World War.

“If one looks at global politics and geo-political tensions, the global economy and megatrends including climate change, the movement of people and digitalization, the truth is that they are more and more interlinked... but the responses are fragmented,” he said, warning that “if these are not reversed, it’s a recipe for disaster”.

Climate change ‘running faster than we are’

Focusing on climate change as one of the key challenges facing the world, the UN chief insisted that “we are losing the race” to manage it.

“[Climate change](#) is running faster than we are,” he said, highlighting that even though the reality was “proving to be worse than what science has foreseen” as the world experiences ever-warmer temperatures, political will to do something about it was “slowing down”.

And in a context of continuing national subsidies for fossil fuel-burning industries, only limited carbon pricing and persistent climate change doubters, Mr. Guterres regretted the fact that this should be so, at a time when the “technology is on our side and when we see more and more the business community ready to respond in a positive way and the civil society more and more engaged”.

Economic dark clouds

Turning to the world’s economy, the UN chief noted that although global growth was “acceptable”, there were nonetheless “dark clouds on the horizon.”

These were being encouraged by trade disputes – which were “essentially a political problem”, he maintained – along with higher levels of debt than before the 2008-9 financial crisis.

Both issues prevented countries from responding to emerging crises and implementing major infrastructure projects that were necessary for sustainable development, Mr. Guterres explained, noting also a growing lack of trust with governments “and international organizations like ours”.

“If one looks at the shutdowns and the Brexit saga, there is a certain sense that political systems do not know exactly what to do when dealing with problems that have strong economic impacts,” he said. “That is a factor of lack of confidence and a factor of lack of confidence creates of increases instability in the markets.”

On globalization and technological progress, which had brought “fantastic improvements” to many, Mr. Guterres noted that these developments had increased inequality and marginalized millions, both within countries, and between them.

With disillusionment the result, and amid the mass movement of people in search of a better life or shelter, the UN Secretary-General insisted that

although he firmly believed a coordinated and global response was the answer, more needed to be done to convince those who felt differently.

It's 'not enough, to vilify populists and nationalists'

"It's also not enough to vilify those that disagree with this and just consider them as nationalists or populists or whatever," he said. "We need to understand the grievances and the root causes why large sectors of the population in different parts of the world disagree with us. And we need to address those root causes and we need to show these people that we care for them."

Achieving this cannot be done by governments or international organizations alone, Mr. Guterres said, before calling for more space for other actors to get involved in a revived 21st century multilateral model.

"We need to work together. There is no way we can do isolated responses to the problems we face, they are all interlinked... It needs to be a multilateralism in which States are part of the system, but it needs more and more the business community, civil society, academia – they are all part of the world to analyze problems, to define strategies, to define policies and then to implement them."

Key to show 'added value' of UN in surge for diplomacy

Among his other priorities, the UN Secretary-General underlined his wish to show the "added value" of the [United Nations](#).

He pointed to the recent meeting on climate change in Katowice, Poland, where Member States agreed on the basis to move forward on the 2015 [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change, at which parties undertook to limit global temperature increase to 1.5C.

"Everybody thought that Katowice would be a failure; it was not," he said. "We managed to approve the work programme of the Paris Agreement. We need more ambition... but it was possible to bring together countries that were in a totally different position to at least agree on the basis to move forward."

On Yemen, he insisted that the UN was pushing for a "surge in diplomacy for peace" after a first ceasefire accord was signed in Sweden at the end of last year, while "many other situations have been improving in recent times" he said, including South Sudan and Ethiopia.

"We are there, we are doing things that are necessary, and nobody can replace the United Nations in this way," Mr. Guterres said, adding that the UN was still responsible for distributing more than half the aid in the world today.

Extreme weather hit 60 million people in 2018, no part of the world spared

With some 60 million people affected by extreme weather in 2018, according to a new study, the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction ([UNISDR](#)) called for better management of the issue worldwide, in a statement published on Thursday.

The study cited by the agency, from the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters ([CRED](#)) – showed that earthquakes and tsunamis claimed more lives than any other type of hazard, with over 10,000 lives lost in the last year; whilst floods, droughts, storms and wildfires affected more than 57 million.

Floods affected the largest number of people – over 35 million – with 23 million in the Indian State of Kerala alone. Storms are expected to be the costliest type of disaster once final economic losses are compiled: the cost of the damage caused by Hurricane Michael, which inundated the eastern seaboard of the United States, is estimated to reach around \$16 billion.

2018 was a record-breaking year when it came to wildfires, with the US experiencing its deadliest outbreak in over a century (it was also the costliest on record), and Greece suffering a record number of casualties from wildfires, with 126 losing their lives.

As for drought, over 9 million people were affected worldwide, with the Kenyan population accounting for a third of the total, followed by Central American countries (2.5 million people), including migration hotspots Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua.

The head of CRED, Debarati Guha-Sapir, acknowledged that the human impact of all disasters, particularly drought and extreme temperatures, is poorly reported, especially in low-income countries. Innovative approaches that measure progress and report on specific [Sustainable Development Goal](#) targets need to be urgently addressed by appropriate UN agencies, she added.

Mami Mizutori, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction and head of UNISDR, said that, with time running out to limit global warming to 1.5°C or even 2°C, climate change adaptation needs to be a high priority, citing measures such as “reducing disaster risk in our cities, avoiding the creation of new risk by better land use, stronger planning regulations and building codes, safeguarding protective eco-systems, reducing poverty, and taking active measures to reduce exposure to rising sea levels.”