

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Gender relations in Peace Support Operations (PSOs) are increasingly under the spotlight within the context of reports of the sexual abuse of local women by peacekeepers across the range of missions, involving a diversity of national military representatives. This monograph, based on a small-scale exploratory and qualitative study of the PSOs in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) and Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) in April and May 2003, aims to contribute towards this evidence base together with understandings of the exploitative aspects of gendered relations in these two African PSOs. The report is concerned with gender issues, with a focus on the dynamic between privileged and powerful peacekeepers and local women and girls. Thus, findings presented here should not be considered as representative of the range of gendered relations in PSOs, but rather, are intended to deepen understanding of the factors driving prostitution and allied forms of exploitation in PSOs.

In highlighting the current environment surrounding sexual abuse and exploitation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Sierra Leone, the study involved in-depth interviews with 45 peacekeepers, UN civilian personnel and members of the civil society, together with a significant number of informal discussions and ethnography in and around the leisure sites of UN personnel and peacekeepers. The research focus reflected the particular conditions in the respective PSOs. In the DRC, the following themes were explored: the context of the PSO, the culture and attitude of UN personnel and peacekeepers towards the host population and *vice versa*, interpretations of the concept of gender, consideration of gender raising strategies – including gender training, peacekeepers engagement with prostitutes and the functioning and understanding of the Code of Conduct. In Sierra Leone, there was a focus on the context of this particular PSOs in terms of the legacy of, and response to the UNHCR/SCFUK report (2002) detailing allegations of sexual abuse of refugees by humanitarian workers and peacekeepers, the workings of the UNAMSIL Personal Conduct Committee (UPCC), prostitution involving peacekeepers, and finally, gendered relations and peacekeeper national culture.

One of the more significant similarities between the post conflict settings of the DRC and Sierra Leone concerned the ways in which women and children (and some men) had been sexually abused through the use of mass rape of the young and old. This 'instrument of war' resonated widely throughout the more vulnerable elements of the population, causing considerable long-term psychological and physical damage. Within the DRC, and less obviously in Sierra Leone, members of the civil society made the observation that peacekeepers occupied a powerful and privileged position, particularly when considering the vulnerabilities of a large number of the populace. The research highlights the impression on behalf of local populations that a number of peacekeepers and UN personnel encountered during the course of the study displayed 'expatriate' views and beliefs and conveyed a position of authority and power over a host population. Moreover, the issue of sharp financial disparity between peacekeepers and host populations provides peacekeepers with an opportunity to exert power and authority over those weakened by conflict and thus vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Implementing gender training strategies, such as in MONUC, while difficult to appraise, is a more proactive approach to stemming SEA. In Sierra Leone, however, while awareness of the 'gender issue' was greater than in the DRC—not least through the work of the UPCC—the lack of a Gender Affairs Office and full-time dedicated officer implies that the mission is more reactive to allegations of SEA. Both PSOs, not unlike other missions, were characterised by the existence of a 'peacekeeping economy' that sustained a range of gendered relations including those understood to be more exploitative. The extremes of inequality that developed in tandem with evidence of a colonial disposition towards the host population represented the political economy of UN intervention in these PSOs.

Evidence for continuing sexual exploitation was apparent in both PSOs. In the DRC, it appeared that peacekeeper-local woman liaisons were considerably less discrete than those occurring in Sierra Leone. Here there was evidence that the UNHCR/SCFUK report had both positive and negative outcomes in terms of raising awareness, whilst driving some exploitation underground. The impact of national cultures was also evident in a number of ways, including the exemplar case of one battalion in Sierra Leone that made it their duty to ensure that the breasts of local women in outlying villages were removed from view and covered up.

This exploratory research has demonstrated a number of weaknesses in the response to continued sexual exploitation. The research report culminates with a number of recommendations including:

- The need for more research into the cultural dimensions of PSOs;
- The ongoing and increasing development of in-mission gender awareness training;
- A more transparent and robust response by the leadership to allegations of sexual abuse by peacekeeping personnel;
- The education of key, senior personnel in issues arising from sexual abuse;
- The establishment of a multi-agency group to oversee policy and practice;
- A sharpening of the various Codes of Conduct in order that ambiguities and tensions between the notions of 'prostitution' and 'bona fide relationship' be removed;
- An appraisal of the work of committees attempting to curtail these exploitative activities;
- The need for effective action on mainstreaming gender in PSOs;
- The need for more women represented in PSOs, particularly in the military and police components, as well as at the strategic and decision-making levels;
- Overall action on recommendations made by the UN, including those by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations itself in 'Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective' (2000).

While there have been considerable advances in raising awareness of the vulnerable position of women and children, including the groundbreaking UN Resolution 1325, this tends not to have been followed-up by decisive action. The report is suggestive of the continued force of a military-masculine culture embedded into delicate diplomatic issues linked to resource provision and the dispositions of troop contributing countries. Analysis presented here turns on the long-term socio-economic and political security of post-conflict societies together with the appropriate response to all members of the population, including women and children who have suffered most during and after the conflict, and have the biggest stake in the peace.