



**Joint Meeting of the Executive Boards
of UNDP/UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP
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United Nations**

Background document

**Agenda item 2: Transition from relief to development,
focusing on natural disasters**

BACKGROUND NOTE FOR JOINT MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARDS, JANUARY 2006

TRANSITION FROM RELIEF TO DEVELOPMENT FOCUSING ON NATURAL DISASTERS

PART I: BACKGROUND

Overview

1. Natural disasters can decimate livelihoods, infrastructure, government capacity and a country's development gains. The consequences of crisis — whether natural disaster, conflict-related or both — seriously hinder advancement toward the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). There has been a sharp increase over the past few years in attention paid to transitions from the humanitarian phase to longer-term development following a natural disaster. This is when efforts to promote interventions that “build back better” — that prepare for future disasters and promote sustainable development — are critical.
2. The post-crisis agenda links the MDGs, the Millennium Declaration and “transition”, and helps to emphasize the need for emergency interventions to take place within a longer-term, nationally-led strategy. Through the Millennium Declaration, the United Nations is committed “to intensify cooperation to reduce the number and effects of natural and man-made disasters.” The humanitarian community now accepts that post-natural disaster transitions must include measures to reduce future vulnerability along with the restoration of livelihoods and basic social services.
3. “Building back better” implies seizing opportunities to improve on the pre-crisis situation while responding to immediate emergency needs. It requires a coherent and strategic response by the United Nations to disasters, informed by a longer-term, disaster risk reduction and management approach. This approach must be based on a plan to address the particular economic and social needs of women, and vulnerable population groups such as children.
4. National ownership is also essential for the success and sustainability of recovery efforts and building back better. Supporting national ownership and capacity must be an integral part of the United Nations system's actions and processes in transition situations. The post-recovery “vision” — especially consensus around recovery objectives and reinforcing local capacities — must be developed by and with the governments, civil society and communities.
5. This paper outlines the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) and system-wide tools that have been developed over recent years to help the United Nations respond more effectively in the transition period following disaster response. The guidelines and structures established to encourage “building back better” — as well as continued key challenges — are also discussed.

Scope of Transition

6. Transition refers to the period between the immediate aftermath of crisis and the restoration of pre-crisis conditions (recovery) or their improvement to a satisfactory level (development). It is up to the in-country actors to decide what the appropriate end point of “transitional” assistance is in a given situation and, specifically, in what ways and to what extent it is possible and necessary to “build back better”. In planning to build back better, a focus on how plans address women’s and men’s different needs must be maintained.
7. Transitions are characterized by a shifting emphasis from life-saving to livelihood-restoring interventions and interventions that transform as they repair. It is now recognized that the various facets shaping transition processes exist — and must often be addressed — simultaneously.

Post-Natural Disasters: Why Specific Attention is Needed

8. Transition out of a natural disaster requires specific attention: the number and impact of natural disasters is increasing; and the world’s poorest people remain disproportionately vulnerable to them.¹ Transition after a natural disaster — particularly where natural disasters are recurrent — poses extra challenges, different from those following a conflict: that of preparing for next time.
9. Post-disaster transition is about helping affected people rebuild lives and livelihoods after a shock, but it is also about preparing for and mitigating the effect of future disasters. In practice, this means helping poor households avoid destitution and build their resilience before an acute crisis actually hits. It also means extensive investments in systems to help governments and communities better anticipate and manage risks, to understand coping strategies in the face of hazards, to build capacity for contingency planning, and to track potential hazards and analyze their likely impact in vulnerable areas.
10. In relation to post-conflict transition, the UNDG/Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA) Working Group on Transition has undertaken work specifically to develop various processes and tools for integrated planning and resource mobilization, all of which support nationally-led priorities and efforts. Post-natural disaster transition requires its own set of tools to respond to situations that are quite different than post conflict settings. Policy and strategy frameworks exist at the global level for disaster risk management (the Hyogo Framework for Action, International Recovery Platform, United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Early Recovery Working Group among others), but practical operational responses, tools and mechanisms need to be built that focus on supporting national leadership and ownership.

¹ The number of natural disasters has risen over the past decade, tripling in the 1990s compared to the 1960s. Disasters in countries with low human development are increasing at the fastest rate. Over the past decade, more than half of those killed by natural disasters lived in low human development countries; and a combination of drought and famine was the most likely cause of death.

11. To date, unlike in the post-conflict arena, no overall multi-sectoral assessment methodology comparable to the Post-Conflict Needs Assessment has existed. In the absence of an overall multi-sectoral methodology that leads directly to a coordinated framework for international assistance to nationally-defined priorities and nationally-led efforts, the recovery assessment process and the follow-up preparation of recovery plans and programmes tend to be driven by sector-specific agency priorities. A Post-Disaster Needs Assessment methodology is part of the workplan of the Early Recovery Working Group (ERWG); the ERWG itself is described below.

PART II: KEY PROCESSES UNDERWAY

The “Triple Threat” Approach to Crisis in Southern Africa

12. The southern African approach to dealing with slow-onset natural disaster in combination with HIV/AIDS is perhaps a unique example and process. The experience reinforces the need, within post natural disaster transitions, for a strategic framework based on simultaneous relief and long-term development needs, including a risk reduction approach.
13. Since the beginning of 2004, the work of the United Nations has been guided by the “triple threat” approach — tackling food insecurity, AIDS and weakened capacity for governance at the same time. The triple threat approach, developed under the leadership of the Special Envoy for Southern Africa and included in a paper prepared by the High Level Committee on Programs, acknowledges that southern Africa requires simultaneous humanitarian and development action to address the three priorities. In a region where life expectancy and other human capacity and economic indicators have been in reverse for several years, largely due to the impact of HIV/AIDS, the United Nations has recognized that the conventional concept of “recovery” has little meaning. The region will continue to experience natural hazards such as floods, droughts and cyclones. The triple threat approach promotes coordination and integration between emergency relief and development assistance and has contributed to providing a practical case and environment for the agencies of the United Nations to work together collaboratively, using common and even joint programming initiatives to address identified priorities.

UNDG/ECHA Working Group

14. The original UNDG/ECHA Working Group on Transitions (established in response to a 2002 resolution by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and Action Point 14 of the Secretary-General’s reform agenda) limited the scope of its analysis to post-conflict situations. This limitation was noted with misgivings by some member states. Initiatives currently underway by this working group — including both the drafting of a Guidance Note for developing United Nations Transition Strategies and a Multi-Donor Trust Fund Review — refer to conflict *and* natural disaster settings. The 2006 work plan of this working group will similarly focus on developing tools for both conflict and natural disaster transitions.
15. The tsunami crisis seems to have demonstrated that UNDG agencies are better equipped today — in part as a result of the Working Group — to address transition

and recovery from disasters. Mechanisms created within UNDG for programme support to the Resident Coordinator were used in the tsunami response, including the development of United Nations transition strategies that outlined areas of United Nations comparative advantage within the implementation of national plans for recovery. Senior recovery coordination advisors were posted to Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the Maldives to assist with these and other recovery processes.

IASC/ERWG

16. Identified as one of the nine key “clusters” of humanitarian action, the IASC/ERWG aims to enhance global capacity for support to Humanitarian/Resident Coordinators in developing humanitarian and recovery-related interventions and integrating risk reduction measures at the very early stages of emergencies and beyond. The cluster consists of 17 partners from both the humanitarian and development communities, with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as the cluster lead.
17. Between August and November 2005, the ERWG made progress in identifying existing collective capacities and gaps in relation to early recovery following both conflict and natural disaster. Following consultations and capacity mapping exercises, the ERWG has developed workplans that identify priority areas in relation to transition from both conflict and natural disaster, and submitted these to the IASC. The post-disaster workplan is based on the International Recovery Platform (IRP); and elements of the workplan, such as developing a multi-sectoral needs assessment methodology, are already largely funded through this platform. Overall, in 2006, the cluster will focus on addressing critical gaps in relation to strategic planning and early recovery response, including joint assessment and planning, knowledge management, and support to United Nations country teams (UNCTs).
18. The ERWG and UNDG have agreed that the scope of the ERWG is early recovery within a humanitarian context, while the UNDG/ECHA Working Group on Transition addresses broader transition issues. Where planned outputs are similar or complementary (e.g. for assessment methodologies), collaboration has been specified in the ERWG 2006 workplan.
19. A country-level Early Recovery Working Group was established in Pakistan following October’s earthquake. The focus of this new cluster is on improving strategic planning for recovery from an early stage of a crisis. The UNCT’s experience to date in tackling transition issues in the aftermath of the earthquake — including within the field-based Early Recovery Working Group — is described in section III. It will also be covered during the Joint Meeting of the Executive Boards by the representative of the Pakistan UNCT.

United Nations reform

20. Progress continues to be made to strengthen the United Nations through better integration and coordination among different agencies and departments. This direction towards greater integration can be seen, for example, in the clarification of leadership and accountabilities in humanitarian response. Moves towards greater integration among the different development, humanitarian, political and security arms of the United Nations are also evident in ongoing initiatives such as United

Nations Integrated Missions and in the proposed establishment of a Peace-building Commission and Peace-building Support Office. Greater integration will better place the United Nations strategically to deliver comprehensive and positive results. UNDG agencies are working to respond and adapt their country programmes and policy interventions for transition to these new realities.

21. Bearing in mind that the confluence of natural disasters and conflict is common, and that political instability can exacerbate vulnerability to natural disasters, work on post-natural disaster transition and early recovery should be closely coordinated with the ongoing efforts on the security and political sides of the United Nations system.²

Protection and internally displaced people (IDPs)

22. Protection and the particular needs of IDPs are two issues that remain prominent in United Nations and humanitarian reform initiatives and post-natural disaster recovery scenarios. Disasters may have human rights implications, e.g. in relation to access to assistance and services, family reunification, enforced relocation, sexual and gender-based violence, camp security, protection of unaccompanied children, recruitment of children into fighting forces, loss of documentation, safe and voluntary return or resettlement, and property restitution. Many of these implications may be different and are frequently worse for women than for men, thereby further aggravating their vulnerability as women and children usually are those most affected by natural disasters in the first place. An early focus on the protection of women and children is hence critical during the post-crisis response, including timely preventive measures against sexual violence and trafficking. In addition, natural disasters can sometimes present particular challenges for assistance and protection to internally displaced persons, particularly when disasters occur within the context of long-standing complex emergencies.

Support to the RC

23. Improvements are required in the ways in which the United Nations system supports a comprehensive and integrated approach to post-disaster assistance, early recovery and longer-term development at the field level. In particular, there is a need to provide more systematic coordination support to the Resident Coordinator (RC) from the onset of a natural disaster. There are a number of benefits to providing additional support to the RC either in the aftermath of a large disaster or where the RC office lacks capacity to deal with additional coordination requirements:
Having such support available immediately at the beginning of the relief phase (ideally at the same time as staff of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) arrive in-country and United Nations Disaster-Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) teams are being deployed) would help to ensure that the United Nations' early recovery components are included in the Flash Appeal and that

² UNDP is currently spearheading a multi-country study on the interface of natural disasters occurring in conflict settings to improve the work of UNDG agencies involved in supporting pre-disaster risk reduction and early recovery programming.

an effective field-based Early Recovery Working Group, if warranted, can be established.

A strengthened Resident Coordinator's office can better assist with the coordination of participation by UNCTs in post-disaster needs assessments, usually in close cooperation with the International Financial Institutions.

The UNCT will be better placed to provide direct support to government to ensure national ownership and production of a national plan for recovery and reconstruction that is based on the needs assessment and incorporates risk reduction and response preparedness elements. At the same time, this coordination capacity will play a critical role in pulling together UNCT strategic planning, possibly through the development of a Transition Strategy — with a costed results framework — to support the implementation of the national recovery plan in those areas where the United Nations has a comparative advantage.

Additional RC coordination support will also help to ensure that OCHA support to humanitarian coordination tasks becomes embedded in national institutions and processes. For example, better linkages need to be established between different United Nations information management systems, notably the humanitarian information centres (HICs), which are run by OCHA, and the development assistance databases (DADs), which are nationally owned; and also DevInfo. Similarly, connecting United Nations Financial Tracking Service data to national systems will ensure that United Nations coordination support is developing national capacities to manage the transition process.

The need for enhanced support to the Resident Coordinator is also critical as OCHA starts to wind down field level operations as the relief operations draw to a close. At this juncture, and as resources for coordination needs mobilized under the Flash Appeal dries up, it is vital for adequate United Nations system coordination capacity to remain in place to oversee the implementation of the United Nations' strategic plan and, more broadly, a smooth transition from relief to development.

24. Related to coordination, and building on the IASC cluster approach for humanitarian action, it is also important that agencies ensure sufficient capacity to fulfill coordination responsibilities in those sectors for which they are the United Nations lead.

Transitions Financing

25. Funding mechanisms are being addressed and there are efforts to engage better the development agencies of Member States to fund early recovery and transitional programming, for disasters as well as following conflicts. Emergency response, particularly in relation to recurrent disasters, is more effective when it is carried out in the context of a longer-term strategy for capacity-building and resilience. Well-timed, targeted and sustained resources are needed, yet despite compelling evidence of the linkages between risk reduction and development it is still much easier to mobilize support for post-disaster relief efforts than for transition, risk reduction and recovery.

26. In Pakistan, the inclusion of early recovery components in the post-earthquake Flash Appeal may constitute an emerging practice. The General Assembly recently emphasized the need for the international community to maintain its focus beyond present emergency relief needs in Pakistan and to sustain the political will to support medium- and long-term rehabilitation, reconstruction and risk reduction efforts. The ERWG has also flagged the need for flexible criteria for the new Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF) so that early recovery interventions, as part of humanitarian action, may be considered.
27. The UNDG/ECHA Working Group on Transition has organized a review, now underway, of country experiences with Multi-Donor Trust Funds. The review aims to document experiences in transition settings with both internal United Nations-administered trust funds and World Bank-administered funds from which United Nations funds, programme and agencies have benefited as grantees.
28. Regardless of the chosen financing modalities, though, the principle underpinning the need for transition financing remains unaltered: disaster reduction efforts constitute the most effective investment towards saving lives and reducing loss; they are fundamental to achieving the MDGs and sustainable development in general.

International Recovery Platform

29. The United Nations system has already adopted a broad framework for managing and reducing natural disaster risks: the Hyogo Framework of Action, adopted at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe in January 2005. The Hyogo Framework prioritizes “integrating disaster risk reduction efforts in post-disaster recovery and rehabilitation processes”.
30. The “International Recovery Platform”,³ established in May 2005, was created to fulfill a main strategic goal of the HFA, by functioning as an international repository of knowledge and a network for recovery, and to address gaps and constraints in relation to post-disaster recovery. United Nations structures and guidelines to deal with post-disaster transition need to take account of The IRP emphasis on risk reduction and increased resilience to shocks, the importance of which was reiterated by experiences with disasters during 2005.
31. Speed of response is a key element in the credibility of an internationally-supported recovery effort. Rapid, visible initiatives to restore normalcy, however, should not be done at the expense of more sustainable and durable solutions that truly address the need for improved risk reduction and increase communities’ resilience in the face of

³ The International Recovery Platform (IRP) was created by UNDP, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), and the Asian Disaster Reduction Centre (ADRC) with key participation from OCHA, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the World Bank. The IRP has set up a Secretariat in Kobe, Japan, hosted by ADRC and has organized its work around three hubs: knowledge management (Kobe, led by ADRC and ISDR); training and capacity building (Turin, led by ILO) and enhanced recovery operations (Geneva, led by UNDP). Resources for the IRP have been committed by the Governments of Japan, Switzerland and Italy as well as by UNDP and ILO. The IRP also underpins the work of the IASC/ERWG in relation to natural disasters.

recurrent disasters. The report of the Secretary General on the tsunami warned that, “when countries fail to factor hazard and vulnerability considerations into their development policies, strategies and plans, economic growth and social welfare becomes eroded by large-scale disaster loss, while increasing demands are made on national and international humanitarian assistance.” There are no quick or easy solutions to the difficulty in balancing speed and longer-term considerations. Agencies must remain committed to cultivating participation and assisting national and local institutions to manage the transition process effectively, recognizing that ownership may develop differently over time depending on the specific country situation.

32. The tsunami and other recent major disasters have pointed to an overarching lesson for the international community: **sustainable, ecologically-friendly development is key to disaster resilience**. Long-term support of sustainable economic development, resulting in strong civil societies as well as sound infrastructure, will help ensure that nations are prepared to weather the shocks from natural hazards and economic change.
33. Within the IASC, humanitarian partners are working to strengthen common systems and capacities for reducing risk. WFP provides support and leadership to humanitarian early warning, preparedness and contingency planning efforts within the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.

PART III: EXAMPLES OF FIELD-LEVEL COLLABORATION

The Early Recovery Working Group (Geneva and Pakistan)

34. Following the Pakistan earthquake in October 2005, UNDP and others established an Islamabad-level Early Recovery Working Group. The resulting “Early Recovery Framework”, launched on 19 November, was the first main output of this group. The cluster played a pivotal role in coordinating and ensuring the consistency of early recovery proposals by various agencies. The comprehensiveness of the recovery framework and the depth of the analysis and resulting programming reveal the intensity of the inter-agency collaboration and the value it can add to major operations.
35. Some challenges remain. The framework on its own is of little use without timely and sufficient resourcing to support the programmes that are outlined. Any delay will limit programme implementation and thus the possibility of filling the “early recovery” gap. Coordination is another challenge: the United Nations system will need to provide strong support to the Government of Pakistan for the implementation process, and effective mechanisms for coordination must extend beyond Islamabad. A solid monitoring component, to ensure adherence to the main principles of the Framework and to capture progress made, will be necessary.

Regional Inter-Agency Coordination and Support Office (RIACSO) in Southern Africa

36. The interagency regional humanitarian framework for southern Africa, developed through RIACSO and supported by the new United Nations Regional Director’s

Team, includes new “recovery” perspectives shared jointly by the United Nations and non-governmental organization (NGO) community. The framework provides a base for short-term and long-term responses in which humanitarian and development players meet in joint action, meeting immediate needs while working to prevent and mitigate vulnerability to future shocks and risks, build livelihood resilience, and enhance economic and social growth.

The IASC and the Tsunami Experience

37. Following the tsunami, there were early fears that sexual, gender-based and domestic violence might escalate due to extreme stress on surviving affected individuals. The IASC, through sector working groups, and individual agencies, took measures for the protection of IDPs and other affected communities. With the aim of heading off such violence, United Nations agencies and NGOs — working with the governments — helped provide safe temporary housing sites, sanitation in camps, and tried to ensure that men and women had access to income generation programs. Also, early advocacy and vigilance in child protection by governments helped prevent trafficking and exploitation of children, a potential risk that generated a great deal of attention in the early stages of the emergency.

Senior Recovery Coordination Advisors: Support for the Resident Coordinator

38. Following the tsunami, senior recovery coordination advisors were deployed to Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Maldives to support the RC. Though funding constraints delayed their arrival, their presence within the first few months yielded numerous positive results along the lines outlined above, reinforcing the need for them to be deployed immediately in future disaster responses. UNCTs in the Maldives, Indonesia and Sri Lanka have been able to develop costed, inter-agency United Nations transition strategies which are being used for implementation, monitoring and resource mobilization purposes. As OCHA starts to phase out of the tsunami countries, the senior recovery coordination officers are playing an increasingly important role in assisting the RC to coordinate longer-term recovery initiatives. Joint reporting initiatives are also underway, spearheaded at the country level by these advisors. More broadly, working closely with government and civil society, these advisors have also helped ensure that United Nations transitional recovery activities promote national ownership and develop national capacities for coordination and implementation.

PART IV: CHALLENGES AND NEXT STEPS

Process Challenges

- ❑ Integrating and harmonizing the various transition-related initiatives and priorities.
- ❑ Ensuring a focus on building in-country capacity for dealing with risk and vulnerability; not mistaking coordination for capacity-building.
- ❑ Increasing the involvement of NGOs and international finance institutions (IFIs) in IASC processes.

National Ownership

- ❑ Ensuring national and local government leadership in post-disaster priority-setting and ownership of transition strategies, and assisting national and local institutions to manage the transition process effectively.
- ❑ Improving participation — inclusive and meaningful — in the recovery process by affected populations themselves. Ensuring that their right to have a say in the decisions that affect their lives is honoured by governments and the international community alike.
- ❑ Ensuring that the need for credible, quick international responses following an emergency does not over-ride national ownership.
- ❑ Building up national and international early warning systems.

Sector-Specific Challenges

- ❑ Coordinating and implementing adequate and timely responses in: emergency shelter and interim housing, water and sanitation, protection, livelihoods, logistics and communications, nutrition, health, education and camp management. (Models are needed for implementation in a range of post-disaster contexts.)

Financing

- ❑ Acquiring up-front and sustained, predictable financing for recovery and transition from disaster emergencies.
- ❑ Strengthening partnerships with the IFIs during early recovery responses.

ACRONYMS USED IN THE DOCUMENT

ADRC	Asian Disaster Reduction Centre
AIDS	auto-immune deficiency syndrome
CERF	Central Emergency Revolving Fund
DAD	development assistance databases
ECHA	Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
ERWG	Early Recovery Working Group
HIC	humanitarian information centre
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IDP	internally displaced person
IFI	international finance institution
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IRP	International Recovery Platform
ISDR	International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NGO	non-governmental organization
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PDPT	Emergencies and Transition Unit
RC	Resident Coordinator
RIACSO	Regional Inter-Agency Coordination and Support Office
UNCT	United Nations country team
UNDAC	United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination
UNDG	United Nations Development Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme