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**Oral Report on the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) and  
Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA)  
Working Group on Transition:  
Background Paper**

**I. Introduction**

1. The present report is an update for the UNICEF Executive Board on the progress of the UNDG/ECHA Work Group on Transition, established in 2002 by the Economic and Social Council and assigned to address Action Point 14 of the Secretary General's Report on "Strengthening of the United Nations: Agenda for Further Change". The Executive Director of UNICEF is serving as Chairperson of the Working Group.

2. The term "transition" refers to the period in a country in crisis when external assistance is crucial in providing support to a still fragile cease-fire and peace process by helping to create the conditions necessary for political stability, security, justice and social equity. The Working Group undertook field-based studies in eight countries with a variety of transition challenges, and the varying roles the United Nations has in each country.

**II. Emerging lessons from transition experiences**

3. Essential programming in countries undergoing transition includes a rapid and accurate assessment of needs and the situation of human rights; the rapid and effective restoration of basic social services; the rehabilitation of crucial physical infrastructure; and the creation of conditions conducive to the return and reintegration of internally displaced persons and, where applicable, refugees. The fragility of the situation in many countries precludes the type of development programming that requires a high level of stability; hence, highly flexible programming allows for simultaneously addressing emergency, recovery and development challenges.

4. Programming in transitional situations requires that national authorities be key partners in setting strategic priorities for transition, as they are integral and essential to efforts to foster and support national ownership and capacity-building. Nevertheless, transitional situations usually entail finding the appropriate mixture and balance between the rapid, timely and effective delivery of humanitarian assistance in lingering conflict-ridden situations and the promotion of national ownership and capacity development, which often require a less rapid pace.

5. Programming in transitional situations can suffer from serious funding gaps from international donor organizations in part because of institutional and policy divides and

because specific transitional situations tend to lose global public attention prematurely. In one country, for example, four major donors in 2002 did not continue to provide contributions to for transitional programming in 2003, and another donor reduced its contribution significantly. However, transitional programming requires sufficient and sustained donor contributions.

### **III. The role of UNICEF in transitions**

6. The first set of challenges for UNICEF in transitions concern the assessment of rights, the restoration of services and effective inter-agency coordination with national authorities. Specific experiences have shown that UNICEF can rise to the challenges and play key roles in the coordination process with United Nations and other partners, e.g., in planning and programming for health, nutrition, education, water and sanitation and child protection.

7. UNICEF also is prepared to make improved and more substantial contributions to programming for and with children in transitional situations. In every such situation, it will be incumbent on UNICEF to use its experience and resources in ongoing country programmes of cooperation before, during and after the emergency phase that better meet the requirements of transitional programming. A high degree of flexibility in programming approaches and improving working relationships with national, non-State and international partners and communities and children is certainly one essential component.

8. Although the rights of children remain the constant focus of programming in all country situations, whether non-emergency, emergency or transitional, the approaches to addressing the fulfilment of those rights requires some adaptation. For example, children always need vaccinations, and a mass campaign is often the most appropriate intervention in an emergency situation. A transitional situation is thus also an opportunity to revitalize routine immunization services.

9. Back-to-school initiatives for children should no longer be treated as a lower priority in both emergency and transition situations. Rejuvenating and continuing the education of children is now a major challenge for UNICEF so that it becomes a major transitional initiative for girls as well as boys. The design of such initiatives has to include such related key interventions as provision of water and sanitation facilities at schools and the involvement of communities and teachers in providing a safe and secure school environment.

10. Transitional programming also requires that UNICEF, in partnership with other United Nations and non-governmental organization (NGO) partners, be more effective in assisting national capacity development, service coverage and monitoring and evaluation initiatives. Key programming challenges include mine education for communities on treatment and disposal of landmines and unexploded ordinance. Preventing the induction of boy and girl combatants, and the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration of former combatants, including child combatants, are challenging enough.

Increasingly, though, boys and especially girls want to have opportunities for their voices to be heard in community affairs. This entails helping them to acquire skills related to conflict resolution, prevention of domestic violence and pre-vocational education is a gigantic set of challenges.

#### **IV. Next steps**

11. The UNDG/ECHA Working Group will submit its final report and recommendations to the Secretary-General in January 2004. A consultation with Member States is planned for the first half of 2004. UNICEF has drawn on the findings of the Working Group in its ongoing efforts to improve its responses in emergency and transition situations.