Helpdesk Research Report: UN peace support mission transition in Sierra Leone

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Query: What analysis exists of the transition from the UNAMSIL peacekeeping operation to United Nations Integrated Office for Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) in 2005/6 and the Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) in 2008?

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1. Overview

The UN intervention in Sierra Leone is regarded as '... one of the world's most successful cases of post-conflict recovery, peacekeeping and peacebuilding' (UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, cited in Committee of Africa 2011). The United Nations Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) began in 1999. At its height in 2001 it consisted of some 17,500 personnel. The mission had a strong influence on how the integrated mission concept is understood and applied today, particularly with regard to integrating humanitarian politico-military efforts and the UN system in the country, operating under the single leadership of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) (Eide et al 2005; Hull 2008).

In 2005, it was decided that UNAMSIL had run its course but that Sierra Leone (and its neighbouring countries) was still fragile and that continued UN support would be required. The United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) was therefore established, as a means of contributing comprehensively to Sierra Leone's peacebuilding efforts and to the consolidation of democracy in a post-conflict environment (Atuobi 2009). Compared to UNAMSIL, UNIOSIL was made up of a small office and had five components focusing on the key areas of its mandate (see section 2 below): peace and governance; human rights and the rule of law; civilian police; military; and public information (Atuobi 2009). When its mandate expired in September

2008, this closed the last chapter of the UN's peacekeeping presence in Sierra Leone (United Nations 2009).

In October 2008, the Security Council created the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL), a new, smaller, integrated peacebuilding office to continue the UN's commitment to assisting the country's new government with peace consolidation and economic recovery (United Nations 2009). The transition was viewed as an opportunity to strengthen the capacities of the United Nations to provide more targeted and effective support to the Sierra Leone Government (UN 2008). As an extreme contrast to UNAMSIL its staff is minimal; the office started with 70 staff in 2008 and its role focused on providing political advice to foster peace and political consolidation, offering support and training to the national police and security forces, and building the capacity of democratic institutions in furtherance of good governance and the promotion and protection of human rights (UNIPSIL 2012).

Thus far, analysis of the nature of the transition is limited. Descriptions and assessments of UNAMSIL, particularly, abound, but analysis of the transition from one mission to another is virtually non-existent. Because it is part of a broader approach to UN integrated working, UNIPSIL's impact (and by extension analysing the transition to UNIPSIL) is difficult to assess. For instance, the UN Joint Vision for Sierra Leone states: 'To reflect its temporary character, UNIPSIL will only act in a supportive capacity and restrict its activities to political guidance, promotion, technical advice, assessments and evaluations' (United Nations 2009b: 15). As a result, this document, therefore, does not specifically mention UNIPSIL in any of the programme outlines.

This report therefore relies on UN documents that discuss the different mandates of the missions, various commentaries on the transitions, and studies of particular development aspects that the various missions were involved in (elections and promoting gender).

A review of the mandates illustrates how the changing roles of the various missions were envisioned and incorporated into mandates, from monitoring the peace agreement, to peace consolidation and longer-term peacebuilding. The commentary shows that the various transitions were largely considered successful due to:

- careful planning
- widespread awareness-raising among the general public
- clear, targeted mandates
- the effective application of an integrated post-peacekeeping approach.

Section 4 also illustrates how careful attention to an evolving mandate ensured that mission emphasis gradually moved from implementation to building capacity to providing support (as in the example of elections. Constraints have, however arisen, as a result of the limited availability of post-crisis funding and the complexities associated with attempting to integrate disparate UN agendas. Further, as the gender example in section 4 shows, there was also the danger of a lack of continuity as the missions took over from one another, in terms of certain programme areas.

2. Comparing mandates

UNAMSIL's mandate

UNAMSIL was established in 1999 by UN Security Council Resolution 1270, mandated to assist the Government and the parties in carrying out provisions of **the Lomé Peace Agreement**. Up to 2005, its mandate included:

- Cooperating with the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) and the other parties to the Peace Agreement in the implementation of the Agreement, including monitoring adherence.
- Assisting GoSL in the implementation of the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration plan.
- Establishing a presence at key locations throughout Sierra Leone's territory, including at disarmament/reception centres and demobilisation centres.
- Facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance.
- Supporting the operations of United Nations civilian officials, including the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and his staff, human rights officers and civil affairs officers.
- Providing support, as requested, to the elections which were to be held in accordance with the Constitution of Sierra Leone (Atuobi 2009).

UNIOSIL's mandate

According to UNSC Resolution 1620 of 2005, UNIOSIL was 'established to assist the Government of Sierra Leone to **consolidate peace** by enhancing political and economic governance, building the national capacity for conflict prevention, and preparing for elections in 2007' (Atuobi 2009: 26). As such, the emphasis was on supporting national institution-building, rather than playing a directive role, for instance in the national elections. To this end, it was tasked to perform the following functions:

- Building the capacity of State institutions to address the root causes of the conflict, provide basic services and accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.
- Developing a national action plan for human rights and establishing the national human rights commission.
- Building the capacity of the National Electoral Commission to conduct a free, fair and credible electoral process in 2007.
- Enhancing good governance, transparency and accountability of public institutions, including through anti-corruption measures and improved fiscal management.
- Strengthening the rule of law, including developing the independence and capacity of the justice system and the capacity of the police and corrections system.
- Strengthening the Sierra Leonean security sector in cooperation with the International Military Advisory and Training Team and other partners.
- Promoting a culture of peace, dialogue, and participation in critical national issues through a strategic approach to public information and communication, including building an independent and capable public radio capacity.
- Developing initiatives for the protection and well-being of youth, women and children.

- Liaising with the Sierra Leonean security sector and other partners to report on the security situation and make recommendations concerning external and internal security threats.
- Coordinating with United Nations missions and offices and West African regional organisations in dealing with cross-border challenges such as the illicit movement of small arms, human trafficking and smuggling and illegal trade in natural resources (Atuobi 2009).

UNIPSIL's mandate

The UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) replaced UNIOSIL in 2008 by UN Security Council Resolution 1829 to support GoSL in its **peacebuilding** efforts. UNIPSIL also has a mandate that provides a political platform, aid coordination and support – through a multi-donor trust fund – and technical advice to assist the government. As such it largely plays an advisory and coordination role. Its activities include:

- Providing political support to national and local efforts in identifying and resolving tensions and threats of potential conflict.
- Monitoring and promoting human rights, democratic institutions and the rule of law.
- Consolidating good governance reforms, especially anti-corruption instruments such as the anti-corruption commission.
- Supporting efforts towards decentralisation, a review of the 1991 constitution and the enactment of relevant legislation.
- Closely coordinating with and supporting the Peacebuilding Commission, as well as the implementation of the peacebuilding cooperation framework and projects supported through the peacebuilding funds (Atuobi 2009; CIC 2011; UNIPSIL 2012b).

UNIPSIL is under the leadership of an Executive Representative of the Secretary General (ERSG). The ERSG position is 'triple-hatted', because it combines the functions of the mission leadership, with that of the Resident Coordinator (RC) and Humanitarian Coordinator (HC), which are responsible for the coordination and harmonisation of the UN development and humanitarian actors, namely the UN Country Teams (UNCTs), on the ground (CIC 2010). UNIPSIL comprises an office to support the ERSG and five substantive sections: Political Affairs and Peace Consolidation; Human Rights and Rule of Law; Democratic Institutions; Police and Security; and a Joint Strategic Planning Unit which is tasked with ensuring synergy across all of the mission's activities (CIC 2010).

In Sierra Leone, the UN system works under the 2009-2012 Joint Vision of the UN Family, which was developed in response to the government's peacebuilding priorities articulated in its 2008 Agenda for Change (Poverty Reduction Strategy) (CIC 2011).

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3. Commentary on transitions

The transitions from one mission to another in Sierra Leone have been largely viewed as a success. In his first report on UNIOSIL, the UN Secretary General reported that as this 'experiment' (i.e. first integrated UN office established to support peace consolidation after a

completed peacekeeping operation) had so far worked well (United Nations 2006: 10). This was aided by a common strategic plan for peace consolidation and the integration process between the UN system and GoSL In his 2010 Global Field Strategy, he also cited Sierra Leone as an example of a 'seamless transition between peacekeeping and special political missions' (United Nations 2010). A 2010 review of political missions also comments on the UN's successful streamlining of 32 different strategies into one joint vision of the UN family, particularly given that it had the GoSL's priorities at its core (CIC 2010: 52).

Reasons for this include:

- **Careful planning:** According to the UN Secretary-General, the transition from the United UNAMSIL to UNIOSIL was well planned and carried out without major obstacles (United Nations 2006: 1). Yabi also comments that UNAMSIL's exit strategy was 'based on a 'carefully calibrated' gradual drawdown of its military component' (Yabi 2009: 187), and that it was 'careful and well thought out in terms of the progressive transfer of security responsibilities to the national army and police and their training to assume such tasks' (Yabi 2009: 191).
- **Extensive awareness-raising and information-sharing:** The Secretary-General's report commented that 'an effective public information campaign conducted by UNAMSIL, and later UNIOSIL, prepared the population for the departure of UNAMSIL and for the role that the United Nations would play' (United Nations 2006: 2). As a result, UNIOSIL was fully accepted by all stakeholders concerned. Hunt also comments that the end of a mission requires information and continued engagement with the public, and systematic approach to a public information exit strategy. He cites UNIOSIL as 'a good example of how the absorption by the political mission and eventual handover of the radio station works in the post-mission environment' (Hunt 2006: 37).
- **Targeted mandates that are clearly elaborated upon:** A 2010 review of political missions found that UNIPSIL has one of the most targeted mandates of UN political missions, which enables it to have a focused strategy (CIC 2010). The 2011 review concluded that 'UNIPSIL's clear and focused mandate has made articulation of benchmarks, according to which exit can be planned, straightforward' (CIC 2011: 49).
- The intrinsic value of an integrated, post-peacekeeping approach: Martin cites the approach taken in Sierra Leone as an example of the value of 'the continued integration of peacebuilding and development activities beyond the presence of international security forces' (Martin 2010: 13).
- **The appropriateness of the ERSG approach: The 2010 review of political missions concludes that the ESRG model 'works well in [Sierra Leone's] particular context** because it is accompanied by a peacebuilding strategy that aligns all aspects of the UN's country presence, and thus having one person in charge streamlines the decision-making process and complements integration' (CIC 2010: 52).

Nevertheless there have been some constraints. These include:

- **Funding:** Regular reviews of political missions find that post-peacebuilding missions find it difficult to attract funding. In Sierra Leone this started from the UNAMSIL's drawdown

period (CIC 2006). Despite UNIPSIL's unique integration model it still suffers from the lack of sufficient resource mobilisation for Sierra Leone (CIC 2010; 2011).

- **Inherent problems associated with an integrated approach:** As a relatively new approach, integrated missions still suffer from a lack of basic guidelines, which can lead to ambiguities (CIC 2010). Further, 'some actors in the humanitarian sphere voice concerns that the integrated approach diminishes the impartiality of the humanitarians, as they are perceived as intrinsically linked with the role of the mission in a country's political transition process. Others argue that the set up in fully structurally integrated missions, where the ERSG also acts as the RC/HC, is an impediment to a more robust political role, because the mission leadership is not solely perceived as an impartial political mediator' (CIC 2010: 53).

4. Evolutionary trends of particular areas of focus

This section considers how two particular interventions fared through the process of transitions, namely support to elections and the various missions' progress with promoting gender. The elections example demonstrates how lessons from previous experience were incorporated, particularly in terms of adjusting the mandate to progressively empower local institutions. The gender example shows how lack of sustained focus can cause important features of post-conflict transition to be left off the agenda.

Declining role in running elections
An examination of the nature of UN mission support to Sierra Leone's elections is a useful means of analysing the nature of transition particularly because each of the three missions have been involved in supporting Sierra Leone presidential and parliamentary elections: UNAMSIL in 2002; UNIOSIL in 2007 and UNIPSIL the upcoming 2012 elections (unless stated otherwise, information is derived from Atuobi 2009).

From 1999 to 2005, UNAMSIL peacekeepers performed multiple tasks which were hitherto not part of UN peacekeeping mandate, including the conduct of elections. UNAMSIL's electoral mandate in 2002 was to assist the National Electoral Commission (NEC) with logistic support and provide wider security and deterrence. Despite this limited mandate, UNAMSIL's role in the elections covered a broad scope of activities, from assisting the NEC to transport voter registration material and personnel to registration centres throughout the country, to assisting NEC to design election logos and posters that were used during the voter registration exercise. Other tasks included monitoring, logistical, security and public information support, providing training on the electoral process for national public information staff, training electoral staff and supporting the Sierra Leone Police (SLP to develop guiding principles on election security. The result of all this activity was that UNAMSIL had an overbearing influence on the electoral process, and sidelined NEC as the body mandated to conduct elections.

UNIOSIL's mandate under its peace and governance component also included the specific duty to support Sierra Leone's elections in 2007, mostly through building the capacity of the NEC to undertake free, fair and transparent elections. Unlike UNAMSIL, however, UNIOSIL focused on enabling Sierra Leonean institutions to take the lead. UNIOSIL's support for the 2007 elections

can be categorised into four main areas of support: technical (strengthening NEC's capacity to undertake its functions); logistical (assistance with distribution of ballots and transporting NEC officials); financial (helping to set up the electoral basket fund); and political, by giving weight to NEC's decisions and encouraging political parties to accept the outcome of the elections. UNIPSIL also transformed the UN radio into an independent public broadcaster to try to prevent the partisan broadcasting of the past from fomenting political rivalry and began building up national mediation capacity (CIC 2010).

In the upcoming 2012 elections, UNIPSIL is supporting the technical aspects of election preparation, including the electoral budget, a voter registration system, reform of the electoral law, and assisting the National Electoral Commission (NEC) and the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC) as needed.

Gender: lost in transition
Although UNAMSIL had a strong gender component, when the mission entered the drawdown phase, the language on gender disappeared from Council resolutions (unless stated otherwise, information is derived from Yabi 2009). Resolution 1562 (2004), which defined the tasks of the residual UNAMSIL presence, made no reference to gender. Resolution 1620 (2005), which defined the mandate of UNIPSIL, only asked the new presence to assist the government to develop 'initiatives for the protection and well-being of youth, women and children' among many other tasks. Given the exceptionally high toll paid by women and girls during the war and their marginalisation from decision-making, a more visible focus on gender issues should have been incorporated. UNAMSIL's exit strategy had been careful and well thought out in terms of the progressive transfer of security responsibilities to the national army and police and their training to assume such tasks, but it was not gender-sensitive.

UNIOSIL subsequently failed to put gender on its list of its priorities, although it later took gender issues more seriously, developing a plan for its implementation. The first explicit reference to resolution 1325 (2000) appeared one year after UNIOSIL's establishment. Resolution 1734 of 22 December 2006 emphasised the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding, as recognised in resolution 1325 (2000), underlined that a gender perspective should be taken into account in implementing all aspects of the mandate of UNIOSIL, welcomed the action plan developed by UNIOSIL, encouraged UNIOSIL to work with the Government, and requested the Secretary-General to ensure adequate capacity, expertise and resources to carry out that work.

When the Security Council decided on the establishment of UNIPSIL, it emphasised from the outset (i.e. in its resolution 1829 of 4 August 2008), 'the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding, as recognised in resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008)'. The resolution underlined that a gender perspective should be taken into account in implementing all aspects of the mandate of UNIPSIL and encouraged UNIPSIL to work with the Government of Sierra Leone in that regard. UNIPSIL has subsequently demonstrated its adherence to the resolution by supporting the creation of the All Political Parties Women's Association in January 2011, which was founded to promote gender equality and women's political participation (UNIPSIL 2012b).

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