UN Transitions: Sustaining Peace and Development Beyond Mission Withdrawal

Thematic Paper prepared by the UN Transitions Project (DCO, DPO, DPPA and UNDP)\(^1\) as a submission to the 2020 Report of the Secretary-General on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace\(^2\).

Introduction

The withdrawal or drawdown of a UN Peacekeeping Operation or a Special Political Mission represents a critical transition for a host country. It signals progress towards peace and new opportunities for development, but also presents risks that need to be addressed through sustained investment in peacebuilding and longer-term efforts to overcome fragility. The UN’s legacy in a country emerging from conflict depends, to a large extent, on how it has supported national actors and coordinated with international and regional partners to consolidate the political and social gains made during the mission’s presence. UN Mission withdrawals are currently underway in Sudan and Guinea-Bissau, and large-scale UN Peacekeeping Operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali and Central African Republic have been asked to initiate or intensify transition planning by the UN Security Council (S/RES/2463; S/RES/2480; S/RES/2448). While recently completed UN Transitions took place in environments marked by relative stability and peaceful handovers of power, these ongoing and future transition processes will likely unfold on the backdrop of unfinished political settlements, continued security challenges and protection gaps, and limited presence of governance and rule of law institutions throughout the territory of the host country. In these settings, the transition from a UN Mission to a UNCT-only presence, or from one type of UN Mission to another, is much more than an administrative or logistical operation. It should rather be viewed as an important moment in the “peace continuum” of a country emerging from conflict. As such, ensuring pro-active, integrated and forward-looking transition planning and management is a key priority for the Organization in years to come.

It is, therefore, imperative for the UN and its Member States to fast-track and strengthen their collective efforts to better shape future UN Transitions. In order to respond to these new dynamics and rapidly changing transition contexts, the UN System has been developing new approaches and partnerships to ensure improved operational and policy coherence, and to foster better integration in transition planning processes, while anchoring them in gender-responsive and human rights analysis. The following sections outline the impact of new approaches and partnerships while at the same time highlighting some key considerations and lessons learned from previous UN transitions.

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\(^2\) This thematic paper was prepared in June 2020 and consulted with DPO/DPET, DPPA/PMD, DCO/PPB, UNDP/Crisis Bureau (UN Transitions Project partner entities), DPO-DPPA/DRC IOT, DPO-DPPA/Haiti IOT, DPO-DPPA/Guinea-Bissau Team, and DPO/OUSG/GU.
The impact of pro-active, integrated and forward-looking UN Transition processes on sustaining peace

- **Strategic context and policy landscape on UN Transitions**

UN Transitions are central to system-wide efforts to prevent conflict, sustain peace, and deliver on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Secretary-General has made UN Transitions one of the priorities of his reform agenda in order to ensure a smoother, more coherent and effective change of the UN System’s response to evolving needs on the ground. To this end, the recent Secretary-General’s *Planning Directive for the development of consistent and coherent UN Transition processes*, issued in February 2019, provides enhanced guidance to UN Missions, Country Teams and HQ entities, particularly on early joint planning and financing, operational support, and staffing. Building on existing policy and guidance on UN integration, in particular the Integrated Assessment and Planning Policy (2013), the Secretary-General’s Planning Directive on UN Transitions provides a framework to advance both a development and a peace and security approach in the context of UN Transitions, in order to sustain peace and development gains, reduce the risk of relapse into conflict, and help set countries on a path towards achieving sustainable development. The SG’s Directive is based on insights stemming from previous transition processes which suggest several factors that determine whether a UN transition process will have a positive impact on a country’s peace and development trajectory.

- **Sustaining political engagement during UN transition processes**

Sustaining political engagement during and after mission withdrawal is essential to support key peacebuilding priorities. Many of these residual peacebuilding priorities are often highly political in nature, yet UN Transitions are often characterized by a decline in the Organisation’s political leverage. This challenge requires the UN to retain adequate capacity for political analysis, as well as for dialogue and convening power with national, regional and international stakeholders, so as to facilitate the implementation of key reforms and to safeguard enablers of conflict prevention and sustainable peace. Preserving space for inclusive peacebuilding, even as the Security Council disengages and as the UN political leverage decreases, requires the design of political strategies that can convene and engage a wide group of stakeholders, including the Security Council, the Peacebuilding Commission, relevant Member States, regional and sub-regional organizations, International Financial Institutions (IFIs), and civil society around a shared vision of key priorities and the desired end-state.

- **The criticality of national engagement in transitions**

National engagement is critical in UN transition processes. For transitions to help consolidate and sustain peace efforts as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, their timing, modalities and outcomes must be determined and implemented with national counterparts, including civil society networks and women’s organizations and coalitions. To ensure this, transition planning needs to be closely aligned to national development plans and strategies, while engaging a wide and diverse group of national actors. Meaningful engagement with national and local stakeholders must happen at an earlier stage to jointly determine shared priority areas, activities and capacities that need to be supported during and after mission withdrawal. A strong focus must be placed on strengthening capacities in areas that will be transferred after mission withdrawal, and on setting up
Joint planning and coordination structures with national counterparts, including key political and civil society actors.

- Effective financing in transition settings

Mission withdrawals often coincide with a lack of adequate focus on financing strategies to support predictable and longer-term funding priorities in post-conflict settings. This is compounded by the fact that UN Peacekeeping Operations and Special Political Missions often provide a considerable injection of economic activity into host countries’ local economies and that their withdrawal, in turn, increases the economic challenges for host countries, particularly in fragile contexts. It is, therefore, important that UN Missions, UNCTs and national authorities take into account economic considerations in integrated transition planning processes and elaborate longer-term financing strategies. This includes tapping into innovative financing modalities that will allow these actors to deliver effectively together and to strengthen partnerships with IFIs and the private sector. In this regard, the implementation of mandated programmatic activities funded through UN Peacekeeping’s assessed budget represent an innovative tool to facilitate transitions from UN Peacekeeping to peacebuilding. These activities engage strategic partners hailing from UNCTs, NGOs, and national counterparts based on comparative advantages, to ensure continued support in shared priority areas, thus strengthening greater coherence among UN System actors and building critical capacities. Moreover, the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) has opened a new funding window for transitions, to address the “financial cliff” that can appear during transitions. In 2019, 22 per cent of PBF investments were in transition settings, including in Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Liberia, Sudan, and Côte d’Ivoire, thus contributing to continuity in addressing peacebuilding and development challenges.

- Strengthening proactive and integrated transition planning

Proactive and integrated transition planning is crucial to ensure a timely and forward-looking UN Transition, which requires continuous and targeted support in various areas: from joint analysis and joint identification of peacebuilding priorities, to the articulation of integrated transition plans and the strengthening of UN coordination efforts. Since UN transitions involve the reconfiguration of the overall UN presence and goals, they must be jointly planned, coordinated and managed from the outset by all UN actors present in the country and at regional and headquarters level, in close partnership with national, regional and international stakeholders. Greater efforts should be placed on jointly identifying with the UNCT the priority areas and activities, roles, capacities and resources to support the Government after Mission withdrawal. Agencies, Funds and Programmes (AFPs) have a crucial role to play and they need to engage proactively and as early as possible in these transition planning efforts. To this end, dedicated capacities and human resources, particularly in Offices of DSRSG-RC-HCs, are critical to support efficient and coherent operational transition planning.
The UN Transitions in Haiti and Sudan can provide the UN System with key insights to identify and address challenges that may arise during future transition processes.

Darfur: A whole-of-system UN transition

The ongoing UN transition in Sudan is a uniquely complex undertaking, given UNAMID’s non-integrated nature and the Mission’s limited geographical coverage. Moreover, the transition is taking place in the context of difficult political and structural reforms, as well as persistent security, humanitarian and economic challenges. In recognition of these difficult circumstances, the UN and AU’s initial concept for the transition focused on a “whole-of-system” approach. This strategy places peacebuilding at its centre and focuses collaboration between the mission and UNCT around critical peacebuilding priority areas. Central to this collaboration are the State Liaison Functions (SLFs), an innovative mechanism for joint-up delivery against these priorities, aiming to enhance UNCT capacities through staff co-location and the transfer of programmatic funds. The use of UNAMID’s assessed budget has been critical to the SLF establishment, but it has also raised financial and planning challenges, mainly due to the short and uncertain timeframes of UNAMID’s transition budgets.

Recognizing that a more comprehensive approach to the transition was needed, UNAMID and the UN Country Team are implementing a Joint Transition Action Plan covering political, programmatic and security aspects of the transition in Darfur. To strengthen transition coordination, communication and information sharing, a Joint Transition Cell has been established and is functional. In addition, a joint Government of Sudan and UN coordination committee has been established to improve State Liaison Functions planning and monitoring of implementation, while also addressing challenges as they emerge. Regarding programmatic activities, a total of USD 32.2 million was allocated to SLFs from January to December 2019 towards stabilization and peacebuilding. These programmatic activities are aimed at addressing land and other resource-based intercommunal conflicts, as well as promoting resilience/durable solutions for returnees, internally displaced people (IDPs) and host communities. Although the planning, execution and monitoring of SLFs could be strengthened, their interventions are contributing to peacebuilding and social cohesion in communities in four Darfur states.

The fluid political and economic environment in Sudan has impacted the UN transition process in Darfur, including the engagement of UNAMID with the UNCT, whose focus is not only on Darfur, but on support to the Sudan-wide political transition. In the remaining months of UNAMID’s mandate, the mission and UNCT will need to continue to reinforce joint planning efforts and strengthen national engagement in the transition process, while also scaling up peacebuilding work, identifying opportunities for new actors to complement ongoing initiatives, and addressing questions of long-term sustainability.
Haiti: The transition from MINUJUSTH to BINUH

At its establishment, following the closure of MINUSTAH, the Security Council asked for a two-year benchmarked exit strategy for MINUJUSTH. It further requested the Mission to work closely with the UNCT and Government to prepare for its drawdown. The transition from MINUJUSTH to a special political mission, BINUH, working hand-in-hand with the UNCT for the implementation of joint priorities, took place as planned in late 2019, although in a challenging political and socio-economic environment.

The UN planning for the transition process was aided by UNHQ through the continuity of the Haiti backstopping team in the merged DPO–DPPA regional operational pillar. The process also benefited from close collaboration between DPPA/DPO and DCO, which facilitated the identification of a common vision to serve as the basis for the follow-on UN presence. A Secretary-General’s directive on Haiti’s transition provided integrated guidance to the UN system. The planning also involved dialogue between the SRSG and the Haitian leadership on the use of the PBF, and the process resulted in the eligibility of Haiti for PBF funding. The latter helped bridge the end of the programmatic funding from the assessed budget of MINUJUSTH and allowed the continuation of critical peacebuilding activities by the UNCT. In particular, the Joint Rule of Law Programme between MINUSTAH/MINUJUSTH and the UNCT, funded largely by the UN Peacekeeping assessed budget, had been designed as a cornerstone of the integrated approach to the continuation of critical activities after the Mission’s closure.

The security situation in the country and the absence of a confirmed government during the transition process meant that the national engagement was not at an optimal level. This resulted in delays in the integrated planning process and impacted the design and implementation of a timely resource mobilization strategy to continue to address joint peacebuilding priorities after the closure of MINUJUSTH and beyond the PBF allocation.

A model of integrated approach: the UN Transitions Project

- **Background and joint structure of the UN Transitions Project**

In 2014, UNDP, DPO, and DPPA initiated an innovative project to ensure that UN Transitions are well planned and managed, to help ensure that the UN is well positioned to provide efficient and effective support to host countries, as they progress towards sustainable development and peace. The UN Transitions Project is widely recognized as a key integrated mechanism providing guidance and system-wide support on how to address recurrent challenges related to UN Transitions. Its support has resulted in a noticeable organizational shift away from a focus limited to mission withdrawal and towards a more proactive and forward-looking approach that places emphasis on consolidating peacebuilding gains and sustaining peace beyond mission withdrawal. In its current phase (2020 - 2023), the Project includes the Development Coordination Office (DCO) as a new partner entity and focuses on institutionalizing lessons learned since the launch of this initiative. By serving the UN system as a ‘one-stop-shop’ on transition planning and management, the Project will continue
responding to the increased demand for transition planning support and will centralize capacities and expertise from across its project partners to provide system-wide integrated assistance.

- **Strengthening policy coherence and guidance on UN Transitions**

The UN Transitions Project has made important achievements to improve organizational practice and knowledge on transition processes in recent years. At the global level, the Project has played a catalytic role in influencing various policy streams with a view to strengthening operational and policy coherence across the development and peace and security pillars, including through support to the review of the 2013 Policy on Integrated Assessment and Planning (IAP) and the drafting and implementation of the Secretary-General’s *Planning Directive for the development of consistent and coherent UN Transition processes* across all mission settings. Furthermore, the Project supported the formulation of reconfiguration options and recommendations put forth in the reports of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on Darfur (S/2019/816) and Guinea-Bissau (S/2018/1086).

- **System-wide support to integrated planning and analysis in transition processes**

At the country level, the UN Transitions Project has improved operational coherence in transition contexts, by supporting the planning and management of UN Transitions in a number of key priority countries, as outlined below:

In **Haiti**, recognizing the need to jointly identify residual peacebuilding priorities and enhance capacities of the UNCT and national stakeholders to address them during and after MINUJUSTH’s withdrawal, the UN Transitions Project has provided support and accompaniment to the Resident Coordinator’s Office (RCO) in Haiti on rule of law and peacebuilding programming requirements, and has put in place planning and coordination modalities for transition planning. The Project has also provided technical expertise during the development of the MINUJUSTH benchmarks and was part of the 2018 Strategic Assessment. In addition, UN priorities and partnerships developed through joint analysis helped identify Women, Peace and Security (WPS) priorities for BINUH and translate them into concrete goals for the UNCT.

In **Darfur, Sudan**, the UN Transitions Project has supported UNAMID and the UNCT to pursue a whole-of-UN transition approach. This integrated strategy has prioritized UN collaboration in four priority areas and it has helped establish an innovative mechanism for joint-up delivery against these priorities, namely the state liaison functions (SLF). Furthermore, the Project has provided surge capacity on key transition tasks, contributing to the development of the Joint Action Plan for UN Transition in Darfur and deploying a Transition Specialist to the RCO.

In support of the transition process in **Guinea-Bissau**, the UN Transitions Project facilitated a transition workshop that enabled UNIOGBIS and UNCT staff to consult and reach agreement on the critical steps to be undertaken as part of the transition planning process. Accordingly, agreement was reached to use the existing UNDAF and the new UNSDCF as the substantive transition plan, which helped to strengthen UNCT’s ownership over the process and to articulate a strategy to address peacebuilding priorities following UNIOGBIS withdrawal. The Project will also deploy a Transition Specialist to contribute to system-wide transition planning efforts.
In Mali, to foster a pro-active, integrated and forward-looking approach to transitions, in line with the Secretary-General’s planning Directive, the UN Transitions Project organized a transition workshop for MINUSMA and UNCT staff to discuss ways to work more closely in support of key peacebuilding priorities across the country. The workshop and the subsequent efforts to develop the transition calendar have reinforced the implementation of the Integrated Strategic Framework and led to the establishment of an integrated transition planning mechanism. The steps undertaken in Mali show that, even in the absence of a mission withdrawal timeline, the SG’s Directive can prompt timely conversations about UN reconfiguration options, with a view to developing a common vision and approach to peacebuilding priorities, which builds upon the strength of the different actors.

In support of the reconfiguration process of the UN and its priorities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the UN Transitions Project has deployed a Transition Specialist since 2019 and has also provided surge capacity to support the UNCT and MONUSCO to articulate a Transition concept. It also participated in the independent Strategic Review Mission in June 2019, which produced recommendations to adjust the mandate, configuration and responsibilities of MONUSCO with a view to build up UNCT capacities in the country.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations outline a response to the aforementioned recurring transition challenges that should be addressed by the UN System and Member States in ongoing and upcoming transition processes:

- **UN Transitions involve UN-wide efforts and require capacities to plan and implement multi stakeholder processes, with political, programmatic, financial and operational dimensions, as well as engagement with a wide range of partners. The UN and Member States need to ensure that the necessary capacities and expertise are allocated both at the field and HQ level.**

- **In planning post-mission UN configuration, the UN and Member States should address the needs of the country and its people, ensuring that the necessary tools and resources are retained/established to support governments and societies, as they consolidate peace dividends and move towards sustainable development.**

- **Resident Coordinator Offices (RCOs) in post-Mission configurations should be adequately resourced in order to maintain political engagement capacities, produce political analysis to identify and address potential conflict drivers, and support technical assistance programmes.**

- **Greater efforts should be placed on jointly identifying with the UNCT the priority areas, activities, capacities and resources needed to support government authorities during and after a UN Transition.**

- **UN Security Council decisions on UN transitions should ideally be informed by a wide range of considerations, in order to ensure that peace and security gains are preserved in the longer term. Towards this end, the advisory role of the Peacebuilding Commission to the Security**
Council should be further strengthened, as the PBC can help convey national perspectives, as well as the views of other important partners.

- During UN Transitions, meaningful national engagement should be secured through high-level and early political engagement, along with support from a broad and inclusive range of national stakeholders, in order to jointly determine priority areas that need to be supported beyond mission withdrawal.

- To ensure continued political engagement, partnerships with regional and sub-regional organisations should be further strengthened by the UN Security Council through the adoption of a stronger regional approach to UN Transitions that leverages the political engagement between regional stakeholders and national actors.

- Transition plans should include the engagement of bilateral actors and IFIs, so as to develop coherent approaches aimed at preventing macroeconomic and fiscal shocks and strengthening national capacities to consolidate peace. These approaches should also be geared towards resource mobilization strategies, to facilitate lasting international commitment during and after a transition.