

CHAPTER 2

PEACEKEEPING AND GENDER RELATIONS IN SIERRA LEONE

Although gender equality is an internationally recognized basic element of human rights, activities in the area are criticized for interfering with the culture of the host population, imposing western values and practices, and in extreme cases, of undermining social norms. The very subject matter – gender – is often misunderstood as women-only, which guarantees confusion regarding what is meant by the term, resistance, and in some cases outright hostility.¹

Introduction

The focus of this chapter is the United Nations Peace Support Operation (PSO) in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). This PSO has been held by many to be successful, particularly when the relative stability of Sierra Leone is considered against the background of the particularly violent conflict affecting this country between 1991 and 1999.² Though the region continues to be unstable (the conflict in neighbouring Liberia has only just been brought to a close), the recent elections in Sierra Leone in conjunction with the dominance of the UN peacekeeping presence has undoubtedly created conditions of relative security.³

However, efforts by both UNAMSIL and humanitarian organisations in Sierra Leone have attracted heightened attention since February 2002 when the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR) and Save the Children Fund UK (SCFUK) report detailing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) and Gender Based Violence (GBV) was unofficially released.⁴ Unlike other missions, where scandals tend to have been dismissed by reference to the ‘anecdotal’ nature of reports, the wide dissemination of the UNHCR/SCFUK findings,⁵ while criticised by some, evoked international interest. Documented cases of SEA and other atrocities committed against refugees by those in power, including “teachers, individuals in the commercial sectors, refugee leaders...individuals with access to goods or money, humanitarian aid workers from various UN and International Agencies, NGO’s and UNAMSIL Peacekeeping troops”,⁶ invoked dismay mixed with disbelief from

concerned onlookers. These abuses, though shocking to many, were nevertheless 're-discovered' in that the issue of SEA within PSOs have been around for at least the last decade, and have led to the establishment of guidelines to curtail such abuses of power.⁷ The intention of this chapter is to highlight the current environment surrounding SEA in UNAMSIL deployed in the country since 1999.⁸ The focus is on the culture of prevention and reaction to SEA in the wake of the UNHCR/SCFUK Report. Specifically, it is concerned with issues turning on the positive effects of the report (tighter policies and raised awareness), together with those understood to be more negative (SEA potentially moving underground).

The current chapter will reflect on perceived differences between UNAMSIL⁹ and MONUC¹⁰, where a dedicated Office of Gender Affairs (OGA)¹¹ was established that has a direct reporting responsibility to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG). Its focus will also be on the importance of cultural differences in peacekeeping practice and the ways in which they may be imposed upon female members of the local population

While there is no discrete OGA in UNAMSIL, there is a Gender Specialist in the Human Rights section of this PSO.¹² Her work has included supporting a Women's Task Force of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and has recommended the development of a policy of psychological support for victims of violence. Further, the chapter will convey research findings focused on gendered relations derived from fieldwork conducted in and around UNAMSIL during two weeks in May 2003 as a way in which to tentatively reflect on the potential implications of the absence of a dedicated OGA in UNAMSIL.

The objective of this chapter is to constructively contribute towards meeting the aims of Resolution 1325, the Windhoek Declaration and the Namibia Plan of Action on Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peace Support Operations, that direct attention to issues related to gender perspectives in PSOs. This research hopes to illuminate the particular issues at play in UNAMSIL in respect of gendered relations, together with recommendations about how best to respond to them.

Study methodology

The more immediate background to the current chapter is related research carried out in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in and around the UN PSO (MONUC) one month prior, during April 2003.¹³ The findings from

the DRC (that had originally explored gender awareness training) have helped to shape the findings presented here involving a focus on SEA in UNAMSIL. While it was important to generate data on the potential use of gender awareness training in UNAMSIL, the particular circumstances and recent history of Sierra Leone and UNAMSIL in respect of the UNHCR/SCFUK report meant that potential cases of SEA were foregrounded in the research design.

The method considered to be most appropriate to address this broad area incorporated a data-led approach, involving qualitative, semi-structured individual and group interviews with male peacekeepers (no female peacekeepers were available)¹⁴ in three sector areas of UNAMSIL. In addition, UN and NGO civilians were interviewed where possible. The study also involved periods of informal observation, and more casual interaction with a small number of sex-workers in the bars and clubs frequented by UN and other personnel in Freetown.¹⁵ Findings from this study should not be taken as representative of the situation of gendered relations in this or other PSOs. However, themes upon which the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) Lessons Learned report focused,¹⁶ (and numerous other reports) parallel particular aspects of gendered relations observed in UNAMSIL.

Research Focus¹⁷

This research builds on and develops work carried out in the DRC (MONUC). Its broad focus includes a consideration of the ways in which gender issues are tackled in UNAMSIL within the context of the absence of a dedicated OGA. Themes explored below include:

- Context and background to the study;
- Sierra Leone and the legacy of, and response to, the UNHCR/SCFUK report;
- The UNAMSIL Personal Conduct Committee (UPCC);
- Commercial Sex Work in Sierra Leone;
- Gendered Relations and Peacekeeper National Culture.

Context

Sierra Leone has a history of trafficking and sexual exploitation of women.¹⁸ A feature of the violent war in the country has been the high incidence of rape, gang rape, and sexual slavery, and is argued to have included between

215,000 and 257,000 women and girls.¹⁹ Reports of SEA in refugee camps is likely to represent one aspect of a much wider instances of GBV, some of which has been perpetrated by humanitarian workers and peacekeepers.²⁰ The context for this research is the nature of gendered relations between UNAMSIL peacekeeping personnel and local²¹ civilian women within Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone and the UNHCR/SCFUK Report

It was clear from the outset that the political conditions of UNAMSIL in respect of gender issues were considerably different from those found in the DRC and MONUC. In these terms there existed a heightened sensitivity of the 'gender issue'. This was clear from the generally greater awareness evident amongst participants of the Code of Conduct, for example. In addition, the language used around gender appeared to reflect a greater recognition of the nature of 'appropriate' gender relations, though it is important that analysis engages with potential tensions between *articulated* levels of awareness and *actual* activities on the ground.²² This is not to suggest that the activities of peacekeepers and others is *consciously* deceptive, but rather, that the evolution of awareness may continue to be at odds with the activities of a number of personnel who may have 'learned the appropriate language'. Indeed, one civilian participant remained adamant that the exchange of sex for money, goods or services with girls under 18 was 'definitely' ongoing, although involved a minority of peacekeeper perpetrators. However, unlike the situation in one particular sector area of the DRC (MONUC), these activities were argued to have gone 'underground' and become 'secretive'. The participant also considered other unintended outcomes of the UNHCR/SCFUK report that had created unease amongst some NGO donors who were less willing to fund organisations they perceived as vulnerable to potential scandal around cases of SEA. Finally, this participant suggested that the report had 'reinforced a silence' around these issues and that 'nothing had really changed' with regard to the exploitation of women and girls by more powerful stakeholders. More in-depth research is necessary to further substantiate the suggestion that cases of SEA continue to be perpetrated by male peacekeeping personnel.

UNHCR/SCFUK Report – Response

A number of initiatives have resulted from the report. At the highest level within Sierra Leone has been the establishment of the Coordination

Committee for Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (CCSEA), an interagency committee under the leadership of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The focus here has been on the methods and prevention procedures that have led to the creation of the Standards of Accountability aimed at humanitarian organisations. The CCSEA continues to develop strategies to tackle abuse including raising awareness and drafting policy on personnel recruitment and service provision for survivors. However, it has – as yet – failed to create a post for a Community Relations Officer (CRO) who would interface with local people and receive their grievances.²³

The UNAMSIL Personnel Conduct Committee (UPCC)

The UPCC has its genesis in complaints by three women to UNAMSIL in April 2000 that ‘uniformed peacekeepers were going around the houses in the Aberdeen area offering US\$1 notes to under-aged individuals in exchange for sexual favours.’ UNAMSIL responded to these allegations and reinforced its commitment to prevent SEA and GBV by creating the UPCC in March 2002. The role of the UPCC is to promote awareness of the UN Code of Conduct for Peacekeepers and ‘zero tolerance’ on SEA and GBV. It extends to national and international staff, both civilian and military. Its aim is to respond to all reported allegations of misconduct and ensure that ‘appropriate action is taken.’ The committee comprises 16 members spanning the range of international, national and civilian and military stakeholders. Its terms of reference include:

- A mass awareness programme targeting civilians and military personnel on the Code of Conduct;
- Receiving of external allegations on misconduct and impropriety committed by members of the Mission. (Telephone hotlines for use by the general public have been made available) as well as encouraging them to complain in writing;
- The development of preventive and dissuasive strategies to all components of the Mission;
- Making recommendations to improve existing rules and regulations relating to personal conduct;
- Making recommendations to the appropriate authorities on all allegations of misconduct.

The UPCC represents a robust and inclusive attempt to curtail SEA and GBV by UNAMSIL personnel. It formed the focus and content of a good many of the interviews, particularly from those participants directly involved in the committee. However unlike OGAs, its remit does not include the inclusion of mission policies and activities that have a gender perspective, nor interface with civil society organisations, to encourage equal participation of women and men in peace processes to ensure coherence between mission policies and national priorities. In these terms, it tends to be a reactive, rather than proactive in its aims and objectives.

The UPCC – Some Issues

Concern was raised by one UN civilian participant that the military Provost Marshall investigates allegations of military personnel, thereby keeping the allegation ‘in-house’. While the Civilian Police (Civpol) focused on allegations made against civilians, the participant felt that one way to build confidence with the local community was to have an external and transparent body tasked with *independently* investigating both military and civilian personnel. Only in this way could a credible level of accountability be created in the minds of the local population, some of whom may have viewed the internal workings of UNAMSIL with suspicion.²⁴

During the period in which the fieldwork took place, the UPCC was encouraging the higher level decision-makers to draw up a list of habitual offenders as one way to prevent them perpetrating similar offences in different missions.²⁵ It was suggested by another UN civilian participant that to date (around the middle of May 2003 at time of interview), the telephone hotlines had remained unused. This, it was felt, could be due to a number of reasons, including access to telephones, unreliability of landlines in Sierra Leone, and the lack of confidence of survivors or their friends/relatives to speak with members of an organisation that could appear intimidating to disenfranchised groups. In addition, it might be that survivors are unaware that their rights had actually been violated. In the case of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees who may not be familiar with the environment, whose first language may not be English, and who may be experiencing estrangement from family, daily chaos around securing accommodation and other basic resources, the idea that they might calmly locate and dial a number to complain of an abusive incident about an unknown peacekeeper is far from practical. Sentiments around the value of telephone hotlines were supported by another UN civilian participant who aired similar concerns.

Overall, it was argued that while the policies and initiatives of the UPCC were seen as positive and progressive, ultimately, it was the issue of *response* on which the Committee would be judged. Was it able to deliver on its promises, and could it gain the respect of the local population? The lack of service provision in Sierra Leone, particularly in respect of survivor and support mechanisms, it was argued, were key stumbling blocks to its ultimate success or failure. In addition, there was a perception that the level information sharing remained limited between the various stakeholders and that, ultimately, enforcing a 'zero tolerance' policy for upwards of 18,000 peacekeepers was 'unrealistic'.

Commercial Sex Work

First impressions of the social organisation of commercial sex-work in Sierra Leone differed from the situation in the DRC. However, these observations are unlikely to be representative as it was only possible to visit three sectors, with the duration of the stay in these areas limited. A number of civilian participants, including members of civil society, referred to the ways in which certain peacekeepers 'donated' cell-phones to women, established them in rented accommodation in Freetown, and visited them during weekends or other off-duty periods. These relationships were exploitative in that they were characterised by sharp differentials of power between privileged male peacekeepers and local women. Another member of civil society, a male worker for an NGO in one of the sectors, described how significant numbers of women were perceived to form 'relationships' with members of one particular battalion. The participant described a pattern of gift exchange between the peacekeepers and the females, though failed to identify the local women's highly disadvantaged and insecure position in relation to the secure male peacekeeper. He went on to describe how during troop rotation, the women would accompany their partners to the airport to 'wave them off'. It was argued that they would then start the next 'relationship cycle' with members of the incoming replacement battalion. It is likely that local women in these situations – having few other possibilities to generate an income – had necessarily to become involved in these exploitative relationships.²⁶

It appeared that the centre of the commercial sex-industry in Sierra Leone was Freetown. Here, it was widely known that 'survival' and 'consumerist' prostitution²⁷ co-existed. Hotels, bars, brothels and clubs catered for the range of clients from local men through to UN personnel who tended to be financially better-off and were the natural 'targets' for prostitutes seeking money.

Undoubtedly, this particular prostitute economy was of importance to local business people, a number of whom may have supported and facilitated such activities.

Within a few kilometres of UNHQ in Mammy Yoko were a number of clubs in which, as a white male, it was extremely easy to meet with sex-workers. They included women from Liberia, Guinea and other countries. These refugees tended to be less secure and were subject to racist comments from women who originated from Sierra Leone, as they were perceived to be 'stealing their business'. In addition, their self-identities were not those of 'prostitutes' or 'sex-workers', but rather as 'refugees', and they saw their work as involving a series of short-term relationships with 'boyfriends' that just happened to provide some financial gain. The extent to which they were forced into this work, and exploited due to their insecure position, was rationalised through this identity, though their vulnerability to abuse and exploitation remained.

An interview was held with the representative of an NGO who worked with prostitutes, some of who were under 18 years of age. This participant argued that the information provided by these sex-workers was that the 'majority' of their clients were UNAMSIL personnel, although again, this information cannot be substantiated and should be treated as anecdotal. However, it may have been that UNAMSIL personnel who used the services of prostitutes who were either 16 or 17 years of age did not consider that they were breaking the rules as this age range fell within the age of consent in Sierra Leone.²⁸ In addition, that aspects of prostitution are 'legal' in Sierra Leone offered male peacekeepers a further possibility to defend themselves. The question of age and sexual abuse is however, dealt with in the Code of Conduct,²⁹ and in this respect peacekeepers are in clear breach of the guidelines.

Gendered Relations and Peacekeeper National Culture

The four days spent being hosted by two battalions in different sector areas allowed the unexpected possibility to observe the internal social organisation of these units. In addition, it provided an opportunity to make some provisional comments about their apparent impact on local women.

Both battalions were located in sectors that were relatively isolated and were accessible mainly by helicopter, with the journey by road taking many hours. They were seen as a largely positive influence on the local community by one

participant of the civil society and a UN civilian worker. The former discussed how one of the battalions was especially concerned to distribute food and that they had made their medical services available to local people. They had been involved in the reconstruction of schools and other public buildings. In addition, they had been successful in quelling local unease when it developed, and were quick to appear and 'brings things under control.' They were also active in collecting information and bringing perpetrators of crime (committed locally) to justice, sometimes working with local civilian police.

Discipline in the Battalions

Unlike the battalion mentioned earlier that interacted closely with the local population, the two case study units had a curfew of 18.00 hours – this was strictly adhered to. Visits to the local town or outlying villages were not conducted alone, with vehicles always containing a Senior Non Commissioned Officer (SNCO), and often with three occupants. There was a great sense of 'home' created in the barracks and messes with well-organised recreational facilities, a mosque, sturdy accommodation constructions and an overall sense of pride in their ability to be largely self-sustaining. A range of activities was organised on a daily basis, and included movie nights for the offices (and the availability of a TV for the lower ranks), cricket, football and weight-training. There was a great sense of camaraderie created in the camp that appeared to provide 'outlets' for the boredom that can often arise during deployments abroad, particularly amongst troops confined to barracks. Informal participants, and others interviewed more formally (including a UN civilian worker), suggested that they had no real reason to leave the barracks, and when they did they were faced with a language barrier. The use of alcohol was strictly prohibited on religious grounds thereby removing another justification for wishing to leave the familiar surroundings of the camp. The officers were permitted up to 2 months leave in total, after six months in mission.³⁰

It was stressed that the lower ranks could 'get into trouble' just by talking with local people, and they were kept under surveillance for much of the time. However, some limited interaction was noted between gate guards and local children and women, with clothes, food and other resources being distributed. Officer participants – interviewed informally – also made reference to their perceptions of peacekeeping troops from other countries who 'lacked discipline' were 'more likely to get involved' (with local women). On numerous occasions the phrase 'best performance' was used and the esprit-de-corps

of the two battalions frequently turned on rivalry with other national forces with frequent reference to their own 'professionalism' versus that of the 'amateurism' of other units.

Informal officer participants also said that lower ranks received monthly briefings on the Code of Conduct, and that it was conveyed to them, (in religious overtones) that any potential involvement with local women was considered as 'both a sin and a crime'.

Gender Issues – Cultural 'Grooming'

The effects of PSO's on the local communities that host them are likely to vary widely. One way in which to understand the dynamics influencing their operations is to consider the intersection of local cultural norms with those imported by peacekeepers. In this thinking, PSOs can be seen as an integral element of a 'cultural framework'³¹ that turns on peacekeepers constituting a particular cultural presence. If an operation is to be effective, it is crucial that it maintains good relations with the local population. This is most likely to occur if peacekeepers have a sound understanding and respect for the local culture.³²

During a brief period of fieldwork in one sector site, it became apparent that cultural norms between local and imported peacekeeper cultural practices were a point of tension. Shortly after one of the battalions had been deployed in Sierra Leone, concern had been expressed by senior members of the battalion at the 'nakedness' of local women (referring to their uncovered breasts). An informal officer participant had described how he was shocked at this inappropriate display and that groups of officers had been tasked to drive around villages asking that local women 'be covered up'. Discussions were also held at higher levels with Paramount Chiefs who were asked to co-operate in this process and pass the message on to the women and adolescent girls in villages to 'dress properly'. A number of women replied that they did not have available the clothing with which to cover up. Members of the battalion then set about distributing clothing so that the women could adhere to the wishes of the peacekeepers.³³

An essential component of the pre-deployment or in-mission training of peacekeepers involves their understanding and respect for local cultural practices. Yet, this research suggests the existence of a somewhat 'colonial' attitude towards local people and their cultural norms. In the case of the predominantly Muslim members of the battalion – it was thought that local

people were best served by adhering to imposed religious practice concerning the perceived 'offensiveness' of displays of certain parts of the female anatomy.

Members of the two battalions I spent time with displayed a qualitatively different response to local people in Sierra Leone than appeared to be the case for other battalions. For example, those from neighbouring African countries did not impose cultural practices, derived from religious belief systems, on the local population. These peacekeepers, however, were more likely to have sexual relations with local women as the differences between them were not considered to be a barrier to interaction or subsequent integration; these 'outlets' were normalised and considered 'natural'. Further explanatory factors may be that either there was no prohibition of, or disciplinary enforcement to prevent, sexual activities with local populations; or there was little effort placed in the African battalions to keep the troops occupied through a dedicated programme of sport and leisure activities. As Tamara Duffey states, drawing on Rubinstein's work on the cultural dimension of peacekeeping:

A peacekeeping mission may mean many different things to different people, because each may have a different political understanding of the situation. Peacekeeping operations take place in the context of the daily lives of multiple communities: diplomatic, military [humanitarian] and local. Each of these communities embodies culturally constituted ways of behaving and understanding the objectives and practices of the operation. Sometimes the intersection of these cultural spheres is problematic.³⁴

From this exploratory research, it was clear that there existed an intersection of military-masculine and cultural practice that influence the nature and frequency of contact with local women. The importance of committed leadership was of prime importance, as was the use of military discipline to shape the patterns of gendered relations developing during deployment.

HIV/AIDS Training

Discussion around gender relations with informal officer participants in the battalions was usually met with the official response that mixing of peacekeepers and women was a prohibited activity. In these terms, members of the officer corps were extremely prescriptive in setting the boundaries of discipline in terms of what would and would not be tolerated. However, despite such strict disci-

iplinary measures, the UN undertook to provide HIV/AIDS training. The contradictions between the prohibition of sexual activity with local women on the one hand, and the provision of HIV/AIDS training on the other is clear. However, it was not possible to elicit data on this point of tension, although there was a sense in which it was 'assumed' that peacekeepers would engage in sexual relations. This understanding draws on framing men as 'biologically driven' to engage in heterosexual intercourse, and was most likely considered to be a pragmatic response to this possibility.³⁵ Further, that the Code of Conduct provides for the possibility of so-called *bona fide* relationships, and also that peacekeepers may well engage in sexual activity while on leave outside of the PSO could also be seen as rationales for the provision of this training. No information was forthcoming on either the value of the training or any potential issues around the spread of HIV/AIDS by peacekeepers.³⁶

Awareness of Gender Issues

As has already been suggested, the UNHCR/SCFUK report had created an impact on the gendered culture of UNAMSIL in terms of highlighting recent incidences of SEA. Yet, informal UN civilian participants believed that the report had perhaps helped to move ongoing abuse underground, and that it was less likely to be discussed openly. A focus group held with five military observers in one of the sector areas revealed a high level of awareness of gender issues, and was able to comment on the vulnerabilities of women and children in the post-conflict setting and identified the desperation that might drive some to exchange sex for money, goods or services. They were also aware of the relatively young age at which many local women (and girls) had started families and the increased pressure this placed them under to generate income to feed their families. These heightened levels of awareness were evident from other military observers, though, unlike the DRC and MONUC, the extent to which this level of awareness was gained in-mission or prior to deployment was unclear. The induction phase of the peacekeeper training programme tended to stress the Code of Conduct in view of the UNHCR/SCFUK report, rather than focusing on gender awareness 'training' per se.

However, while awareness appeared to be heightened amongst peacekeepers, a UN civilian participant believed there existed considerable scope for improvement in their behaviour. This participant suggested that 'peacekeepers were not trained to recognise gender issues' and that what was needed was in-depth training to familiarise peacekeepers with 'the history and culture' of Sierra Leone to improve their awareness.

Conclusions

Each PSO develops according to a complex nexus of internal, external and historical factors. It is clear that in UNAMSIL, the UNHCR/SCFUK report had left a deep impression on levels of gender awareness together with strategies (such as the UPCC) intended to monitor and follow-up such activities. Unlike the DRC (MONUC), there did appear to be more of an onus on preventative action, although considerable work remains to move from the current tendency to be reactive. A considerably more proactive approach might head-off the exploitative actions of peacekeepers towards local women, although, again it may also serve to drive activities underground. While the availability of a telephone 'hotline' through which members of the local community might report abuses, or raise issues around these activities, appears to be a useful contribution, nevertheless, it fails to adequately take account of the realities 'on the ground' for individuals who may have been abused, or have knowledge of abuse. For the hotline to be more effective, there would need to be a concerted campaign to raise awareness amongst local people, but also to ensure landline or perhaps cell-phone provision, perhaps through agencies already working with vulnerable groups.

The absence of a dedicated OGA is a real concern, as the current climate appears to turn – as we have already suggested – on *reaction* to allegations,³⁷ rather than a proactive gender awareness-raising approach. Highlighting the importance of the Code of Conduct represents only one narrow aspect of pursuing the goals set out in Resolution 1325, for example. In the opinion of a number of participants, cases of SEA involving minors and peacekeepers were ongoing in UNAMSIL. While policies are in place, as one participant argued: 'The weakness [is] response in terms of investigation procedure, survivor follow up, and legal prosecution response either here, or in the peacekeeper's country of origin.' A further issue of concern is that of monitoring and data collection. One UN civilian participant said: 'This information is not gathered in any systematic manner. Determining the types and variations of SEA around the country that involve peacekeepers, to my knowledge, has never been done, not even by UNAMSIL.'³⁸ Yet difficulties do exist more generally in monitoring and data collection:

The specific impact for those working in gender is that the conditions for life for women in the political, economic, and social realm are difficult to quantify, qualify or apply as a solid basis for arguing the case for improved gender equality.³⁹

Rumours, anecdote and allegation were noted to circulate around 'who the culprits were' in respect of sexual abuse. Here, alleged offenders were normally referred to by their national identity, though it was not possible in this small-scale exploratory and qualitative study to produce statistically representative data. It is also extremely difficult – even if a more quantitative approach to data collection was taken – to produce information on patterns of exploitation in relation to ethnic or national identity. First, the area is extremely sensitive and deeply politicised; inter-military and inter-national rivalry has traditionally turned on one nation being considered 'superior to another' in both a serious and a more light-hearted military 'banter' sense. Banter and talk of this nature is intensified within the context of military based operations where competence and nationality identity are frequently conflated, particularly within the context of multinational operations. Here, it would be vital to use the services of an independent and external body to oversee research in this area. Second, in a more methodological sense, PSOs by their very nature involve a defined number of nationalities, and therefore samples can ever only draw on a narrow range of any potential population. In this way, research drawing on nationality as the key explanatory variable may actually tell us little since those nationalities involved in any one PSO are likely to feature in the data. However, despite these obvious shortcomings, there remains an urgent need to collate disaggregated data on incidences of SEA. One possibility might be to establish a confidential hotline for UN personnel to report potential abuse; investigation would then follow. Finally, a further strategy would be to attempt to harmonize national military disciplinary codes. Currently, a number of participants believed that UN Codes of Conduct were not treated seriously, but that national military codes had a greater immediacy, urgency and relevance to personnel of the particular force in question.

In sum, while this small-scale study appears to reflect heightened levels of gender awareness, nevertheless it was difficult to know the extent to which SEA had become more secretive and 'gone underground' as had been suggested. A particular pattern of 'scandal and response' had developed in Sierra Leone, described in the following way:

As with any scandal, there is a heightened focus and energy on the topic followed by an exhaustion of resources and initiative. This has been noted in Sierra Leone where it is becoming increasingly challenging to ensure agency cooperation and collaboration...this is not a topic that should be left off agendas and out of discussions. The protection of women and children from sexual abuses perpetrated by

those employed to assist them must remain a focus. It is up to those with the power to do so to ensure that power is used for good and not violate those that look to us for protection.⁴⁰

The particular exigencies of the PSO in Sierra Leone, coupled with the continual 'rotation of staff, no doubt combine to undermine the consistent application and committed follow-up of various strategies. The extent to which the policies on SEA and GBV, together with the 'acceptability' and 'grey-areas' surrounding prostitution, serve to muddy the waters in terms of those who make and enforce policies. Given that operations in Sierra Leone are been drawn-down, it may be inappropriate to recommend that a dedicated OGA be established. Yet this exploratory chapter does point to the continued concern, articulated here by a number of participants, that SEA continues in which peacekeepers are implicated.

Recommendations

Given that UNAMSIL is in the process of drawing-down, the following recommendations may seem largely academic. However, as part of the ongoing attempt to enhance the effectiveness of PSOs in respect of gendered relations in post-conflict contexts where women and children are characterised by particular vulnerabilities, the following recommendations should be considered:⁴¹

- Directing attention to the extent to which the Code of Conduct is considered to be 'realistic', particularly with regard to the 'grey area' of prostitution;⁴²
- Give consideration to encouraging a harmonisation of national military's disciplinary code involving SEA and 'appropriate' gender relations as one way to make immediately relevant the rules under which UN military personnel function;⁴³
- An appraisal of the achievements and impact of the UPCC should be carried out and integrated into the gender components of the mission;⁴⁴
- The lack of a proactive and widely credible gender focal point is of continuing concern in UNAMSIL and thought should be given to the establishment of a dedicated OGA, or perhaps widening the remit of the UPCC as an interim measure;

- Any gender specialist is expected to have direct access to the SRSG;⁴⁵
- Issues of accountability, transparency and associated follow-up action (e.g. punishment of peacekeepers), should once again be placed at the centre of policy and awareness raising campaigns. These have slipped down the UNHCR/SCFUK report fades from consciousness;⁴⁶
- The ongoing challenge to be more effective in gender mainstreaming needs to be rigorously pursued, as the lack of female peacekeepers demonstrates;⁴⁷
- UNAMSIL needs to have a widely known, proactive and approachable community relations officer or officers (CROs). They would interface with the local population to ensure that grievances are treated seriously, and feedback delivered to those making complaints;⁴⁸
- Considerably more training needs to be organised and delivered (requiring additional resources), and in particular, more senior personnel need to familiarise themselves with local gender issues and the most appropriate ways in which to respond to them;
- One component of the appraisal of senior leaders should be their success or otherwise in dealing with issues around SEA and GBV involving UN personnel;
- The UPCC, while involving a range of stakeholders, needs to be more inclusive of civil society in respect of women's groups;
- Senior officials should be trained to recognize and be prepared to punish inappropriate behaviour amongst UN personnel in respect of SEA;
- Greater protection of survivors of abuse and support/counselling need to be publicised and offered as part of an overall package of proactive response to potential SEA;
- A record of perpetrators needs to be collated and should be used to determine the opportunities open to these individuals in relation to future employment with the UN. The experience of the UPCC should be shared/known among the main stakeholders and between missions (best practice). This should be linked to the Gender Advisor at HQ (DPKO) to build bridges between peacekeeping missions and share good practices;

- Data needs to be collected around incidences of SEA. A statistical base disaggregated by variables including geographical location, national military and nature of offence would provide an evidence base from which 'hot-spots' could be identified and response (training/awareness) targeted towards those that appear most at risk of exploitation. (See footnotes 33 and 34 above).

Further Details of Sample and Fieldwork

A total of 21 interviews were conducted including two focus groups. This sample was made up of military personnel, UN civilians and NGO staff. 12 interviews were tape-recorded, and members of the contingent were not involved. A significant number of more anecdotal discussions and observations were conducted in and around UNAMSIL and three sector areas. The fieldwork was 14 days in duration and confidentiality and data protection has been managed according to the guidelines laid down by the Social Research Association.

Notes

1. Chief, Office of Gender Affairs, UNMIK, *End of Mission Report*, October 2002, p 2.
2. For a different view see W Reno, *The Failure of Peacekeeping in Sierra Leone*, *Current History* 100, 2001, pp 219–225.
3. While it is drawing down, UNAMSIL currently represents the largest UN PSO.
4. See UNHCR/SCFUK, *Sexual Violence and Exploitation: the Experience of Refugee Children in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone*, Geneva, 2002.
5. This report is widely believed to reflect activities that have occurred in a number of refugee camps and cannot be easily dismissed.
6. See C Galenkamp, *Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, Lessons Learned from Sierra Leone*, UN OCHA, 2002.
7. See the 2001 Lesson Learned document from an Inter-Agency meeting in Geneva, in which the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Mary Robinson, supported the Code of Conduct for humanitarian workers in the foreword to the manual. *Prevention and Response to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Refugee Situations*, Inter-Agency Lessons Learned Conference Proceedings, 27 – 29 March, 2001.
8. Around 4,000 ECOMOG troops were deployed in 1997 and can be seen as the precursor to the current mission.

9. There is no dedicated OGA in UNAMSIL. The UNAMSIL 'Gender Specialist' is more closely affiliated with the Human Rights Section where she has a number of more widely defined tasks.
10. MONUC is the UN Organisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).
11. OGA's in PSOs draw their mandate from various international legal instruments, such as the UN Charter, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The UN has an obligation to consider the rights and perspectives of both sexes in the development of policy and programmes and UN Resolution 1325. The OGA in MONUC is mandated to incorporate a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations.
12. A Memorandum of Understanding exists between DPKO and the Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights for the position of the gender focal point in UNAMSIL.
13. See previous report: *Peacekeeping and Gendered Relations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*.
14. The absence of female peacekeepers underlines their overall low numbers within the UN peacekeeping force more generally.
15. Including British military personnel deployed as part of the International Military Assistance Training Teams (IMATT) to train the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF).
16. See *Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peace Operations*, Lessons Learned Unit, DPKO, United Nations, New York, July 2000.
17. The efficiency of the Protocol office in Mammy Yoko (UNAMSIL HQ) ensured that my stay in Sierra Leone revolved around a closely worked out programme of structured visits. This both facilitated and limited the research. For example, for a period of some days I was hosted by two different national battalions who insisted that I reside in their officer's quarters. While I was free to move around the battalion, language barriers meant that I had only limited contact with members of the contingent and largely 'formal' interaction with the English speaking officer corps. That both areas were geographically isolated also left me unable to pursue the full-range of my research interests as transportation was at a premium. Given the focus of the research, it was difficult to gain insight into the nature of interaction occurring between Military Observers (for example) and the local population, though some tentative impressions of these dynamics were formed.
18. Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs Sierra Leone, *World Congress on Commercial Sex Exploitation of Children*, August 1996.

19. For additional information, see: *We'll Kill You If You Cry, Sexual Violence in the Sierra Leone Conflict*, Human Rights Watch Report 15(1), January 2003, <www.hrw.org>, (20 October 2003).
20. Documented cases of SEA being committed by humanitarian workers and peacekeepers go as far back as 1995.
21. The term 'local' is used to refer to the proximity of the women to UNAMSIL establishments, not to their place of origin, as a significant number of them are likely to fall into the category of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees.
22. The phrase 'liberal humanist discourse' has been used to highlight tensions between language that reflects agendas such as those around equal opportunities (for example, gender mainstreaming strategies), with views and actions that might run counter to such publicly articulated sentiments. One sociologist as has described the phrase liberal humanist discourse: "allowing the "good" citizen to take on a standpoint that is accepting of diversity but unable to comprehend how he or she could be privileged by race and gender." S D Farough, *The Social Geographies of White Masculinities, Critical Sociology*. The relevance of this statement will become clear when discussion turns to the suggestion that while policies in respect of gender have evolved positively, their 'follow-through' continues to falter in key areas such as gender mainstreaming. A similar sentiment – framed in terms of frustration that 'Lessons are not Learned' – is to be found in *Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective*. An extract of the main text and a footnote in this report reads: "Perhaps the single most important lesson learned is that lessons are not learned...again, gender mainstreaming is new enough that one cannot assume that what is planned for or agreed upon always occurs [but] monitoring is required, required, required." Op cit p 25.
23. Recommendations for a CRO have yet to be taken up in the PSO in DR Congo (MONUC) as well. See *Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective*, op cit, p 16 for details of this particular recommendation.
24. One UN civilian had referred to the anger of a number of the local community at what they perceived to be the immunity of peacekeepers implicated in abuse. A more senior peacekeeper participant stressed that the repatriation of perpetrators, when it did occur, should not be seen as a 'soft option', but should damage the career of the individual involved.
25. A UN civilian employee noted that the UPCC did not set out to orchestrate 'witch-hunts' into the private lives of UN personnel, thereby alienating the groups with whom it wished to work, but rather to create a constructive and progressive dialogue aimed at incremental change.
26. It is important to understand that the battalion involved in these exchanges were perceived as 'local' to the women involved. That they originated from a geographically proximate country meant that cultural and other differences were not

so great, and relationships were more likely to develop between them. Alternatively, as the chapter argues, was the case of those battalions originating from Asia, who it was said 'had little in common' with members of the host population and were considerably less likely to interact with them.

27. See previous report: *Peacekeeping and Gendered Relations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*.
28. The age of consent in Sierra Leone is 14.
29. The Code of Conduct explicitly states that the legal age of consent is 18.
30. However, if they decided to travel to Europe rather than their country of origin, they were allowed to take six weeks' leave.
31. T Duffey, Cultural Issues in Contemporary Peacekeeping, *Journal of International Peacekeeping*, p 143.
32. Ibid, p 151.
33. Many women villages in proximity to the battalion appeared to be dressed in recycled clothing such as bra's that fitted poorly and may have restricted movement. This possible restriction – of particular importance given the physical tasks they were engaged in – did not concern those instructing them to cover their bodies.
34. Duffey, op cit, p 146.
35. This understanding of men's 'natural sex drive' is widely held. For example, the head of the UNTAC mission in Cambodia was quoted as saying: "It was natural for hot-blooded young soldiers who had endured the rigours of the field to want have a few beers and to chase 'young beautiful beings of the opposite sex'". See S Whitworth, Gender, Race and the Politics of Peacekeeping, in E Moxon-Browne (ed) *A Future for Peacekeeping?*, Macmillan, London, p 180.
36. The girls who have either escaped or been released by the rebels habitually turn to prostitution. Nearly one hundred percent exhibit one or more STIs. In Bo, the YWCA assists former girl captives by providing counselling, one meal a day, and skills training. On arrival the girls are taken to a clinic for a reproductive health check-up and treatments. Of the 99 participants present, all 99 tested positive for STIs; most had multiple infections. For additional information, read J Benjamin, Conflict, Post-Conflict, and HIV/AIDS – The Gender Connections, Women, War and HIV/AIDS: West Africa and the Great Lakes, <www.worldbank.org/html/prmge/womensmonth/benjamin.doc>, (27 October 2003).
37. However, as one UN civilian suggested, these normally concern 'serious allegations such as rape'. This person went on to say that 'transactional sex with a minor is not something that I have ever seen as being taken seriously by the organization as a whole...some at UNAMSIL would argue strongly with that, but,

in my opinion, it has fallen by the wayside, or more accurately, was perhaps never fully picked up as a huge concern.'

38. UNAMSIL parallels UNMIK (Kosovo) in this respect as the following suggests: "No gender situational analysis or related data collection has been conducted [during the first year of the mission] despite the fact there is insufficient reliable gender data or analysis available to provide a solid foundation for decision makers." Chief, Office of Gender Affairs, UNMIK, *op cit*, p 6.
39. *Ibid*.
40. Galenkamp, *op cit*, p 11.
41. A number of these recommendations are mission specific, and therefore novel, while others represent a reiteration of those found in *Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective*, *op cit*, pp 15–20.
42. This point turns on the definition of what constitutes a 'bona fide' relationship. Given that there will always be an element of value judgement in labelling a relationship this way, peacekeepers require greater background information on the circumstances that face local women within the post-conflict setting. This point connects to the issue around understanding better the cultural context of the PSO in question.
43. One military observer suggested that the UN Code of Conduct was considered 'too amorphous' and with little 'real bite'. It was argued to exist within the cultural milieu of the UN, an organization considered to turn on the pivot of 'diplomacy'. The UN had a reputation of failing to intervene robustly. The participant considered that national military disciplinary codes might have greater relevance for perpetrators, so long as they were enforced.
44. It has already been suggested that: 'A well publicized procedure for complaints should be put in place that can allow complaints to be made confidentially in the field as well as at Headquarters.' *Gender Mainstreaming*, *op cit*, p 20)
45. *Ibid*, p 16.
46. This point has been in various forms numerously. *Ibid*, p 19.
47. *Ibid*, p 17. Despite declarations that progress has been made on mainstreaming gender in PSOs, women make up 4 per cent of the total police and military personnel in UN peacekeeping operations. See: Statement of Mr. Jean-Marie Guéhenno. Under-Secretary General for Peacekeeping Operations, Open Meeting on the Security Council on Women, Peace and Security, 29 October 2003. These sorts of statements can create an illusion of moving forward and ignore the realities on the ground.
48. See *Gender Mainstreaming*, *op cit*, p 16.