

Banks, UN set standards on channelling investments for sustainable development

31 January 2017 – Nearly 20 leading global banks and investors, totalling \$6.6 trillion in assets, have launched a United Nations-backed global framework aimed at channelling the money they manage towards clean, low carbon and inclusive projects.

The Principles for Positive Impact Finance – a first of its kind set of criteria for investments to be considered sustainable – provide financiers and investors with a global framework applicable across their different business lines, including retail and wholesale lending, corporate and investment lending and asset management.

“Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – the global action plan to end poverty, combat climate change and protect the environment – is expected to cost \$5 to \$7 trillion every year through 2030,” said the head of the UN Environment Finance Initiative, Eric Usher, in a press release.

The UN Environment Finance Initiative is a partnership between the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the global financial sector created in the wake of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, widely known as the Earth Summit, with a mission to promote sustainable finance. Over 200 financial institutions, including banks, insurers and fund managers, work with UN Environment to understand today’s environmental challenges, why they matter to finance, and how to actively participate in addressing them.

“The Positive Impact Principles are a game changer, which will help to channel the hundreds of trillions of dollars managed by banks and investors towards clean, low carbon and inclusive projects,” Mr. Usher said.

The Principles provide guidance for financiers and investors to analyse, monitor and disclose the social, environmental and economic impacts of the financial products and services they deliver.

“With global challenges such as climate change, population growth and resource scarcity accelerating, there is an increased urgency for the finance sector both to adapt and to help bring about the necessary changes in our economic and business models,” said Deputy Chief Executive Officer of Société Générale, Séverin Cabannes.

“The Principles for Positive Impact Finance provide an ambitious yet practical framework by which we can take the broader angle view we need to meet the deeply complex and interconnected challenges of our time,” he added.

The Principles were developed by the Positive Impact Working Group, a group of UN Environment Finance Initiative banking and investment members, as part

of the implementation of the roadmap outlined in the Positive Impact Manifesto released in October 2015.

Currently, the Positive Impact Working Group includes: Australian Ethical, Banco Itaú, BNP Paribas, BMCE Bank of Africa, Caisse des Dépôts Group, Desjardins Group, First Rand, Hermes Investment Management, ING, Mirova, NedBank, Pax World, Piraeus Bank, SEB, Société Générale, Standard Bank, Triodos Bank, Westpac and YES Bank.

UNICEF launches \$3.3 billion appeal to assist millions of children affected by conflict, disasters

31 January 2017 – Against the backdrop of ever increasing number of children driven from their homes due to conflict, disasters and climate change, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) today launched a \$3.3 billion appeal to provide emergency assistance in 48 countries around the globe.

“From Syria to Yemen and Iraq, from South Sudan to Nigeria, children are under direct attack, their homes, schools and communities in ruins, their hopes and futures hanging in the balance,” noted the UN agency in a news release today.

“In total, almost one in four of the world’s children lives in a country affected by conflict or disaster,” it added.

UNICEF’s Humanitarian Action for Children sets out the agency’s 2017 appeal and its goals to provide children with access to safe water, nutrition, education, health and protection in some of the world’s worst conflicts and humanitarian emergencies.

The largest single component of the appeal (\$1.4 billion) is for children and families caught up in the conflict in Syria, which will soon enter its seventh year. This also includes Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries, such as Jordan where, according to estimates, almost half of all refugee families have a child who is a breadwinner.

With enough funding, UNICEF hopes to reach 81 million people, including 48 million children with access to safe water, nutrition, education, health and protection.



A 28-month-old child, who has been receiving treatment for malnutrition, having her mid-upper-arm circumference measured by a health worker at a

health post in Ethiopia. (file) Photo: UNICEF/Ayene

'Silent threat' of malnutrition

UNICEF is particularly concerned about another slow-burning threat – malnutrition.

“Malnutrition is a silent threat to millions of children,” said the agency’s Director of Emergency Programmes, Manuel Fontaine, adding:

“The damage it does can be irreversible, robbing children of their mental and physical potential. In its worst form, severe malnutrition can be deadly.”

The UN agency fears that an estimated 7.5 million children will face severe acute malnutrition across the majority of appeal countries, including almost half a million each in north east Nigeria and Yemen.

The situation is further complicated due to unavailability of accurate information in parts of the Lake Chad basin due to lack of access because of continuing activities of Boko Haram militants.

In Yemen, the worst affected areas include the capital, Sana’a, where 78 per cent of children are chronically malnourished. Furthermore, many other areas have also seen growing deprivation, from Hodeida in the west to Taiz and now Aden to the south.

UNICEF’s Yemen Representative, Meritzell Relano termed the situation for children in Yemen “catastrophic”, with at least 10 million in need of some form of humanitarian assistance.

“Children are dying of malnutrition, that is for sure [...] under-five mortality rate has increased to the point that we estimate that at least in 2016, 10,000 more children died of preventable diseases,” she said.



Children attend a class at a primary school at an IDP camp in Maiduguri, Borno State, north east Nigeria. There are nearly 2,000 children enrolled at the UNICEF supported school in the camp. Photo: UNICEF/Naftalin

Challenges great but not insurmountable

The UN agency believes that as great as these challenges are, they’re not insurmountable.

Thanks to donors, UNICEF saved lives every day in 2016, providing water to 13.6 million people, protection from measles to more than nine million children, education to over six million, and treatment for severe acute malnutrition to 2.2 million, in the first ten months of the year.

AUDIO: UNICEF seeks \$3.3 billion in emergency aid

Clashes in north-eastern South Sudan halt UN migration agency's humanitarian work

31 January 2017 – Thousands of people in need of aid in South Sudan's Upper Nile area will have to wait indefinitely, after fighting forced the United Nations migration agency to suspend humanitarian activities in the area.

Violence in Upper Nile has once again hindered the ability of IOM and other relief agencies to provide assistance to populations seriously in need, said the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) South Sudan Chief of Mission, William Barriga. Civilians will undoubtedly suffer as sporadic fighting makes it more difficult for aid workers to deliver services.

In addition to aid, the agency was in the process of registering people to receive supplies, when clashes between the Government and opposition forces forced everyone to evacuate. An estimated 2,000 to 3,000 people remained in line when the team was forced to flee.

According to IOM, clashes reached Wau Shilluk on 27 January, just as a 14-person team from the UN agency was about to resume registration. A partner organization, which provides aid, was with UN agency at the time.

Wau Shilluk is located north-eastern South Sudan, across the White Nile River from Malakal town. Malakal was one of South Sudan's largest urban areas before the current crisis and home to more than 33,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) who are sheltering at the protection of civilians (PoC) site, said IOM.

The UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) yesterday condemned the latest fighting and urged all parties to protect civilians.

Yemen: UN envoy condemns attack on building used to monitor cessation of hostilities

30 January 2017 – The United Nations envoy for Yemen strongly condemned today the attack on the De-escalation and Coordination Committee building, which

regularly houses UN Staff, in Dhahran Al-Janoub, which is in Saudi Arabia near the Yemeni border.

“It is especially tragic that this attack took place at a point in time where we are calling for a restoration of the cessation of hostilities,” UN Special Envoy for Yemen Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed said.

Noting that the building attacked was supposed to host the committee that will oversee the cessation of hostilities and report on violations, the Special Envoy said: “The United Nations maintains a regular presence in this building and this incident is not a sign of good faith.”

Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed urged Ansar Allah and the General People’s Congress to commit to participate in the De-escalation and Coordination Committee’s preparatory workshop. He underscored the importance of the support to the work of the committee which is critical for the success of a renewed truce.

“It is of the interest of both parties in the conflict to commit to the rapid resumption of a long-lasting cessation of hostilities in the coming days and weeks. The improvement in the security situation will open space for renewed dialogue,” he added.

In a briefing to the UN Security Council late last week, Mr. Ould Cheikh Ahmed said those seeking a military solution will only prolong the suffering caused by the war, allow the terrorist threat to grow and deepen the challenges that will face the eventual recovery. “With political courage and will, the war can be stopped,” he said, pressing both sides to demonstrate the political courage needed to stop the nearly two-year-long war.

[World must implement pledges on women’s empowerment and rights – UN Women deputy chief](#)

30 January 2017 – Speaking at a consultation in preparation for the Commission on Status of Women, a body exclusively dedicated to promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment, a senior United Nations official today called for sustained commitment and leadership to ensure a successful outcome of the Commission.

“We are at an important [juncture] in the achievement of gender equality and women’s empowerment and women’s human rights,” said Lakshmi Puri, the Deputy Executive Director of the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women).

Recalling recent adoption of a number of far-reaching global commitments,

such as Beijing+20 (the 20-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Paris Agreement on climate change, the New Urban Agenda, and the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, she added: “Now it is about the normative of implementation – how do we implement different parts of the compact and how do we follow up and monitor the implementation.”

Ms. Puri was speaking at a multi-stakeholder forum, which has been organized to contribute to the preparations for the 61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women – a functional commission of the UN Economic and Social Council – that will meet in March this year.

In particular, today’s forum sought to raise awareness on existing commitments as well as to identify key areas and issues that should be considered by the Commission in the context of its priority theme, and to strengthen dialogue and galvanize partnerships to accelerate the implementation of the outcomes of the Commission.

It also provided a platform to share result-oriented approaches and strategies and to highlight areas that require enhanced consensus.

Further in her remarks the UN-Women deputy chief said the upcoming session, held under the theme of ‘Women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work,’ will provide concrete, practical and action-oriented recommendations that will cover significant new ground, on overcoming structural barriers to gender equality, gender-based discrimination and violence against women at work.

VIDEO: Speaking at the forum, UN Women’s deputy chief Lakshmi Puri said that “enhanced interventions” are required in order to tackle “persistent gender inequalities and gaps” in the workplace.

“There is a dynamic new element of assessing how the world of work is changing due to technology, migration, and other factors and whether women can be enabled to leapfrog beneficially into this new context and not adversely affected and left behind,” she added.

Also in her statement, Ms. Puri underlined important commitments such as those under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development on gender equality and women’s empowerment and spoke of processes underway in different regions of the world to prepare for the session.