

The future of the High Street

The changes to rates has once again highlighted the rapid changes on UK High Streets. Large centres with numerous coffee shops, restaurants, boutiques and the main multiples are usually trading successfully. The Metro Centre, Oxford Street, Bicester Village, Meadowhall and the other well established shopping centres are flourishing. People want a good range of shops, good brands, and the capacity to make a half day or a day of it with stops for food and drink. Big new shopping centres like Westfield are still being added, with the redevelopment of Birmingham Bullring and other leading City retail destinations.

In contrast many of the smaller High Streets are suffering from the attack of internet shopping offering keener prices, and destination shopping offering more choice. Many a small butcher, baker, fishmonger and green grocer has given up the struggle to compete with the volumes, prices and freshness of the leading supermarkets. In their turn the large supermarkets are under strong competitive pressure from the discounters, who target a narrower range of popular products so they can use their dominant volume in these items to command great prices from suppliers.

The advent of new or expanded and revamped destination shopping centres, and more space for the main discounters has intensified the bricks and mortar shopping competition. The large food retailers have added to the complexity of their tasks by opening a range of local smaller stores, seeking to tap into the narrow range essentials that many people buy daily or several times a week at a convenience store near their homes.

The changes to rate valuations seek to mirror the changing fortunes, but some think they throw up anomalies. The aim is to reduce or remove business rates from small independents, to cut the tax on those many shopping centres with falling revenues or weaker margins, whilst boosting the tax on the successful destination shopping areas. We will find out how successful this has been in the debate that has been unleashed by the new rating schedules.

'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.

[‘Time running out’ for 1.4 million children in ‘man-made’ crises in Africa, Yemen – UNICEF](#)

21 February 2017 – Almost 1.4 million children are at imminent risk of death due to severe acute malnutrition this year, as famine threatens in Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen, warned the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), urging prompt action to save them.

‘Time running out’ for 1.4 million children in ‘man-made’ crises in Africa, Yemen – UNICEF

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“We can still save many lives. The severe malnutrition and looming famine are largely man-made,” said UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake in a news release issued by the UN agency today.

“Our common humanity demands faster action,” he underscored.

According to UNICEF, as many as 462,000 children in Yemen – where a conflict has been raging for the past two years – are currently suffering from severe acute malnutrition. This figure has risen nearly 200 per cent since 2014.

Similarly, in conflict affected parts of northeast Nigeria, including Adamawa, Borno and Yobe, the number of children with severe acute malnutrition is expected to reach 450,000. According to a famine early warning system, the famine likely occurred in some previously inaccessible areas of Borno, and it is likely ongoing, and will continue, in other areas which remain beyond humanitarian reach.

Furthermore, in Somalia, droughts threaten an already fragile population battered by decades of conflict: almost half the population (6.2 million people) faces acute food insecurity and is in need of urgent relief, 185,000 among them children suffering from severe acute malnutrition. There are fears that the number could rise to 270,000 in the next few months.

In South Sudan, a famine was recently declared in parts of the country, adding to a humanitarian situation already complicated due to poverty and

insecurity. Over 270,000 children are severely malnourished in the country and the total number of food insecure people across the country is expected to rise once the lean season sets in.

RELATED: Famine declared in region of South Sudan – UN

In its response, UNICEF, working with partners, has been providing therapeutic treatment to 220,000 severely malnourished children in Nigeria, over 200,000 in both South Sudan and Somalia, and 320,000 children in Yemen.

However, more action is urgently needed.

“Time is running out,” said Mr. Lake. “We must not repeat the tragedy of the 2011 famine in the Horn of Africa.”

[UN refugee agency focuses on sheltering displaced as Iraqi offensive moves to west Mosul](#)

21 February 2017 – The United Nations refugee agency is focusing efforts on camp construction in and around the Iraqi city of Mosul, where renewed fighting could displace up to 250,000 people.

“With the predicted exodus of up to a quarter of a million people, it will be impossible to accommodate such large numbers on existing land,” said Matthew Saltmarsh, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), at the regular press briefing in Geneva.

Almost 217,000 people have fled from the eastern sections of Mosul since the military offensive to oust Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) terrorists began on 17 October 2016. About 160,000 remain displaced while others have returned to their homes in the now Government-controlled areas.

The spokesperson said UNHCR has eight camps open or completed at present, and one under construction. “We are planning for the start of work at another site in Hamam Al Alil, south of Mosul,” he said.

The Iraqi Government has decided, initially, to transport people displaced from western Mosul to camps in the east while new capacity is being added in the south.

UNHCR has been asked to support a new site at Hamam Al-Alil, 20 km south of Mosul. It is expected that many of those fleeing western Mosul will reach there on foot. This site will provide shelter for up to 60,000 people.

According to reports and testimonies, conditions in the densely-populated

west of the city are worsening, and hence concerns are mounting for the well-being of civilians. There are shortages of food, water, fuel and medicine. Half of all food shops have closed and most people can only access untreated water.

Food prices are skyrocketing and there are reports of families burning furniture, clothing and plastic to stay warm.

Mr. Saltmarsh said that during the battle for eastern Mosul, the protection of civilians was prioritized in military planning and activities, and UNHCR hopes this principle will continue to be upheld.

However, he added, the new battle will be different as the city's west is densely populated, with many narrow streets, and fighting will be street by street. Armed groups have built a network of tunnels.

Insecurity and recent suicide attacks in eastern Mosul have resulted in some families – who had opted to return to their homes – coming back to the camps in search of safety, he said.