

[Around 22 million children could soon starve without urgent aid, UNICEF warns](#)

28 March 2017 – Millions of children are on the brink of starvation in the worst humanitarian crisis in decades, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) today warned, urgently calling for nearly \$255 million to respond to immediate needs in northeast Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen.

“Time is running out,” UNICEF said, noting the threat from famine, drought and war.

Some 22 million children are hungry, sick, displaced and out of school in the four countries, according to the UN agency. Nearly 1.4 million are at imminent risk of death this year from severe malnutrition.

“We learned from Somalia in 2011 that by the time famine was announced, untold numbers of children had already died. That can’t happen again,” said Manuel Fontaine, UNICEF Director of Emergency Programmes.

Famine was declared a month ago in South Sudan, and will likely be declared soon in Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen where fighting has pushed people off their farmland and droughts have destroyed their animals and what is left of crops.

“Children can’t wait for yet another famine declaration before we take action,” Mr. Fontaine said.



A mother holds up an empty cooking pot as she crouches alongside her daughter inside their makeshift home at a settlement near the town of Ainabo, Somalia, Thursday 9 March 2017. Photo: UNICEF/Kate Holt

The UN agency is calling for close to \$255 million to provide 22 million children with food, water, health, education and protection services for just the next few months, according to a new funding update.

The majority of that funding will go towards nutrition programmes to screen children and provide them with therapeutic food, as well as health services and water and sanitation.

This request is part of a broader appeal for all of 2017 totalling \$712 million, up 50 per cent from what was requested for these four countries at the same time last year.

Supporting Syrian refugees not only an act 'of generosity' but also of 'enlightened self-interest' – UN chief Guterres

28 March 2017 – Visiting the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan that is hosting about 80,000 Syrian refugees, the United Nations chief urged the parties to the conflict in Syria and the countries that have influence over them to realize that the crisis is not only a tragedy for Syrian people but also a threat to regional stability and global security.

“This is the moment for all countries that are involved, directly or indirectly in the conflict, to put aside their differences and understand [...] the common interest from the fact that they are all threatened by the new risk of global terrorism,” UN Secretary-General António Guterres told reporters at a press conference at the camp.

“Solidarity with Syrian refugees is also a way to be able to express our capacity to guarantee global security. It’s not only an act of generosity. It’s also an act of enlightened self-interest,” he added, noting that by failing to support refugees, groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) and al Qaida could use such inactions as arguments to further their own vested interests and put global security at risk.

In his remarks, Mr. Guterres also hailed the generosity of the Government and the people of Jordan for supporting refugees despite having a vulnerable economy, and appealed for international solidarity with countries such as Jordan that have been hosting Syrian refugees.

“I hope that if all countries that have an influence on the Syrian situation are able to come together, these refugees, [who have been living here for more than four years,] will be able to restart their lives again, to find jobs, to work, to have a normal life,” he said.

He also underscored the importance of Arab unity and said that when Arab countries are divided, it has allowed others to intervene and to manipulate situations, creating instability, breeding conflict and facilitating activities of terrorist organizations.

The UN Secretary-General further called on to the wider international community to increase their humanitarian support as well as to make sure that more opportunities are given to the refugees and to make sure that the countries that have an influence on the parties to the conflict “come together to put an end to this tragedy”.

Children suffer grave atrocities in Sudan's conflict – UN reports

27 March 2017 – Fewer children have been recruited to fight in parts of Sudan, but they are still killed and injured, and victims of sexual violence in the country, according to a new report by the United Nations Secretary-General.

“Boys and girls continued to be victims of grave violations committed by all parties to the conflict, including killing and maiming, sexual violence and attacks on schools and hospitals,” said Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

The report, released on Friday, details the impact of the armed conflict on children in Darfur, South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Abyei between March 2011 and December 2016.

During that time period, nearly 1,300 children were either killed or maimed in conflict as a result of hostilities between the Government and the armed groups. The majority of the casualties took place in Darfur, according to the report.

Rape and sexual violence were also a major concern in Darfur, where the UN confirmed at least 372 children were victimized.

“In most cases, children were raped during attacks on their villages or while getting wood or water in the vicinity of camps for displaced people,” the report authors wrote.

Despite these ongoing atrocities, the report notes a positive trend in recruitment and use of children – with fewer being conscripted.

However, there are concerns about cross-border recruitment and use of children by Sudanese and South Sudanese groups, notably the SPLM/N, Sudan People's Liberation Army-in Opposition and Justice (SPLA-iO) and Equality Movement (JEM).

Since 2011, the Government of Sudan has strengthened its national framework to protect children and raised the minimum recruitment age for national forces to 18.

In addition, the UN has signed three Action Plans with national authorities to protect children, as well as separately with SPLM/N and JEM.

The Special Representative has called on the Government and all other parties to conflict to take concrete measures to protect children.

UN report explores ways urbanization can be a catalyst for rural development

27 March 2017 – One way to encourage mutually beneficial developments for urban and rural areas alike is to develop value chains and food systems more efficient and inclusive, a United Nations-backed report examining the ‘quiet revolution’ towards sustainable urbanization has found.

Meeting the rising urban demand for food can increase the incomes of the rural poor, most of whom derive their livelihoods from small and family farm agriculture, said the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Director-General, José Graziano da Silva.

“But growing urban demand will not automatically benefit small farmers, so we must look for solutions that can seize on the opportunities, and avoid the downside of increasing urbanization,” he said in a new release on the report presented by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and FAO.

Better roads, reliable and extensive electrification, refrigerated transportation and better storage facilities are all key to success, Mr. Graziano da Silva said, noting that such transformation would also lead farmers to grow higher-value and more nutritious produce, which is essential for the proper nutrition of growing urban populations.

The report notes that growing urban populations will be especially visible in Africa, as a majority of the continent’s fast-growing population will be living in cities by 2030. Globally, some 2.5 billion more people will be living in urban areas than do today. Africa and Asia will account for 90 per cent of the increase.

Quality concerns over locally produced food by urban residents in many developing countries often result in greater preference for imported varieties, according to the report. Better vertical integration of the domestic food value chain – requiring improved processing, milling, cleaning, marketing, bagging, branding and possibly even supermarkets – could remedy that.

Such an effort would produce a host of agribusiness jobs and enhance the agricultural sector’s ability to make productivity-boosting investments.

The report also highlights the role of intermediate towns, which can play a catalyzing role in mediating the urban-rural nexus. The vicinity of such towns tends to provide smallholder farmers with greater opportunities to market their products and share in the gains from economic growth.

Smaller towns also offer migration destinations that more likely help the rural poor escape from poverty than big cities do.

“Intermediate cities can be, and most of the time, are, the effective promoter of rural development,” said Mr. Graziano da Silva.

Near East and North Africa: Conflicts threaten to erode gains in region’s zero-hunger battle

27 March 2017 – Food security and nutrition levels have sharply deteriorated over the last five years in the Near East and North Africa due largely to the spread and magnitude of conflicts and protracted crises, reversing the pre-2010 trend of improvement, a new United Nations report said today.

“A peaceful and stable environment is an absolute pre-condition for farmers to respond to the challenges of water scarcity and climate change,” said Abdessalam Ould Ahmed, Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for the Near East and North Africa of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), in a news release.

“Achieving food security is still at hand, provided we take concerted efforts and make the right moves now,” he added.

The FAO 2016 Regional Overview of Food Insecurity in the Near East and North Africa noted that the deterioration is largely driven by conflicts and protracted crises.

The FAO assessment shows that the prevalence of severe food insecurity in the adult population of the Near East and North Africa was close to 9.5 per cent in 2014-2015, representing approximately 30 million people. Before 2010, the prevalence of undernourishment, stunting, anaemia and poverty were decreasing.

“The region is facing unprecedented challenges to its food security due to multiple risks arising from conflicts, water scarcity and climate change. Countries of the region need to implement long-term and comprehensive sustainable water management to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of ending hunger by 2030,” said the FAO official said.

The Syria crisis in particular has deepened during the period 2015-2016, leaving more than half of the population in need of food assistance and 4.8 million refugees, mostly in neighboring countries. The numbers of food insecure and the internally displaced are also rising in Iraq and Yemen.

Beyond conflicts and crises, the report argues that water scarcity and climate change are the most fundamental challenges to ending hunger, achieving food security, improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture by 2030. Water scarcity is the binding factor to agricultural production in the Near East and North Africa region and the driver of the region's dependency on food imports.

The report explores other major options for the adaptation to climate change impacts on water and agriculture, including the need for designing and implementing social protection measures for building resilience of farmers to extreme events, cutting food losses and improving trade policies.