Joint Meeting of the Executive Boards of
UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP
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Transition

Introduction

1.   This background paper, jointly prepared by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the World Food Programme (WFP), builds on a decade of work on transitions. It describes the critical insights gained to date and identifies any gaps or emerging issues with a view to facilitating discussion on ways in which the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes can align their strategies in the countries in transition.

2.   In 2002, the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) and the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA) established a Joint Working Group on Transition Issues in response to Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) resolution E/2002/32, which calls for action to address shortfalls in funding and gaps in strategic planning between relief and development in transition contexts. The Secretary-General's report *Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change*[1] calls on UNDG to strengthen integrated planning, budgeting and resource mobilization tools in countries emerging from conflict. At the request of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP the working group issued a report on transition issues in February 2004. In 2008, UNDG/ECHA and the Cluster Working Group on Early Recovery (CWGER) produced a Transition Guidance Toolkit for use in transitions from conflicts and natural disasters.

3.   The 2004 UNDG/ECHA report on transition issues offered the following working definition of transition: "a period in a crisis when external assistance is most crucial in supporting or underpinning still fragile ceasefires or peace processes by helping to create the conditions for political stability, security, justice and social equity". Furthermore, in the tool kit it is emphasized that transitions typically involve a shift from a strictly humanitarian response to an approach that includes planning for and implementing recovery, reconciliation and peace consolidation through a process that should be increasingly led by national actors. Transition also describes the period of a country's transformation following a crisis – a conflict, political crisis or a complex natural disaster – though there are differences inherent to each context. Although the definitions differ, there are common elements, including a need to restore basic services, such as health, education and food security, along with livelihood systems. It is generally acknowledged that the process can be cyclical and may sometimes relapse into conflict, that local and national ownership should be supported and that there should be a coherent United Nations strategy.

4.   Transition has been discussed at a number of Joint Meetings of the Executive Boards of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP. At the latest such meeting, held in February 2011, the Boards reviewed lessons learned about the efficiency of emergency responses and the transition to recovery and long-term development. A Joint Meeting of the Boards held in September 2011 focused on South Sudan. At both meetings, the Boards reaffirmed the principles outlined in the transition report, including the need for the United Nations to do more to deploy rapidly, act holistically, improve joint planning, address underlying vulnerabilities and build local capacity and resilience. The South Sudan case study underlines the importance of building

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[1] United Nations General Assembly 2002. Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change. A/57/387 (9 September 2002)

national civilian capacities through strong national and international partnerships. It also emphasizes that transitions often involve the simultaneous delivery of humanitarian assistance and fast-tracked recovery programmes that consolidate peace dividends, help reduce vulnerability and lay the foundations for sustainable development.

5.   A number of strategies, frameworks, institutions and tools for an international response to transition have been produced and put into operation.[2] In 2006, the Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Fund were created. At the second global meeting on International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, held in Monrovia and, most recently, the Fourth High-level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, held in Busan, Republic of Korea, the policy discussions were broadened and new policy directions were recommended. The recent Civilian Capacity Review and the subsequent report by the Secretary-General[3] honed in on the importance of strengthening local and national capacities as the basis for transition. For its part, the United Nations has increasingly focused attention on its own transition, with batons being passed between various parts of the system, for example from humanitarian to development coordination, and from an integrated United Nations presence, led by apolitical or complex peacekeeping missions, to United Nations country teams.

6.   The Arab Spring and concerted calls by fragile States for a "New Deal" with donor countries on statebuilding and peacebuilding point to the need for regular assessments of the efficacy of existing tools and policies in achieving the desired outcomes for peaceful and sustained transitions.

7.   Consequently, for their January 2012 joint meeting, the Executive Boards of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS, UN-Women and WFP agreed to review what has worked, showcase recent developments and insights, and focus on the improvements needed for strengthening national ownership, participation and inclusion, building resilient communities and supportive environments at local and national levels, and sharing and managing risks.

Key Issues and Challenges

National Ownership – Participation and Inclusion

8.   The value of national ownership and inclusive participation by all stakeholders in articulating and implementing national priorities during transitions is becoming increasingly apparent. The direct engagement of local authorities and civil society organizations, in particular, can help ensure that transition processes and their outcomes reflect the interests and address the needs of diverse sections of society, including women, youth, ethnic and other minorities, and other vulnerable or marginalized populations. More emphasis must be placed on national capacity development during transitions. Experience shows that, context permitting, the earlier an investment is made in building up relationships with national counterparts the easier the transition to government-led mechanisms and ownership will be.

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[2] Some of the most important tools and frameworks for transition developed and tested by the United Nations system include the UNDG/ECHA-CWGER Transition Guidance Toolkit, Post-Conflict and Post-Disaster Needs Assessments, Revised Common Country Assessment (CCA)/United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) Guidance and the Review of Civilian Capacities in the Aftermath of Conflict. There is also the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)-International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF) Guidance on Transition Financing: Building a Better Response, 2010.

[3] United Nations General Assembly 2011. Civilian capacity in the aftermath of conflict. A/66/311-S/2011/527 (19 August 2011).

9.	To increase the chances of transformative transition outcomes, partners need to go beyond the national level and support capacity development at the local level. This may require the United Nations temporarily to strengthen its field presence and support local needs assessments, coordination and capacity development.

10.	While international support usually concentrates on governments and national authorities, evidence suggests that transitions are successful when there are high levels of national and local ownership, which includes civil society.[4] Full participation by women and the mainstreaming of gender equality principles throughout transition policy programming and monitoring are essential to success.[5] It is therefore vital to ensure that the governance structures for managing recovery do not replicate the patterns of exclusion established during conflict. When institutions are being strengthened, it is critical for people to have access to basic services. Equitable service delivery is crucial for ensuring that basic human rights are respected and confidence in institutions is built, in particular in the immediate aftermath of conflict.

Building Resilient Communities and Supportive Environments

11.	During transitions vulnerabilities are often accentuated and risks increased at the community level. Communities are buffeted by a host of simultaneous or repeated shocks, such as political crises, disease epidemics or the destruction of shelter and productive assets in storms or floods. The ability of agencies, funds and programmes to enhance the resilience of communities – in other words, their ability to anticipate, prepare for, cope with and recover from a wide range of shocks, stresses and uncertainties – will determine how a strategy can support transition.

12.	The concept of resilience has long been rooted in science and ecology but has only recently taken hold in the humanitarian and development communities. It has featured prominently in the disaster risk reduction community, notably in connection with the Hyogo Framework for Action.[6] There is a growing body of research that seeks to better understand resilience and its effective application to development and humanitarian issues. Many development and humanitarian actors, including donors, are also developing resilience strategies and programming approaches.

13.	Some consensus has begun to emerge on a broad definition of a resilient community. Better understanding of what resilience means in practice to communities affected by crises is crucial for agencies, funds and programmes to be able to plan and target programmes that will have a real impact. Possible dimensions of a resilient community may include assets, institutions and services, knowledge and information, cooperation, sustainable and equitable access to resources, local capacity for conflict management, diversity, redundancy[7] and self-reliance.

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[4]International Peace Institute. *Research Note on Transition Compacts; Summary of Initial Findings and Key Questions.*

[5] Report of the Secretary-General, Women's participation in peacebuilding, 7 September 2010, A/65/354-S/2010/466.

[6] World Conference on Disaster Reduction, 2005. Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters. A/CONF.206.6 (January 2005).

[7] Redundancy refers to the overlap of actors and approaches.

14.   Supporting resilience is a longer-term development enterprise but there is evidence that humanitarian action can make important contributions to strengthening disaster risk reduction through sound preparedness and the early recovery approach. In transitions, humanitarian action can reduce hardship and prepare the ground for more robust recovery and risk management in the future. Resilience should be advanced jointly by development and humanitarian actors.

15.   There are a number of areas where agencies, funds and programmes face challenges to providing effective support for resilience in transitions. These include:

> **Partnerships.** Building resilience is a multi-stakeholder endeavour. Agencies, funds and programmes must seek creative and context-specific alliances with actors ranging from the private sector to community development organizations.

> **Innovation.** Agencies, funds and programmes must deliberately foster experimentation in and diffusion of promising institutional and technological solutions.

> **Fundamentals.** Accountability, participation, capacity development, and local and national ownership continue to be essential for effectively helping a community in crisis move towards sustainable recovery.

> **Social transformation.** Resilience is achieved through social processes whose outcomes defy precise measurement. To encourage truly sustainable investments by donor and developing countries, donors should review and revise their own performance monitoring and reporting systems.

> **Multi-sectoral programming.** Resilience support must be holistic and systemic. This places a premium on the capacity of agencies, funds and programmes not only to break down internal sectoral silos and identify multi-sectoral packages of support to communities but also to do so with partners.

Rethinking Risk Management in Transition Contexts

16.   Risk management is increasingly recognized as an important issue for successful international support in cases of transition. Seen as an integral part of the aid effectiveness agenda, it was discussed at the recent Fourth High-level Forum on Aid Effectiveness. Aid agencies must take increased contextual and institutional risk factors into account when planning their support during transition.

17.   Effective risk management that balances risks against opportunities and is based on a comprehensive view of both institutional risks (such as corruption) and contextual risks (such as the risk of renewed conflict) can help achieve stronger overall results. Risk management can, in particular, facilitate more timely and flexible development interventions during transition, when humanitarian assistance may become overstretched.

18.   Risk management in international assistance is still limited and has yet to be mainstreamed. Some agencies have established formal enterprise risk management systems designed to help programme managers assess risks and opportunities as part of the planning process and to integrate risk management into their broader strategic decision-making. In Somalia, a three-year project is currently underway to establish the first joint United Nations enterprise risk management system for a United Nations country team. There continues, however, to be a lack

of risk assessment and risk management at the strategic level together with a failure to link risk management to results.

19. There is a need for stronger inter-agency cooperation and harmonization of risk-management approaches, and for more collective approaches to managing risk at the country level. National partners, donor governments and their implementing partners need to develop a shared and realistic understanding of risks and find ways to act jointly to manage them in the specific country context. Mechanisms for risk-sharing, including joint risk assessment and analysis, and pooled funding, such as the Peacebuilding Fund, have a potential that has yet to be realized; more knowledge is needed about different models and lessons learned from applying these in practice.

20. At the global level, lessons need to be learned from country experiences to better understand the requirements for effective risk management. This could potentially lead to common elements being identified from which to establish risk management platforms and standards, which could be adapted for a variety of contexts and used to inform harmonized systems.

Lessons Learned

21. The following are the four main lessons learned during the past decade, structured with a view to responding to the challenges outlined above.

   a) **National ownership requires the creation of an institutional space for governments to lead and/or play a more active role in early recovery planning, implementation and resource mobilization.** Clusters that have worked with government counterparts early on and adopted a co-chairing arrangement with national authorities find the hand-over of responsibilities for coordination much easier. Systems of accountability must be established to ensure that humanitarian and development partners engage fully with national state and non-state actors in the recovery process from the outset. Ultimately, the goal should be to make it possible for national authorities to play leading roles in the crisis response phase as well, depending on the context, the existing national capacities and the nature of the response.

   b) **Participatory, inclusive and transparent decision-making at all levels helps sustain national ownership and broaden social support for successful transitions**. Research shows that civil society plays an important role in this process of building and promoting accountability for development. Strong and diverse civil societies also enrich the cooperative social capital needed to build community resilience and the capacity to rebound from shocks. At a high-level panel on civil society and transitions, held on 26 October 2011, the United Nations Secretary-General stressed the importance of a vibrant and diverse civil society, noting that women's groups, social media activists and human rights defenders are critical for building strong and accountable public institutions.[8]

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[8] Secretary-General's remarks to Non-Governmental Organizations, New York. 26 October 2011 (SG/SM/13904, NGO/741).

c) **Increasing the number of women teachers, medical staff, police, agricultural extension agents, local registrars and court official**s **greatly improves the quality of service delivery and access for all groups – men and women, girls and boys –** according to research conducted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UNICEF, UN-Women and the World Health Organization (WHO).[9] A critical mass of at least 30 percent women employed at the front line of public service delivery greatly enhances the capacity of public service providers to reach marginal and vulnerable populations, while supporting gender equality and women's empowerment, both of which are associated with well governed and responsive public sectors.

d) **Best practices in risk management need to be identified to enable international assistance to provide effective support for resilience and inclusive and sustainable transitions.** In order for transitions to be successful, it is vital to understand and manage the risk to populations, United Nations organizations and partners. In the financing and planning of transitions, the need to strike a balance between speed, flexibility and tangible results, and the longer-term objective of social transformation and sustainable development, require all actors to invest continuously in local resilience and risk management.

Conclusion

22. National ownership, resilience and risk management are crucial for successful transitions. However, the United Nations must work creatively on these issues during transition, approaching development from a peacebuilding perspective while, in some contexts, prolonging humanitarian support to avoid the gaps that result from precipitous reductions. Experience has shown that transitions offer an opportunity for United Nations entities to come together to provide seamless support, as has been increasingly recognized by the United Nations and the international community. The current international dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding and the work of inter-agency groups, such as the UNDG/ECHA Joint Working Group on Transition Issues, the Cluster Working Group on Early Recovery, the Peacebuilding Contact Group and the Senior Peacebuilding Group are all making progress but challenges remain, as noted above.

23. It is not possible to meet all the challenges in the short term, as is demonstrated by the continuing discussion of the topic at Joint Meetings of the Executive Boards, but the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes can take steps or enhance actions to bring about more effective results. For example, they can:

➢ continue to strengthen joint assessments and situation analyses, including conflict/disaster analysis;

➢ work together with the donor community and national governments on risk management;

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[9] Joshi, A. 2010. *Women at the Frontline of Service Delivery: Accelerating the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)*. United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) Expert Paper; Report of the Secretary-General, Women's participation in peacebuilding, 7 September 2010 (A/65/354-S/2010/466); UNESCO, Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (PROAP), 2000. *Increasing the Number of Women Teachers in Rural Schools*. Bangkok, UNESCO PROAP; Stacki, S. 2002. *Women Teachers Empowered in India: Teacher Training Through A Gender Lens*. UNICEF Working Paper; WHO. 2006. Pakistan, Afghanistan Look to Women to Improve Healthcare. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*. 84(11): 841–920.

- design programmes and foster approaches that purposefully build resilience and enhance the capacity of communities to better prepare for and recover from shocks;

- integrate peacebuilding into programmes and projects;

- support institutions that manage conflict in order to prevent conflicts from escalating into violence and to build peaceful relations among people and groups;

- integrate capacity-building for civil society, local and national leadership into humanitarian and development planning and service delivery;

- provide the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator with the necessary support;

- promote inclusive economic recovery and post-crisis jobs-creation programmes in which neither gender dominates more than 60 percent of the jobs;

- support funding mechanisms that are flexible and that disburse quickly enough to make responses to volatile and fluid situations in crisis settings; and

- support joint risk management platforms that provide a basis for better understanding and risk management and sharing while allowing improved donor consistency.

24.   While the above lessons and insights have been recognized, several questions have arisen about the design and application of transition strategies, including:

- how to ensure that transition processes reflect national and local views of what is urgent and seen as a priority by wider sections of society;

- how to achieve a common understanding of resilience and build agile, context-specific partnerships effectively to help communities to manage risk and uncertainty;

- how to manage expectations in ways that balance priorities that are achievable in the short term by national stakeholders with priorities that are aspired to;

- how to promote the participation of women and other marginalized people, particularly in settings where non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are weak or do not exist and social movements are highly polarized, in situations of insecurity and/or those where political forces are fragmented;

- how to enable the international community to better manage and share risks, and achieve a broader and more holistic understanding of risks that goes beyond institutional risks such as corruption to include the risks of renewed crisis or conflict;

- how to better understand and consistently analyse high-risk transitional operating environments in order to find programme opportunities and gain access to vulnerable or marginalized people; and

- how to apply better risk management to support more flexible and timely release of development funding and how to enable the international community to work together on shared risk management platforms at the country level.