

Business-as-usual not an option with future global food security in jeopardy, cautions UN agency

22 February 2017 – Warning that diminishing natural resources and a changing climate have put humankind's future ability to feed itself "in jeopardy," the United Nations underlined today that while the planet still has the potential to produce enough food, "major transformations" are needed to make production sustainable and to ensure that all of humanity benefits.

In The Future of Food and Agriculture: Trends and Challenges report, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) highlights that while "very real and significant" progress in reducing hunger has been achieved over the past 30 years, these have often come at a heavy cost to nature.

"Almost half of the forests that once covered the Earth are now gone. Groundwater sources are being depleted rapidly. Biodiversity has been deeply eroded," noted the report.

"[As a result,] planetary boundaries may well be surpassed, if current trends continue," added FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva, underlining the gravity of the situation.

With global population estimated to reach 10 billion by 2050, world-wide demand for agricultural products could be pushed by as much as 50 per cent above current levels, intensifying pressures on already-strained natural resources.

At the same time, the report argues, greater numbers of people will be eating fewer cereals and larger amounts of meat, fruits, vegetables and processed food – a result of an ongoing global dietary transition that will further add to those pressures, driving more deforestation, land degradation and greenhouse gas emissions.

According to FAO, without a push to invest in and reorganizing food systems, far too many people will remain hungry in 2030 – the year by which the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to eradicate chronic food insecurity and malnutrition.

"Without additional efforts to promote pro-poor development, reduce inequalities and protect vulnerable people, more than 600 million people would still be undernourished in 2030," the report noted.

In fact, the current rate of progress would not even be enough to eradicate hunger by 2050, it added.

Climate change will affect every aspect of food production

On top of these challenges, climate change adds a new level of complexity.

Its increasing impacts are leading to greater variability of precipitation and increasing the frequency of droughts and floods.

RELATED: Drought drives food price spike in East Africa, UN warns

In the midst of this multifaceted issue, the UN agency is advocating for a shift to more sustainable food systems that make more efficient use of land, water and other inputs, and for sharply reducing the use of fossil fuels in agriculture.



Empowering small-scale farmers and providing them better access to information, markets and technologies is key to ensuring future food security. Photo: FAO

Reducing fossil fuel dependency will also help cut agricultural green-house gas emissions, conserve biodiversity, and reduce waste, it added.

Furthermore, investments in agriculture and agri-food systems, as well as in research and development, are needed to sustainably boost food production and help producers better cope with water scarcity and other climate change impacts.

The social dimension to food security

Also in the report, FAO has called for preserving and enhancing livelihoods of small-scale and family farmers, and ensuring access to food for the most vulnerable.

Amid the core challenge of having to produce more with less, it has underlined that the twin-track approach is needed to immediately tackle undernourishment, and that pro-poor investments in productive activities – especially agriculture and in rural economies – could sustainably increase income-earning opportunities of the poor.

RELATED: UN agency urges support for small farmers to help them not just get by, but thrive and feed others

In addition to boosting production and resilience, it is equally important to create food supply chains that better connect farmers in low- and middle-income countries to urban markets.

“Major transformations in agricultural systems, rural economies and natural resource management will be needed if we are to meet the multiple challenges before us and realize the full potential of food and agriculture to ensure a secure and healthy future for all people and the entire planet,” read the report.

“Business-as-usual” is not an option.

Humanitarian agencies seek \$1 billion to provide life-saving aid to millions in northeast Nigeria – UN

22 February 2017 – As relief organizations increase response to the humanitarian emergency in the north-east of Nigeria, timely donor support amounting to a little over \$1 billion is required to sustain life-saving assistance to millions people devastated by Boko Haram-linked violence, the United Nations relief aid wing has said.

“If the resources do not arrive in time, one in five children suffering severe acute malnutrition could die,” said Peter Lundberg, the Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator for Nigeria in a press release issued yesterday by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

“The likelihood of a child with severe acute malnutrition surviving is nine times less than a properly nourished child,” he added.

According to OCHA, the eight-year-long conflict has left some 8.5 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in the worst-affected states of Nigeria’s north-east. In the coming months, around 5.1 million people will face severe food insecurity in the region, where some 1.8 million people have been displaced and millions are exposed to violence and abuse.

“Food assistance alone will cost \$1 million a day to avoid famine in a region where 450,000 children under five will suffer from severe acute malnutrition this year,” said Mr. Lundberg. “Sustained and timely financial support is needed to maintain the scale-up in operations desperately needed in the north-east of Nigeria.”

RELATED: UN food relief agency chief welcomes progress on anti-hunger programmes in north-east Nigeria

During a recent visit by representatives of 12 donor countries and agencies to Borno state, in the run up to the 24 February Humanitarian Conference on Nigeria and Lake Chad region, they lauded the scale-up of humanitarian operations in the north-east and emphasized the need for more funding, a stance the humanitarian community in Nigeria concurs with.

“We are grateful to our donors who have enabled us scale up the response and appreciate their continued commitment. We look forward to receiving the needed resources to implement the 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan for Nigeria,” Mr. Lundberg said.

'We cannot give up the fight' to end child recruitment, says UNICEF chief

21 February 2017 – Even though over the past 10 years, more than 65,000 children have been released from armed forces and armed groups, tens of thousands of boys and girls under the age of 18 continue to be used in conflicts around the world, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said today.

"[It] is not only about looking back at what has been accomplished but looking forward to the work that remains to be done to support the children of war," said UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake as global leaders gather in the French capital on the anniversary of the Paris commitments to end the use of children in conflict.

Adopted 10 years ago, the Paris commitments, together with the Paris principles and guidelines, lay out guidance for protecting children from recruitment and use by armed forces or armed groups, and assisting their release and reintegration, with other vulnerable children affected by armed conflict in their communities.

According to UNICEF, exact data on the number of children used and recruited in armed conflict is difficult to ascertain because of the unlawful nature of child recruitment. But estimates indicate that tens of thousands under the age of 18 are used in conflicts worldwide.

For instance, since 2013 an estimated 17,000 children have been recruited in South Sudan and up to 10,000 have been recruited in the Central African Republic (CAR). Similarly, nearly 2,000 children were recruited by Boko Haram, in Nigeria and neighbouring countries, last year alone, and there have been nearly 1,500 cases of child recruitment in Yemen since the conflict escalated in March 2015.

There has also been progress: since it was adopted, the number of countries endorsing the Paris commitments has nearly doubled from 58 countries in 2007 to 105 at present, signalling an increasing global commitment to end the use of children in conflict.

Globally, more than 65,000 children have been released from armed forces and armed groups, including 20,000 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo); nearly 9,000 in the Central African Republic; and over 1,600 children in Chad.

But more needs to be done.

Seeking to build on the current momentum, the Paris International Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Children in Armed Conflicts is urging for

unconditional release of all children – without exception – and putting an end to child recruitment.

It is also calling increased resources to help reintegrate and educate children who have been released, and urgent action to protect internally displaced children, child refugees and migrants.

“As long as children are still affected by the fighting, we cannot give up the fight for the children,” Mr. Lake added.

[‘Time lost means lives lost,’ warns UN aid chief, releasing funds to tackle drought in Ethiopia](#)

21 February 2017 – The top United Nations humanitarian official today released \$18.5 million from the organization’s Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to enable critical aid for more than 785,000 people suffering from hunger, malnutrition and severe water shortages in Ethiopia’s Somali region – the worst drought-stricken part of the country.

“I was recently in Ethiopia’s Somali region, where I saw the devastating impact this drought is having on people’s lives, livestock and livelihoods,” said UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O’Brien.

“Time lost means lives lost so I am releasing CERF funding to provide urgent aid to people in need – now – when they need it most.”

According to CERF, the latest allocation will immediately provide affected people with access to water and health, nutritional and agricultural services. The funds will also help pastoral communities, who are most in need, and thousands of whom have been forced to move in search of water and pasture.

This latest drought struck Ethiopia before it could recover from the effects of a devastating El Niño-induced drought in 2015 and 2016 which left millions in urgent need of aid.

However, the grant covers only a small portion of what is required in 2017 to address rising challenges. Furthermore, according to current estimates more than 5.6 million people in the country are in desperate need of basic necessities.

“Humanitarians will use these funds to save lives, but it is a bridge that must be matched and surpassed urgently. Millions of people’s lives, livelihoods and wellbeing depend on continued donor support,” noted Mr.

O'Brien.

The drought is also one of the worst to hit the Horn of Africa in decades. According to the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the region received only a quarter of the expected rainfall between October and December last year, leaving over 17 million people in Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda in crisis and emergency food insecurity levels.

RELATED: Warning of dire food shortages in Horn of Africa, UN agency calls for urgent action

CERF also highlighted that as the scale and intensity of emergencies around the world continue to increase, the Fund needs to be strengthened so that aid can reach people, whenever and wherever crises hit.

To this end, In December last year, UN General Assembly endorsed a recommendation by then Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's to double CERF's annual target to \$1 billion by 2018.

[Yemen's brutal two-year conflict forcing displaced to return home amid persisting risks – UN](#)

21 February 2017 – The complex crisis in Yemen continues to deepen, with United Nations agencies reporting today that perhaps one million people who had fled for safety are returning to their homes mainly due to a lack of access to income and basic services in the areas of displacement, warning that returnees often find the situation just as bad.

It's testament to how catastrophic the situation in Yemen has become, that those displaced by the conflict are now returning home because life in the areas to which they had fled for safety is just as abysmal as in the areas from which they fled," said Ayman Gharaibeh, the Representative for Yemen of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in a joint press release issued with the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

These returns cannot be viewed as sustainable," Mr. Gharaibeh added, explaining that people often return to homes that have been damaged and to areas lacking essential services, and are often forced to flee again.

A multi-sectoral location assessment report released today, and a periodically updated population movement tracking report published last month, show that there are currently two million internally displaced people

(IDPs) across Yemen and one million IDP returnees.

As conditions across the country further deteriorate, many more IDPs are contemplating a return home, where challenging security and socio-economic conditions persist. About 40 per cent of key informants indicate that IDPs now intend to return home within the next three months. The reports highlight a lack of access to income and basic services in areas of displacement as the main reasons for pushing IDPs to return to the areas of their origin.

All but one Yemen's governorates now affected by devastating conflict

Mr. Gharaibeh noted that all of Yemen's governorates, with the exception of the island of Socotra, have been affected by conflict.

The overwhelming majority of Yemen's one million IDP returnees have returned to Aden, Amanat Al Asimah, Taizz, Lahj and Shabwah, which have been particularly impacted by hostilities and insecurity, he explained.

Yemen's local communities are also under intense strain with alarming scarcities of food and insufficient access to water and sanitation services. Some 84 per cent of Yemen's two million IDPs have been displaced for more than a year and scarce resources are increasingly overstretched.

IOM and all partners must scale up their response to support those newly displaced as well as those whose displacement is becoming increasingly protracted with shifting needs, said IOM Yemen's Chief of Mission, Laurent De Boeck.

Weapons must fall silent to avert famine

In a separate statement, the Humanitarian Coordinator in Yemen, Jamie McGoldrick, warned against the impact of increased fighting along Yemen's west coast on the food crisis.

I urgently call on all parties to the conflict and on those that have influence over the parties to facilitate the rapid entry of critical life-saving food staples into all Yemeni ports, he said, noting that over 17 million people are frequently forced to skip meals and seven million Yemenis do not know where their next meal will come from and are ever closer to starvation.

Moreover, the availability of food in markets and the food pipeline are at imminent risk. Food shortages are widespread, food and fuel prices are rising, there are disruptions to agricultural production, and purchasing power is plummeting, especially brought about by the lack of salary payments in the public sector for over six months.

And given that the country is 80-90 per cent dependent on imported food staples, he said he is compelled to raise the alarm, as such factors, if left unabated, could combine to accelerate the onset of famine.

The best means to prevent famine in Yemen is for weapons to fall silent across the country and for the parties to the conflict to return to the

negotiating table,” he said.



Source: OCHA 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan for Yemen

UN agencies support nationwide polio immunization campaign

Meanwhile, a nationwide polio immunization campaign was launched yesterday in Yemen by national health authorities with support from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), aiming to immunize about five million children under the age of five.

More than 40,000 health workers are taking part in the three-day campaign.

“WHO is working closely with UNICEF and health authorities to keep Yemen polio-free. The threat of virus importation is serious and this campaign aims to curb any possible return of the virus to Yemen,” said WHO Acting Representative in Yemen, Nevio Zagaria.

This is the first polio immunization campaign since April 2016. The security situation in Yemen has limited accessibility of many parts of the country, leaving many children at risk of vaccine-preventable diseases.