

Background Note for Joint Meeting of the Executive Boards, January 2005

<p>Agenda Item: Transition from Relief to Development Using the Report of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG)/Executive Committee on Humanitarian Assistance (ECHA) Working Group on Transition Issues as Background</p>

Part I: Overview

A. Background

The UNDG/ECHA Working Group on Transition Issues was established in response to ECOSOC Resolution E/2002/32 calling on the UN system to address the funding and strategic planning gap between relief and development activities. It also addresses Action Point 14 of the Secretary-General's reform agenda asking UNDG to address integrated planning, budgeting and resource mobilization tools for countries emerging from conflict. The final report of the UNDG/ECHA Working Group on Transition Issues, including case studies of the way countries manage post-conflict transition¹, was endorsed by the Deputy Secretary-General and submitted to the Secretary General in December 2003. It provides a framework for improved United Nations response to transition through more coherent planning, effective handover of coordination responsibilities and appropriate resource mobilization. The UNDG and ECHA members are now implementing the recommendations and action plan.

The Working Group's efforts have taken place within the context of the Secretary-General's reform process and will continue to be informed by broad, ongoing discussions about improving UN system coherence. Progress in implementing Integrated Missions, and the final report of the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change will inform the Working Group's continuing efforts.

B. Summary of Response to the 'Transitions' Report:

The report of the UNDG/ECHA Working Group on Transition Issues was presented and discussed at the following meetings of Member States: a briefing to the Group of 77, April 2004; the Humanitarian Liaison Working Group (HLWG), April 2004; the WFP Executive Board, May 2004; the UNICEF Executive Board, January 2004; the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme and of the United Nations Population Fund, June 2004; and ECOSOC, July 2004.

At these meetings, the recommendations of the report were generally endorsed. Member States emphasized the need to find practical means of bringing together the UN's political, humanitarian and development work, and recognized the enormous benefits of investing in post-conflict societies to consolidate peace and to avoid

¹ The countries studied were Afghanistan, Angola, the Great Lakes Region (Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Rwanda and Tanzania), the Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan and Timor Leste.

returns to conflict.² There were, however, concerns expressed about the scope of transition issues covered by the Working Group. In particular, it was pointed out that the report of the Working Group does not fully address issues related to engagement of International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and the functioning of multi-donor trust funds; HIV/AIDS; and links with post-natural disaster transition. There was also concern that the report not lead to the diversion of development resources into humanitarian and transition assistance programmes. The need for national leadership of the transition process is another key issue, with some concern expressed that the definition of transition puts too much emphasis on external assistance without adequate acknowledgement of the role of national and local structures and capacity. The UN system has aimed as much as possible to address these issues through its actual interventions on the ground, in collaboration with national and international counterparts.

Part II: Update on the Working Group and Task Teams

Since the completion of the report of the Working Group, solid progress has been achieved in strengthening the UN system's capacity to support countries undergoing a transition from a humanitarian crisis to post-conflict recovery. Several outputs of the Working Group and its associated Task Teams - directly related to the recommendations of the Working Group report - have strengthened the UN system's response capacity in transitions.

Guidelines have been developed for a standardized approach to analysis, needs assessment and planning UN response. A Post-Conflict Needs Assessment (PCNA) handbook was jointly developed by the UN and the World Bank, and subsequently adopted by the Working Group. Needs assessments using the new approach have been conducted in Liberia and Haiti and are ongoing in Sudan. The PCNA methodology includes conflict analysis and facilitates a sharp focus on gender, HIV/AIDS, human rights and the environment. So far, PCNAs have also facilitated national ownership of the assessment process and definition of clearly-articulated, time-bound and achievable priorities for funding, based on recognized implementation and absorptive capacity constraints. The PCNA process has forged closer collaboration within the international community, including between the UN system and the International Financial Institutions, and between the international community and national authorities and civil society.

The Working Group has also finalized a framework for conflict analysis in order to place UN Country Team (UNCT) transition strategies – including the needs assessment stage - within an overall context that considers the root causes of conflict and how ongoing risks of relapse can be mitigated. The UN Development Group Office also intends to revise existing guidelines for Consolidated Country Assessments (CCAs), UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs) and other programming instruments in light of lessons learned from the UNDG/ECHA Working Group process. As more practical examples of using the tools of the Working Group are gathered, an inter-agency task team established under the UNDG/ECHA Working

² Findings of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change also support some key recommendations of the report, particularly in relation to the clear need for more sustained international attention and resources for countries in transition and strengthening of the Secretariat.

Group will also prepare a guidance note for all post-conflict countries on preparing transition strategies.

Mechanisms for effective and timely handover of coordination functions from the humanitarian to the development arms of the UN and to government are being put in place. A guidance note on coordination handover support has been drafted and will be endorsed by the Working Group in early 2005. The handover will include a gradual phasing out of OCHA and strengthening of support provided to the Resident Coordinator System, particularly in relation to strategic planning. A key priority will be to support the government through capacity-building and/or technical assistance to take on coordination functions. Already, UNDG has provided strategic planning support to post-conflict countries through the recruitment of strategic planners to assist UNCTs in Tajikistan and Cote d'Ivoire, and will support a Transition Unit in Georgia in 2005.

A review of existing resource mobilization mechanisms – a key concern of Member States - has also been initiated. The senior-level consultant who is undertaking the review has met with agency representatives, donor Government officials and the World Bank. A comprehensive discussion paper on the subject will be completed by end of December 2004, with detailed recommendations on key issues expected in March 2005. Based on the recommendations, a handbook will be produced to guide UNCTs in making decisions regarding resource mobilization, fund management and coordination arrangements in transition situations.

Annex I provides a summarized update of the Working Group on Transitions' action plan.

Related developments

Improvements in the interface between the political, peace-keeping, humanitarian and development arms of the UN are also being made, with the aim of joining together around a unified strategy and purpose while maintaining a clear 'humanitarian space'. While these developments are not outcomes of the Working Group on Transitions, their close relation to its recommendations and follow-up activities warrant discussion here. Some practical examples of increased coherence between the political and operational arms of the UN include: i) the designation of Deputy Special Representatives of the Secretary-General responsible for the humanitarian and development work of the UN at the country level, and ii) participation of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in needs assessment missions, particularly in the areas of justice and security sector reform, institutional capacity-building, governance and the organization of elections. An 'Integrated Missions Study' currently underway is expected to help strengthen further arrangements within integrated missions.

As the Working Group's efforts progress, improved liaison with the transition work of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), as well as regional bodies such as the African Union (AU) will be necessary.

Part III: Particular Challenges for the UN in Relation to Transitions

A. Capacity-Building

Most countries in transition face severe institutional and capacity constraints – yet working with national and local authorities as well as local civil society is essential to durable transition. The challenge is to ensure an inclusive planning process so that UN system programmes support one another and clearly focus on national and institutional capacity-building. State institutions must have responsibility and resources for ensuring that people in need receive assistance following a peace agreement. Aid should help nascent governments provide broad-based social services and pay civil service salaries, and avoid drawing skilled national talent into temporary, parallel NGO, bilateral aid or UN systems.

B. Financing for Transition

The UN needs to engage better the development agencies of Member States to fund early recovery and transitional programming. Dependency on voluntary contributions for assistance often means the response of the UN in transition situations is not timely or predictable. Well-timed, targeted and sustained resources are needed, yet donors have until now been more forthcoming with contributions for emergency relief than for post-conflict, transitional or recovery funding. A compact between the donor community and transition countries is necessary to ensure that both short- and longer-term needs are met, and far more engagement is required with bilateral donors and the World Bank to examine how existing instruments can be modified to better meet the resource mobilization needs of least developed countries emerging from conflict.

In addressing funding constraints and mechanisms, a more nuanced understanding of the linkages between humanitarian and transition/recovery financing is required, given that no clear line can be drawn between humanitarian, transition, recovery and early development interventions. The linkages among financing for peacekeeping, integrated missions and transition also need to be addressed. Crucially, given the focus on the UN system on peace-building in transitions, there is also a need to link financing for transition with financing for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration.

C. Gender

The role of gender as it relates to conflict management and peace-building in precarious environments remains poorly understood. Violent conflicts affect social relations, create demographic imbalances, and alter individual and group characteristics of men and women. Women often represent a potentially powerful – an untapped – resource for conflict management efforts in transitional contexts and efforts to deal with associated trauma, reconciliation, employment, child soldiers, transitional justice, and HIV/AIDS crises. Depending on the magnitude of war, death, and displacement, women may comprise a significant majority of post-war populations. They always represent a critical mass of the local population, but so far have only rarely been equal owners in the reconstruction efforts in their societies.

D. Post-Natural Disaster Response

Recovery from natural disasters and improving resilience to deal with them may need to be considered as transitional situations, alongside recovery from conflict. In addition, political instability can exacerbate vulnerability to natural disasters. The UNDG is considering how the UNDG/ECHA Working Group on Transition Issues might also address post-natural disaster transition situations, bearing in mind the concern of Member States as well as lessons learned from the Executive Board Members' Joint Field Visit to Mozambique in 2003.

This challenge will be described more fully in the presentation by the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for Haiti, on behalf of the Haiti UNCT.

N.B. More information on transition issues can be found on the UNDG website: www.undp.org.